PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 395 (Part 1)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2002–03

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25 November 2002

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 395**

SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 2002–2003

House of Commons

Monday 25 November 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Final Salary Pension Scheme

1. **Angela Watkinson** (Upminster): How many employees pay into a final salary pension scheme. [81269]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): It is estimated that 9.6 million employees pay into final salary schemes. They will, therefore, continue to play a significant role in people's pensions savings. A Green Paper on pensions, to be published shortly, will set out our proposals, which are designed to increase the flexibility and security of final salary schemes and other types of pension provision.

Angela Watkinson: What protection can the Minister offer to my constituents who are so close to retirement that it is too late for them to make alternative pension arrangements? They have contributed to final salary pension schemes all their working lives and now find that those schemes are in severe financial difficulties or are heading for wind-up. Those constituents are suffering severe stress at the prospect of a pension that falls way short of what they formerly expected.

Mr. McCartney: If the hon. Lady could be a bit more specific, I could deal with her point, because there is no point in giving a general answer about the Department's line. If there is a genuine problem, the hon. Lady should write to me and I will offer her a meeting

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): That is a change of approach.

Mr. McCartney: No, it is not a change of approach—I am just that kind of a Minister.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Does the Minister think that there is any connection between the £25 billion that the Chancellor took out of pension funds and the decision of four out of 10 final salary schemes to close to new members? If he does—and presumably he does because he lives on the same planet as the rest of us—what will he tell the hundreds of thousands of people up and down the country, many of whom are in my constituency, whose final salary schemes have been cut and whose income in retirement will be reduced?

Mr. McCartney: I think that I live on the planet more than most Conservative Members of Parliament. It is interesting to note that when the same question was put to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) about the removal of the then tax credit on pension funds, the hon. Gentleman said:

"Actually, I don't think we'll be doing that. Helping pension funds doesn't mean going back to the same system as we had before, you know."

The Conservative party has introduced a red herring. The tax changes made by the Chancellor were designed to ensure increased investment across the entire portfolio, which will assist pension funds greatly in the long term.

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the major and recent reason for the decline in final salary schemes—although they have been declining since the 1960s—has been employers' inability to take advantage of pensions contributions holidays, which they enjoyed for so many years? Does he also agree that the only way to reverse the decline permanently is to introduce an element of compulsion for employers and pensioners?

Mr. McCartney: I accept what my hon. Friend says about the very inappropriate pensions holidays that have sometimes been taken. The purpose of the Green Paper is to address that and other issues. I hope that my hon. Friend will wait to see its contents, as it will deal with all issues connected with fairness and security in retirement.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Does my right hon. Friend accept that although some employers use the current circumstances to close their final salary schemes, others wish to keep such schemes open? However, under the existing law and the power of trustees, they know that to do so might at some stage bankrupt their company. They would keep those schemes open, with some relation to salary, if there were greater flexibility in the law. Will the Minister look at this issue in this Green Paper or, as we heard at the weekend, in another one six months later?

Mr. McCartney: My right hon. Friend will be pleased to know that those are among the issues that will be examined in the Green Paper.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Does the Minister accept that one of the big problems associated with the closure of final salary schemes is that employers use the opportunity to reduce the amount of their contribution into those schemes? Does he accept that the Government have no power to stop that process and that if they merely produce a Green Paper and more consultation follows, we will have to watch the process continue? Why, then, has the right hon. Gentleman rejected the idea of putting a mandatory floor below employer contributions?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman makes that comment before he has even read the Green Paper. The purpose of the Green Paper is to have a long-term agreement to provide security in retirement. That includes responsibilities on the part of the state, the employer and the employee and an effort to refashion, remodel and modernise the pension promise. I hope that at the end of the Green Paper process not only will we have a national debate but there will be a national consensus on where we need to go.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): One of the additional benefits of these schemes is the generous provision of widows' and survivors' benefits. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern at the proposal in the Pickering review to end compulsory provision of such benefits? Does he agree that in this area of pensions, as in so many others, where there is no compulsion there is no provision?

Mr. McCartney: That was among several issues in the report, and we indicated that at this stage it was not a route that we wanted to take. All those issues will have to be considered in the Green Paper. One thing is certain, however: survivors' benefits are extremely important, overwhelmingly for women. It is no intention of this Government, when reviewing the pensions system, to undermine its capacity properly to look after women in retirement.

Mr. Willetts: Can the Minister confirm that the Government are still committed to the promise in their last pensions Green Paper that the proportion of pensioners' income from private savings should rise from 40 per cent. to 60 per cent.?

Mr. McCartney: That is all part of the Green Paper—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman has asked me a question so he might like to listen to what I have to say. Since the last Green Paper, we have taken steps in respect of the basic state pension and in relation to poverty. The third step—in this Green Paper—is about how we modernise the arrangements so that the basic state pension and the second-tier pension meet people's needs. That, of course, includes a mixed economy, as was set out in the previous Green Paper. The current Green Paper follows that, and at the end of the debate on it I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree with the Government's proposals.

Mr. Willetts: I have in my hand the previous Green Paper. It contains a personal foreword by the Prime Minister, which states that the Government are committed to increasing the percentage of pensioners' income that comes from private savings from 40 per cent. to 60 per cent. All I am asking is whether the Minister of State is still committed to that objective of the last Green Paper. It is very simple.

Mr. McCartney: Of course that remains our objective. That is why the Green Paper that will be published soon examines arrangements to secure the continuation of funding by employers and deals with inadequate relationships as regards the costs to employers that run counter to their retaining pensions schemes. We want to give real choice to people who are saving for retirement so that there are secure pension schemes both in the public and private sectors.

Social Security (Complaints)

2. **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): What steps he is taking to improve the service of the telephone complaint lines for social security clients. [81270]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): First, may I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for the extremely poor service that one of his constituents received earlier this year? The hon. Gentleman has been in correspondence with the Department about that.

The creation of Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service represent one of the biggest operational changes that the civil service has ever experienced, so, perhaps inevitably, there has been some disruption to the high standards of service that we prefer to give. I am pleased to say, however, that Jobcentre Plus contact centres are already providing improved telephone access and response times to many customers and we are determined to improve and develop standards as those changes go nationwide.

Dr. Harris: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. Does he agree that clients of Jobcentre Plus, the Pension Service and the former Department of Social Security are among the most vulnerable and that, owing to the work load of the hard-pressed staff, the changes to which he has referred may create more problems than heretofore, so the provision of adequate telephone lines and the means for those clients to complain is very important? I was especially disappointed to find that the number of the Banbury incapacity benefit manager, which I was given to ring to follow up my complaints, was engaged all morning, as I found out when I tested it before I came to the Chamber. Will the Minister ensure that there is adequate telephone capacity so that vulnerable people can make inquiries and complaints?

Malcolm Wicks: Of course I shall check on that and I apologise again to the hon. Gentleman and especially to his constituent. From time to time, we all experience the frustration of not being able to get through on the telephone. However, overall national performance on all aspects of customer service is currently about 84 per cent. against a target of 79 per cent. That measures speed of response, accuracy and so on. However, when individuals are not getting that service in response from the Banbury office, I realise that ministerial statistics butter no parsnips—they certainly butter no Banburys.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Will the Minister tell us about the availability of telephone help through the medium of Welsh and other languages? I made a test of that this morning and contacted a Benefits Agency office only to be told that there was no such service because the person concerned was away on a Welsh course. The service seems rather fragile. Would the Minister care to comment?

Malcolm Wicks: Like the hon. Gentleman, I pay tribute to the high training standards in our Department as evidenced by the colleague who was taking the Welsh course. May I write to the hon. Gentleman about the services that we offer through the medium of the Welsh language? As a former external examiner for the University of Wales, I appreciate the importance of that.

Incapacity Benefit Assessments

3. **Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): What representations he has received regarding incapacity benefit assessments carried out by SchlumbergerSema. [81271]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): We have received a number of representations from my hon. Friend, other hon. Members and members of the public about personal capability assessments carried out by SchlumbergerSema. A small proportion of medical assessments—about 0.5 per cent.—result in complaints about the doctor.

Linda Perham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and for seeing me last week in the case of Mrs. Gray. In the light of her case and continuing concerns expressed by disabled constituents about the quality of service provided, will he assure me that the assessments will be closely monitored, especially when the contract comes up for renewal?

Mr. Brown: We closely monitor the work of SchlumbergerSema, so I know that the number of complaints is going down. A set of standards has to be met and, so far, all the targets are being met.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Although I acknowledge that there has been progress in achieving a smoother and less judgmental assessment system, would the Minister not be prepared, in turn, to acknowledge that many claimants still resent intrusion, particularly in recurrent cases and those where perhaps the matter could have been resolved on evidence from the patient's own GP? But is he not even more concerned that, for all the Government's talk of welfare reform, there are almost as many claimants for incapacity benefit as five years ago, while there are no fewer than 250,000 extra disabled claimants for income support? Is that not a rather shameful failure to deliver?

Mr. Brown: If the previous Government had undertaken more pilot schemes on rehabilitation and other pathways to work, this Government would not have to undertake the necessary studies to try to achieve—I do not mean to make this a partisan point, tempting though that is—what I know we both believe in, as we have had exchanges about this before: helping those who can work into some form of work that they can comfortably undertake.

Employment Statistics

4. **Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): What assessment he has made of the most recent employment statistics. [81272]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): The employment level is holding up well, given the world economic slowdown. We have record numbers of people in jobs thanks to economic policies for stability and labour market policies that keep people engaged with the job market, whatever the stage of the economic cycle.

Mr. Martlew: Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating those at the jobcentre in my constituency who in the past five years have seen unemployment drop dramatically, especially youth unemployment, which has dropped by more than 40 per cent.? But does he acknowledge that, at present, many people—not just in Carlisle, but throughout the country—who wish to

work are on incapacity benefit? Will he outline the Government's proposals to help those people and support them back into work?

Mr. Smith: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Jobcentre Plus staff and all the associated partners on the good work that they are doing in Carlisle. The number of young people unemployed for more than six months has fallen by 70 per cent. or more—a great tribute to the efforts of all concerned. In relation to incapacity benefit, I announced the consultation document last week, which will suggest a more intensive programme of interviews and other support for people going on to the benefit in the proposed pilot areas. We will introduce groundbreaking rehabilitation collaborative work with the national health service and a new £40 a week back-to-work credit in those pilot areas for the first year of employment. My hon. Friend is right: 90 per cent. of those coming on to incapacity benefit expect to get back into jobs. Those proposals will help them to do just that.

Ann Winterton (Congleton): Is the Minister aware of the growing number of white-collared unemployed who do not show in the statistics because they do not as yet qualify for benefits? What assessment has his Department made of that problem?

Mr. Smith: White-collar employees qualify for benefit on the same basis as anyone else, and the full array of programmes to help them—the new deals and Jobcentre Plus—are at their disposal, as well as the action teams for jobs. We also offer extra help through the new deal ambition initiatives, one of which includes collaboration with the IT industry, which would help precisely the sort of unemployed people to whom the hon. Lady has referred.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I thank my right hon. Friend and the Government for the low unemployment rate in this country, which is lower than that in most other comparable European countries. There is, however, a small number of long-term unemployed. What steps will be taken to change the new deal 25 plus to help those people into work?

Mr. Smith: We are refining and improving the new deals and our wider array of Jobcentre Plus programmes all the time. As work-focused interviews are rolled out with Jobcentre Plus, they are making a big difference, and the extra discretionary help that we are now able to put in the hands of the front-line advisers is producing good results in helping sometimes very long-term unemployed people who face considerable barriers to employment back in to jobs. As my hon. and learned Friend says, we are making good progress: thanks to initiatives of that sort, 100,000 more people are in jobs than were at the beginning of this year.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): In the last quarter, what percentage of new jobs were created in the public sector?

Mr. Smith: A significant proportion, as we fulfil our promises to invest in the national health service, education and rebuilding the nation's transport infrastructure. We make no apologies for keeping our promises to invest in public services and public infrastructure—if the Conservatives had done some of that when they were in office, we would not have had the mess that we have had to deal with.

Pensioner Poverty

6. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): What action he plans to take to assist older people living below the official poverty line. [81274]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): We have brought in the minimum income guarantee, winter fuel payments and free television licences for the over-75s, so that single pensioners are at least £18 a week better off and couples have gained by more than £27. Of the £6 billion extra that we are spending on pensioners compared with 1997, £2.5 billion is being spent on the poorest third of pensioners.

Mr. Cunningham: I am sure that my right hon. Friend would want to know that most people appreciate the fact that 650,000 pensioners in the west midlands have gained from the fuel poverty allowance. However, when he considers proposals on old-age pension increases in April, is he satisfied that when those increases are implemented, they will be a step in the direction of eliminating pensioner poverty?

Mr. Smith: Yes indeed. The increases will help us further to address pensioner poverty, and taken together with the introduction of the pension credit next October, all the measures that we have introduced mean that the average pensioner household will be £1,150 a year better off, and the poorest third of pensioner households will be £1,500 a year better off. Of course there is more to do, but that represents substantial progress in helping the poorest pensioners in our country.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): The Secretary of State is absolutely right that we have to fight pensioner poverty, but does he accept that the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit make it rather difficult to achieve the target to which the Minister for Pensions committed himself today, that in future pensioners should receive approximately 60 per cent. of their income from private sources?

Mr. Smith: As I just said, we can always do more. We take seriously the recommendations of the National Audit Office's excellent recent report, which pointed to the need to build on local strategies targeted on those who are not getting everything to which they are entitled; to reduce duplication in the information that we request from people; to measure non-take-up better; and to spread information about pensions and benefits as widely as possible. We are doing that by sending out 2 million copies of the pension guide and by creating the Pension Service, a dedicated service for pensioners which will provide a more sensitive and user-friendly source of information and advice.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, while the minimum income

guarantee and the pension credit are welcome, a great number of pensioners will not receive those benefits? Despite the current take-up proposals, does he accept that further work is needed, and will he set out what measures are being taken to increase take-up?

Mr. Smith: I accept that we need to build on the substantial progress that has already been made by intensifying take-up activity in precisely the way that I just outlined. My hon. Friend will have noted that in its report the NAO states that it was

"very pleased that the Department accepts all our recommendations".

The report also underlines the importance of doing all we can to encourage pensioners to contact the Pension Service or other advice agencies, stating that those pensioners who had made such contact

"were better informed, and were generally satisfied with the help they received".

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said that

"a sustained fall in the numbers of poor pensioners is unlikely until and unless the Government's policies aimed at encouraging greater use of private pensions start having an effect".

How can that happen when the Chancellor of the Exchequer raids the savers' funds? How can that happen when the extension of the means-testing that the Chancellor has introduced creates massive disincentives to savings? How can that happen when vehicles such as stakeholder pensions become such a flop that nine out of 10 of the schemes have no members at all and respected companies are simply giving up selling them? How will the Secretary of State encourage private saving?

Mr. Smith: Those remarks would have a lot more credibility if the Opposition and the hon. Gentleman had a single positive alternative to any of our policies. They do not.

To address the specific points on means-testing, is the hon. Gentleman advocating either spending more out of taxation and public spending or cutting some of the help that goes to the poorest pensioners? Judged by the Opposition's record, they would cut that help. He refers to stakeholder pensions. More than a million of them have been sold so far. Although we need to do even better than that, that is very good progress for a new pension product across the first year. Conservatives Members should support our efforts to build confidence in private pensions rather than carping at them.

Health and Safety

8. **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): What plans he has to improve health and safety in the workplace. [81276]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): The joint Government and Health and Safety Commission strategy set out in the document "Revitalising Health and Safety" aims to achieve significant reductions in the incidence of injury and ill health in the workplace. There are specific targets and delivery plans in place for 2004 and for 2010.

Mr. Dismore: Bearing in mind the fact that it is more than seven years since the Law Commission first proposed an offence of corporate manslaughter and that more than 200 people are killed every year as they simply go about their normal business at work, will my right hon. Friend discuss with his colleagues in the Home Office what can be done urgently to implement this extremely important manifesto commitment and to introduce vital legislation to protect people from death at work?

Mr. Brown: I have a great deal of sympathy with the representations that my hon. Friend makes. The policy lead is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, but I will do as my hon. Friend asks and raise the matter with my right hon. Friend to see whether we can make progress.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Minister look carefully at the rising trends in the costs of insurance claims as a result of accidents at work? They are feeding into worrying increases in employers' liability insurance premiums, and many small businesses are finding it very difficult to obtain cover. I understand that, in the summer, the Health and Safety Executive were engaged in considering the prospect of having discussions that would lead to lower premiums for firms that had good safety records. Will the Government support such a move?

Mr. Brown: There is a lot of sense in relating premiums to the risk and in rewarding the good and discouraging undesirable practices. Discussions are taking place across Government on this very important issue, and they include discussions with outside bodies such as the CBI, the TUC and the Association of British Insurers.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): Although I endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), does my right hon. Friend not agree that the best way of improving health and safety in the workplace is to ensure that firms are subject to rigorous and regular inspections? Is he confident that the Health and Safety Executive currently has the resources that it needs to ensure that firms are investigated properly and efficiently?

Mr. Brown: I am absolutely confident that the Health and Safety Executive and the Health and Safety Commission are able to prioritise their work and, with the resources allocated to them, carry out a good job. There will always be a discussion about priorities and, in the next few weeks, I shall meet representatives of the commission and the executive to consider targets and priorities.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the Minister attend the Amicus meeting this evening in Portcullis House on bullying in the workplace? Is he proud of his Department's record on health and safety, because on

his own figures there are nearly 100 assaults and attempted assaults each month on members of his staff in Jobcentre Plus offices alone?

Mr. Brown: It is quite wrong to give the impression that the new Jobcentre Plus offices are a dangerous place because they are open plan. The Government are committed to providing the new-style services—integrated benefits and labour-market advice—to people who seek our help in modern, workable circumstances instead of conducting interviews from behind a glass screen. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to take that approach.

Travel-to-Work Costs

9. **Clive Efford** (Eltham): If he will help unemployed people with their travel-to-work costs when they first obtain a job. [81277]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): Yes. We recognise that the lack of affordable transport can be a significant barrier to work for jobless people, and have a number of measures in place to help them overcome these difficulties, including the extension of half-price rail fares to 125,000 more people on the new deal programmes and the £10 million transport project fund to be used with action teams.

Clive Efford: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Such measures will help many people who seek employment. What steps is he taking to engage other transport service providers, such as London Transport, in discussions to encourage them to provide cheaper fares to people who seek employment?

Mr. Smith: We are working not only with the rail companies through the Association of Train Operating Companies, but with a number of bus operators including, I understand, some that cover my hon. Friend's constituency. The action team funding works out on average at more than £150,000 for each action team area over two years. We will be pleased to consider further proposals from jobseekers, those who help them into work or employers in his constituency.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: I call the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Field: Hi. *[Interruption.]* A little bit of informality does us no harm.

Although I accept that the right hon. Gentleman wants to keep matters relatively simple—

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): That is why the hon. Gentleman has been called.

Mr. Field: Absolutely right. I will have words with the hon. Gentleman later on.

I accept that we need to keep things simple and that the main focus will be on public transport, but the Secretary of State will be aware that the congestion charge comes into play on 17 February next. Will he give some thought to extending travel-to-work allowances to those people who have antisocial jobs within central London?

Mr. Smith: I admire the hon. Gentleman's ingenuity of working congestion charges into the question. Front-line advisers on the use of the discretionary funds at disposal, which are up to £300, are encouraged to include any action that can remove barriers standing in the way of jobseekers accessing work. I am sure they will do just that.

Stakeholder Pensions

11. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will make a statement on the take-up of stakeholders pensions since their inception. [81279]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Figures from the Association of British Insurers show that up to the end of September 2002, 1,151,371 stakeholder pensions had been sold. A detailed breakdown of sales will be available around the middle of next year. Sales of more than 1 million in their first 18 months on the market represents a very encouraging start.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the Minister for that response. How many of those are people who have transferred their pensions to stakeholder schemes from other schemes? If they have, the figure does not reflect a net increase in the number of people who hold pensions. How does he intend to address the crisis in the industry given the catalogue of errors, outlined by my Front-Bench colleagues, that the Government have introduced?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman has not changed since he stood against me in 1987, when he was shown the door.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): He has: he has got a seat.

Mr. McCartney: Nice one, but I was talking about the attitude of the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) rather than his seat.

Some 97 per cent. of the sales have been made to people of working age and half of them have been sold via the workplace. It is a significant increase in pension provision. Before stakeholder pensions, some people had no opportunity, either with their employer or not, to save for a pension.

The record of the previous Government was different—£13.5 billion of mis-sold pensions to workers. The present Government resolved that and went on to introduce something else—the stakeholder pension. More than 1 million people who did not have a pension 18 months ago have one now.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): In April this year, the Government introduced the earnings-related state second pension, the best pension deal for low-paid workers that has ever been on offer in the history of British pensions. The Government

promised that it would remain in force until there was a take-up of millions of stakeholder pensions in the target group of low to middling incomes. That target is not being achieved. Will that promise be kept? Can we look forward to the continuation of the earnings-related state second pension?

Mr. McCartney: I am surprised that my hon. Friend should say that the Government are not pursuing with vigour the issues around stakeholders and the second state pension. He is absolutely right—the state second pension has been a tremendous fillip for 14 million low-paid workers. 2 million people with disabilities who have work records that kept them out of the basic state pension previously, and 2 million carers. Most of the recipients are women, which is a major step forward. We have not gone to the trouble of taking such step only to reduce later our capacity to make it one of the most effective measures introduced by any Government.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I note that the Minister did not quite answer my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), who asked how many people who had signed up for stakeholders had transferred out of another scheme. Perhaps he would like to have another go. I know how interested he is in hearing how things are at the grass roots. Certainly, lower-paid workers in my constituency are not signing up because they do not want to commit their savings to the final compulsory annuity. Will the Minister take a look at the difference between the state of the pensions market now and in 1997? One of the great destructive things the Government have done is to take away the incentive for people to invest. The compulsory annuity scheme is part of the problem. Will the Minister take a second look at that?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should perhaps try for an Adjournment debate on the subject.

Mr. McCartney: I hope that it is not me who has to reply—[*Laughter.*] I like the hon. Lady really.

If the hon. Lady had listened to my reply to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), she would have heard that a detailed breakdown of sales would be available around the middle of next year. That is a movable feast, but the important fact is that more than 1 million stakeholders have been sold. Another vital figure relates to the fact that 97 per cent. of sales have been to people of working age, so the initiative has been a tremendous success. Why cannot Opposition Members, whether from the Liberal or Conservative party, get behind a proposal to provide for people who, without stakeholders, would not have a future in pensions?

Housing Benefit

12. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): If he will make a statement on housing benefit reform. [81280]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): On 17 October, the Secretary of State announced the next steps of our reform of housing benefit. Our aim is to provide a better, quicker service based on simpler and clearer rules. For the first time, we will give tenants real choice over their housing decisions.

I am pleased that North East Lincolnshire council, which I visited recently and includes my hon. Friend's constituency, has accepted our invitation to become one of the pathfinders for the new standard local housing allowance. That marks a radical step forward in the simplification of housing benefit.

Shona McIsaac: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. If that private scheme is to be successful, it is vital that claimants are aware of the changes in the scheme well before their introduction. Will my hon. Friend therefore tell me his proposals to inform claimants of such changes?

Malcolm Wicks: I myself am visiting all the 10 pathfinder areas before Christmas to discuss those issues—[*Interruption.*] At least I get out a bit. I am discussing with local authorities plans for communication, which are vital. The pathfinders will not be introduced until the autumn of next year, and my Department will provide communications to all tenants. The reform is about providing choice and empowering people in the privately rented sector to make decisions that the rest of us tend to take for granted.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Government's changes to housing benefit regulations have been legion—so legion, in fact, that they amount to one change every fortnight for which the Labour Government have been in power. Can the Minister give an assurance to the people struggling to administer housing benefit that the number of changes will be considerably reduced, if not completely eliminated, in future?

Malcolm Wicks: I have a group, including local authority experts, to advise me on the timing of regulations. We try to introduce them at two stages in the year, rather than throughout the year. Much of what we are doing is aimed at simplification. At present, everyone has to reapply for housing benefit every year or so, filling in the forms and providing the information. We are scrapping that. That is the right way to do it—not to talk about it, but to do it.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Has my hon. Friend made any estimate of the impact of stock transfer, reform of the housing revenue account and equalisation of rents on the housing benefit bill?

Malcolm Wicks: Of course, but I think I will send my hon. Friend the details. The numbers claiming housing benefit have fallen somewhat recently, which is a testimony to our employment strategies. As with all benefits, the best social security policy of all is having a job.

Pensioner Incomes

13. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): What plans he has to improve the take-up of benefits for pensioners. [81281]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): We have made good progress in our efforts to ensure that pensioners take up their entitlements, including the national advertising campaign for the minimum income guarantee, the shortened claim form and working closely with partner organisations that represent older people. We are equally committed to ensuring maximum take-up of pension credit.

Mr. Rendel: Given the lack of information about the cost-effectiveness of different methods of encouraging take-up, how can the Minister be sure that her plans are the best use of resources? What plans does she have to make sure that in future we get better information about how cost-effective take-up campaigns are?

Maria Eagle: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, will have studied carefully the recently published National Audit Office report. We welcome the report's findings, which include comments on better information and evaluation, but the important thing for us is to make sure that elderly people who have entitlements to additional benefits such as pension credit take them up. We have reorganised the Pension Service to be much more effective at ensuring that people take up their benefits and entitlements, so I am confident that there will be an improvement in the current level of take-up. The first test, of course, will be pension credit.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): How long does my hon. Friend believe it will be before we have a system whereby, when pensioners make their claims through the Pension Service, they get their housing benefit and council tax benefit calculated at the same time? We want one-stop benefits for pensioners, so that they get all the benefits to which they are entitled.

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend is right. It is often difficult and confusing for people to have to claim their entitlements from different bits of central and local government and to fill in different forms. The major IT infrastructure programmes that we have in the Department for Work and Pensions should enable us to join up a lot more of our own claims processes. Some of the improvements that we are making by cutting the size of claim forms and introducing trigger points to indicate entitlement are already coming through, but with housing benefit being administered by local authorities, it is difficult to ensure such joined-up local and central Government administration. We are doing our best to make progress as speedily as we can.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The Secretary of State said a moment ago that the Government had more to do to tackle pensioner poverty, and presumably that includes Scotland, where one in four of our pensioners still live in poverty. Is not the problem of take-up exacerbated by the massive extension of means-testing of benefits introduced by the new Labour Government?

Maria Eagle: The pension credit abolishes the weekly means test and targets money on those at the lower end of the income bracket by using a simplified five-yearly assessment process. I hope that the hon. Lady, along with other hon. Members, will encourage pensioners in her constituency to take that up, as it is an entitlement. We in the Department will do all that we can to ensure that, when pension credit comes in in October 2003, there is maximum take-up.

Learning Disabilities

17. **Jane Griffiths** (Reading, East): What steps his Department is taking to support employment opportunities for adults with learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement. [81286]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): We are committed to improving employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities and set out our strategy for achieving that in the White Paper "Valuing People", which was published in March 2001. We are now working closely with key stakeholders to ensure that our active labour market programmes and policies reach as many people with learning disabilities as possible, and that they are delivered in ways that are responsive to their needs.

Jane Griffiths: The Minister will be aware of the excellent work being done by the Shaw trust in supporting people with learning disabilities in getting into employment. Does she agree that constituencies such as mine, which has almost full employment, present a further opportunity? Will the work of her Department therefore be targeted on high-employment areas such as Reading?

Maria Eagle: We are just as keen to ensure that people with learning disabilities have employment opportunities in Reading as we are elsewhere. I congratulate the Shaw trust, whose work in that regard I know very well. We are keen to ensure that our specialist disability employment programmes, such as Workstep and the new deal for disabled people, also help people with learning difficulties. Such people experience some of the lowest levels of labour market participation. It is obvious that in Reading, where employers are looking for good employees, they should be looking to disabled people and those with learning difficulties, as they can make excellent employees.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): What is the incidence of current employer non-compliance with the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995? Will the hon. Lady say something about the respects in which and the degree to which the work of the Disability Rights Commission has improved the situation? Does she have any plans further to progress policy in advance of implementation of the terms of the anti-discrimination directive in 2006?

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman asks three questions to which it would take me all day to reply. Given your strictures, Mr. Speaker, I shall be more brief. We know something about the number of inquiries that are made to the DRC about allegations of non-compliance. We do not collect information about the number of people who do not comply with the DDA, but we know that the problem is still widespread.

The DRC offers advice and a helpline, and guidance is available. The Department undertakes awareness-raising to try to ensure that employers recognise their obligations and the business case and advantages in respect of employing disabled people. We hope that a combination of those policies will ensure that we can increase the participation of disabled people in the labour market. By October 2004, the small firms exemption to the DDA employment requirements will no longer apply, so we have big job to do to ensure that employers are aware of their obligations and to enable them to take advantage of the skills that disabled people have to offer.

Poverty

18. **Mr. George Foulkes** (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): What his targets are for the reduction of household poverty. [81287]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): We recently published our fourth annual report on poverty, "Opportunity for All", which provides a detailed account of our strategy, measurement indicators and what more we need to do. The report shows that we have achieved a great deal and that our approach is working, and we will continue to deliver on this challenge over the years to come.

Mr. Foulkes: But has it yet dawned on the Government that if they continue to measure relative poverty and use a percentage of median wage as the poverty level, we will never be able to eliminate poverty? Yet as wages increase at a much greater rate than inflation, everyone is getting wealthier. Surely, there must be some more sensible way of measuring genuine poverty, so we will achieve our aims and not hear the sort of nonsense that was spouted earlier by the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing).

Malcolm Wicks: We want to consult on this matter, because the Government have a bold target of eradicating child poverty. Even on the difficult relative measure—it is difficult because we are trying to hit a moving target as a result of economic prosperity—500,000 fewer children are now in relative low-income households than in 1997. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members would do well to listen. They increased child poverty, while this Government have reduced it.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): There are record numbers of homeless people in this country today. Would Ministers care to comment on the fact that homeless families with children have increased by 11 per cent. in the past four years? What are the Government doing about that shocking situation?

Malcolm Wicks: I do not accept that there are record numbers of homeless people, but I acknowledge that there is a housing problem, not least in the south-east. We are enabling more of those parents to get into jobs. That means that 250,000 fewer children are in workless households than when we took over from the Conservative Government. That is a double victory: an attack on child poverty and more of our children growing up with experience of an adult in work in their families.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Is my hon. Friend in consultation with the Chancellor to ensure that continuing reform of the benefits and taxation system means that people in employment gain significantly from their efforts?

Malcolm Wicks: It is absolutely vital when people take the difficult step from welfare dependency into work that we demonstrate that work pays financially. That is why the national minimum wage and the working families tax credit are so important. They have made work pay and meant an average weekly gain of £35. Our strategy is to make skilled work possible and to make it pay.

Unemployment Figures

19. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What assessment he has made of the most recent unemployment figures. [81288]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Economic stability and active labour market programmes have helped people move from welfare to work in all parts of the country. Consequently, unemployment has fallen to levels not experienced since the 1970s and has remained at those low levels for more than a year.

Of course we want to do more. That is why we are introducing even more support to ensure that no area is bypassed and no one is excluded from mainstream economic prosperity.

Mr. Bryant: I am sure that my right hon. Friend knows about the dramatic fall in unemployment in constituencies such as the Rhondda since 1997. However, has he had an opportunity to consider the new survey that MORI conducted on behalf of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust into the attitudes of young people in former mining constituencies to employment? Has he noted that fewer than 1 per cent. of young people in such constituencies believed it likely that they would become company directors? What are the Government doing to ensure that young people in former mining constituencies increase their aspirations?

Mr. Brown: We need to increase and broaden people's aspirations. Proactive management of the labour market is therefore important. A first job is a stepping stone to a whole career. There is no reason why people from constituencies that traditionally relied on a single employment base such as mining and shipbuilding should not share in the rest of the country's aspirations.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The Minister will agree that unemployment, especially youth unemployment, was already falling before the Labour party came to power. Does he also agree that skills

shortages are the problem in areas such as Vale of York? Who will conduct a skills audit to marry the skills that employers require to places that currently lack them?

Mr. Brown: The regional development agencies are considering skills needs region by region. I take the opportunity to praise Yorkshire Forward, which covers the hon. Lady's constituency. The RDAs have recently produced studies that cover the ground that she rightly mentioned.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): What progress has the Jobcentre Plus initiative made?

Maria Eagle: How long have we got?

Mr. Brown: Exactly. The reply could keep us here until 3.30 pm. Jobcentre Plus is a flagship programme for the Department which has been established throughout the country. Its purpose is to bring together benefits advice and proactive labour market advice, and to help people to achieve the most that they can by getting them into work.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): Does the Minister agree that it would be better for the Government to spend more time and resources in encouraging more young people to become apprentices in some of the trades that are suffering skills shortages instead of staying on at school to study inappropriate A-levels or even going on to university? Where are we going to get our future carpenters, plumbers, bricklayers and welders?

Mr. Brown: It is right to look at modern apprenticeships, and to make sure that we are addressing skills shortages in the economy. That is a matter that should be discussed on a regular basis between my Department and the Department for Education and Skills.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): Over the last five years, unemployment in my constituency has fallen to below 2 per cent., but individual wards still have high levels of unemployment. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is still a need for programmes to promote employment and enterprise in such wards, even though they are within constituencies with low overall levels of unemployment?

Mr. Brown: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. The Government have programmes in place to target specific pockets of high unemployment. There is a range of reasons for that high unemployment, which is why the schemes to tackle it are varied.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): My right hon. Friend will be pleased, as I was, to know that the *Whitby Gazette* recently reported that unemployment in that fishing port is at an all-time low. Given the debate that we had last week on fisheries, what work will his Department do in the event of fisheries employment opportunities failing—we hope that that will not happen—because of the forthcoming threat being brought in by Europe?

Mr. Brown: Where there have been large numbers of redundancies in the fishing sector—and in other sectors—local jobcentres and Jobcentre Plus, where it is rolled out, stand ready to help. If a rapid response is required, it will be there.

Selby Coalfield Taskforce

20. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will make a statement concerning the work of his Department in assisting the Selby coalfield taskforce. [81289]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Jobcentre Plus is a member of the Selby coalfield taskforce, and it is involved both on the ground and in the development of the taskforce action plan. An application for rapid response service help has been approved, and resources have been deployed at each of the four sites affected. Jobcentre Plus is working alongside other partners to provide information, advice and guidance to workers. Because of the special circumstances, workers in the Selby coalfield can benefit from early access to training and other support from the rapid response service.

Mr. Grogan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Given the anticipated scale of the redundancies in the Selby coalfield in late 2003 and early 2004—2,000 jobs lost from the mines directly, and 3,000 indirectly—will he confirm that he is prepared to waive the so-called 90-day rule, which limits the assistance given by the rapid response unit to those applying within 90 days of being made redundant?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend has always been a staunch advocate of his constituents' interests. I can confirm that, given the very special circumstances in the area, I have acceded to Lord Haskins's request for the 90-day rule to be waived in respect of access to Government schemes.

Child Care

25. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): If he will bring forward proposals to extend child care provision for those in work. [81294]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): The Government's vision is for every parent to be able to access affordable, good-quality childcare, where they wish to have it.

Ian Lucas: One of the most difficult aspects of child care is the preferential provision that is given to in-place nurseries, rather than to people who work for smaller businesses, who want child care to improve their work capabilities. Is any action to be taken to assist those smaller businesses with financial support for the provision of child care?

Maria Eagle: The Government already have a good record of creating new child care places, having done so

for an extra 1.6 million children. Along with colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills, we are currently examining the best way of ensuring that both public and private sector provision is improved still further, to ensure that parents have the opportunity to get their children into nursery and pre-school places.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): What discussions has the hon. Lady had with her colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about one of the principal impediments to the better supply of decent child care, namely the rigidity and inflexibility of our current planning procedures?

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that that Department is now two Departments. I cannot tell whether he wants me to talk to the Department for Transport or ask about local government. We are working across government to ensure that improvements are made in the availability of child care for all our children.

Fire Dispute

3.30 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green)*(Urgent Question)*: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the progress of the firefighters' dispute.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): The Government deeply regret the continuing firefighters' dispute and believe that it cannot be justified. The firefighters are currently paid under a formula agreed at the conclusion of the last firefighters' strike 25 years ago. Under that formula, their pay has kept pace with pay rises in the economy as a whole.

Following the election of the new general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union earlier this year, the union declared that it wanted to change the formula and tabled a 40 per cent. pay claim. The employers agreed to discuss a new formula, and agreed in the meantime to pay 4 per cent.—an above-inflation pay increase roughly in line with the existing formula—and pay awards to comparable groups of workers. The union refused that offer.

In an effort to help, in September the Government appointed Sir George Bain, the highly respected chairman of the Low Pay Commission, to inquire into firefighters' pay and a possible new formula. We did so following consultation with the Trades Union Congress, and also appointed Tony Young, the former TUC president, to assist Sir George.

Meanwhile, in August we began preparations with the military for strike cover. The employers co-operated with Bain. The unions again refused even to allow their members to talk to him. When the time for the strike approached, as well as continuing preparations with the armed forces, we tried to facilitate negotiation. We brought forward Sir George Bain's report. He recommended that above-inflation pay increases could be paid, but only if accompanied by modernisation.

Among Sir George's findings were that full-time firefighters should lift the ban on working alongside part-time ones; that overtime, where it needed to be worked, could be worked; that management could change, where necessary, the rigid shift system of two days on, two nights on, then four days off to provide a better service; that firefighters could be allowed to do basic training as paramedics and carry resuscitation equipment such as defibrillators; that the fire service could share control rooms with other emergency services to provide efficiency of response; and that action be taken to improve the management of sickness in the service to reduce the extremely high numbers who retire early through sickness and ill health.

The employers welcomed the report; the FBU rejected it out of hand. Those changes to working practices, I believe, are plainly reasonable. They would produce substantial savings that could fund a better pay award. The potential deal that may have been reached last Friday morning between the union and the local government employers was unacceptable for the simple reason that it was not funded through modernisation. In addition, the agreement to modernise was only to talk about it, not a firm commitment to do it. The costings of the deal were not calculated or given, although they were plainly significant. In effect, the Government were being asked for a blank cheque, which we could not sign.

The Government's position is that, over and above the 4 per cent. already offered to the firefighters, there can be no further money without that claim being paid for by modernisation. If the existing firefighters' pay formula, on which their union insisted for 25 years, is to be changed, it has to be changed by agreement. The Bain report offers increased pay above 4 per cent., paid for by changes in working practices. It is, as I say, a fair and reasonable report.

The Government cannot be asked to find additional money outside agreed Government spending limits; to do so would risk fundamental and lasting damage to the economy. If the Government were to yield to this claim for pay increases way above inflation and not linked to productivity, the consequences across the whole public sector would be huge. Nurses and soldiers—after all, many of them are manning the appliances at the moment on pay far below that of the firefighters—as well as teachers and police officers would also seek similar claims, and all that we have done to produce the lowest inflation, the lowest unemployment and the lowest mortgage rates in Britain for decades would be put in jeopardy. That is a course we cannot take.

Meanwhile, the military do a superb job in providing replacement fire cover. I pay full tribute to our armed forces, Army, Navy and Air Force. They have done brilliantly, as ever, and we can be proud of them. I also thank the public, who have responded in an intelligent and mature way to the strains put on services. Up to this point, after six days of strike action, they have coped admirably, saving numerous lives in the process. Obviously, however, the risk to the public is there. That is why, even now, I urge the unions to call off the dispute—which cannot succeed—and return to the negotiating table to discuss how modernisation can fund pay improvements over and above the 4 per cent.

The Deputy Prime Minister set out the Government's position on Thursday. He had offered to make a further statement to the House today, precisely to keep the House informed. It has obviously been superseded by my answer to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), but I know that my right hon. Friend wishes—with your permission, Mr. Speaker—to make a further statement tomorrow.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to our armed forces, who, as ever, are going about their duties with the utmost efficiency and professionalism. We owe them a real debt.

We have, however, now entered the fourth day of the firefighters' strike, and the threat to public safety grows with each passing day. It is unquestionably time for the firefighters to return to work, and for all parties to return to the negotiating table. Governments of any hue should not give in to inflationary pay demands: but Governments should also speak with consistency and clarity. That has not been the case with the present Government. On Friday, the Deputy Prime Minister described the draft agreement between the employers and the fire union as "half-baked". The Prime Minister seemed to reiterate that today, but yesterday he said it was "still worth talking about". Which is it? This

morning, the Chancellor dismissed the fire union's pay demand as "simply unaffordable", yet the Deputy Prime Minister said that the Government were

"quite prepared to make an exceptional case"

for the firefighters. Which is it?

This morning, the Prime Minister said—and he has said it again here—that to give in would be a defeat for the country, but yesterday one of his own Cabinet Ministers said that the firefighters' claims had been "ignored for too long". Which is it?

Sadly, rather than speaking with consistency and clarity, the half-dozen Cabinet Ministers who have speaking for the Government over the weekend have said different things each time they have opened their mouths. Public safety is at risk, so the Prime Minister must answer some very serious questions. Now that he says he has taken charge, he must tell us what he will do to protect the public throughout this strike.

Four weeks ago, I asked the Prime Minister to ensure that troops would be trained to use the most modern firefighting and life-saving equipment. Halfway through the present walk-out, why has he not done that yet? What is the Government's line? The Minister with responsibility for fire services said that no troops would cross the picket lines. Lord Falconer said that they would. The Chief of Defence Staff said that they should not. The Secretary of State for Defence said that the police would do it instead, but the police said that they would not. What precisely is the Government's position?

How will it be possible to gain access to a significant number of red fire engines, and when? Other public services, such as the London underground, have been severely disrupted by wildcat secondary action masquerading as concerns about health and safety. Now that the Health and Safety Executive has said that this action is unjustified, will the Prime Minister take legal action to ensure that the public do not suffer yet more misery?

Will the Prime Minister also use all the emergency powers and trade union legislation available to him? Every time the Deputy Prime Minister has been asked that question, he has sidestepped it by saying that we should ask the Attorney-General. Will the Prime Minister tell us what the Government's position is?

Throughout the dispute, the Government have been woefully ill prepared. No two Ministers have agreed on the same line. There have been insufficient preparation and planning over the weeks and months during which there has been notice of the strike. The Prime Minister has been hard on rhetoric, but there has been no action from the rest of his Ministers, particularly the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister has played his part in the escalation of the crisis. At the beginning of the 21st century, men and women are without the fire and safety cover to which they are entitled. This should never have happened. The country deserves better from its Government. It is time for action, not words.

The Prime Minister: The truth of the matter is that the Conservative party, as its shadow Deputy Prime Minister—or whatever the position is that he holds nowadays—said earlier today, basically agrees with the Government's position. However, because it is so concerned to make political capital out of anything it possibly can, it has to try to pretend that, at the same time as it agrees with the Government's position, there is something that it would have done differently. Indeed, it says on its website today that the Government have caused the strike. Given that its position is the same as ours—that any pay award has to be funded by modernisation—I do not see how it can say that we have caused the strike.

The Deputy Prime Minister said yesterday that any extra money

"had to be financed out of changing work practices and the modernisation in the Fire Service".

That is precisely what I have said today and what the Chancellor said yesterday.

We have made it clear throughout that if the military want additional resources—red fire engines or anything else—they will have them. However, the military have not asked for more red fire appliances than we are giving them. If more are needed, they will have them.

The position as of today is that only one of London Underground's drivers has refused to work, so it would be somewhat excessive to take legal action on that basis.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Deputy Prime Minister said that emergency legislation is a matter for the Attorney-General. That is actually the law: it is a matter for the Attorney-General.

The right hon. Gentleman says that the Government have refused to make any preparations for this strike—*[Interruption.]* He says that we have made none whatsoever. I suppose that the military just suddenly happened along a couple of weeks ago. The fact is that since August the Government have been making preparations for the dispute. The logistics are rightly in the hands of our armed forces, who are doing a superb job. May I give the right hon. Gentleman a piece of advice? If he is going to employ opportunism as a tactic, make it less transparent.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does the Prime Minister agree that the Conservative proposal to use the law to make the strikers in contempt, which would result in the mass imprisonment of firefighters, would be unlikely to douse any fires either literally or metaphorically?

The Prime Minister: We know what the game of the Conservative party has been from the moment the dispute began: to exploit it for all it is worth—*[Interruption.]* Let me repeat that: from the very beginning, rather than attempt to help in the dispute, it has done everything it can to inflame it. That is, frankly, what we would expect, but it is worse than my hon. Friend says. The decision to use the law could be taken only by the Attorney-General, and that is not the position that he has taken.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Robathan, our constituents will not understand us shouting across the Chamber at

[Mr. Speaker]

one another at a very serious time. Hon. Members should be allowed to ask questions and the Prime Minister should be able to answer.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness West): Obviously, we all deplore the continuing strike action and the House of Commons is entirely correct to keep requesting and reminding the leadership of the FBU that it should not be conducting a national strike, that firefighters should be back at work, that the citizens of this country are entitled to receive the level of fire and emergency cover for which they pay through their taxation and that the FBU should be in negotiations based on the original Bain report. I pay tribute to the military services for doing a first-class job in this very unfortunate situation.

Will the Prime Minister concede that, over the past few days in particular, mixed messages have been emerging from the top of his Government? On the specific point that I raised with him a couple of weeks ago, will he confirm that Bain makes it clear that savings can accrue in due course from the process of modernisation, which we want to see encouraged, but that there may be additional costs sooner before the savings begin to come through? What is the Government's position? If there are transitional costs, will the Government meet them if the FBU signs up to modernisation?

The Prime Minister: The short answer is that Bain makes it clear that any changes have to be paid for through modernisation. It was always anticipated that the report would come in two stages—we brought forward the first stage. Essentially, it says that the 7.5 per cent. in the second year of modernisation, in addition to the 4 per cent., could be funded by changes in working practices. It then says that there could be further changes in working practices, yielding further benefits. It is within those parameters that people must negotiate. I entirely understand, because of the two stages and the different figures being bandied about, why people ask whether it will be this percentage or that percentage, but, with the greatest respect, the basic point is that they must negotiate on the basis of Bain. Why? Because if they want more than the 4 per cent., it must be paid for by modernisation. The rest should be left to the negotiators to negotiate, but they need to do so within those parameters.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): Will the Prime Minister stop referring to 40 per cent., because I understand that 16 per cent. was agreed by both sides on Thursday? We were already a good way towards a negotiated settlement. Does he understand the anger and frustration of many people in my area who are offended by many of the remarks made here about firefighters? Lothian and Borders fire brigade is already committed to producing 50 per cent. of what Bain has projected. The fire service is different things to different people in different parts of the country, and—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: It may well be true that the firefighters have come off the original 40 per cent. claim, but that was the basis on which they first took strike action. We cannot have negotiations between the employers and the trade union through the night that materially change what is on offer, and then simply hand the bill to the Government and say, "Pay it—and if you don't pay it, what's more, within the next hour or two we're going on strike."

I am sorry, but if we are to get to a negotiated settlement, some reason has to be employed. The reason, surely, is that there is an existing pay formula. Many people across the public sector have a formula, including the firefighters. Two years ago, I think, the Fire Brigades Union leadership said that the firefighters' formula had to be maintained, because it was the basis of fairness for them. If they now want to change it, fair enough, we are all agreed, let us change it, but it has to be changed as part of a deliberative process whereby we work out a new formula reasonably, and not on the basis of eight-day strike action.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): At his pre-parliamentary scrutiny conference this morning, the Prime Minister said—he repeated it this afternoon—that full-time firemen were not prepared to work with retained firemen. They are in my constituency. Who gave him that information? He also said that the Chief of Defence Staff was satisfied that our commitments, including a war, could be met irrespective of the number of troops being used to fight fires. Would he care to place that on the record in the House of Commons and confirm that that is what the Chief of Defence Staff thinks?

The Prime Minister: On the latter point, I think that I did that last week at Prime Minister's questions, in an answer to the leader of the Liberal Democrats. What the Chief of Defence Staff said was perfectly obvious. Obviously, soldiers would prefer not to be doing firefighting duties, and if 19,000 people are employed on those duties they are clearly not available for other duties. That is a statement of the obvious. However, he went on to say that we would have full operational cover for any requirement that might be placed on us, and that is the case.

On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the point is simply that at present there is a general ban on full-time firefighters working alongside the part-timers. If the FBU wants to agree the changes in the Bain report, let it do so—and frankly, I would hope that he would agree with us on that.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Will the Prime Minister explain how we can afford to fund a war against Iraq but cannot find the necessary money to meet the just demand of the firefighters for a living wage?

The Prime Minister: Because it is important that we play our full part in meeting our responsibilities in the fight against terrorism and against weapons of mass destruction—it would do enormous damage to this country if those evils were not confronted and defeated—but it is also important that we take a proper view of public money and how it is used. I heard some of the comments from union leaders at lunchtime about firefighters being a special case. With the greatest respect, everybody always argues that they are a special

case in such circumstances. However, I have not yet had an answer to how I could agree such a pay claim for the firefighters but tell a nurse, soldier or teacher that they were not entitled to the same. Until that answer can be given in a way consistent with running the economy and with low inflation, mortgate rates and unemployment, I am afraid that the Government's position will have to remain as it is.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): How exactly, apart from laying off people, would the modernisation proposals contained in the Bain report lead immediately to the hard cash needed to fund any increase in firefighters' pay?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman goes through the Bain report, he will see that Sir George Bain describes how those savings could be achieved. For example, if firefighters are able to manage the shift system more effectively, changes and savings could of course be made. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, and I will give him a couple of examples showing how the military are already running the cover in the dispute. First, they have taken account of the fact that it is better to have joint control rooms with the other emergency services, which is producing greater efficiency. Secondly, they have already worked out that 75 per cent. of calls are made during the day and that there is therefore not the same requirement for people to be on duty during the night. All these factors can save money.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Consequent upon the question put by the leader of the Liberal Democrats, will my right hon. Friend make it clear that Government financial support for an unrealistic, irresponsibly negotiated pay deal would spell catastrophe for every trade unionist in this country as well as for the country as a whole?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. If we yield to this pay claim, it will have consequences right across the economy. It would result in the huge benefits that we have seen over the past few years—the lowest inflation and unemployment for decades and the lowest mortgage rates for almost 40 years—being put at risk. That is why the Government cannot responsibly agree to this claim.

Bob Russell (Colchester): We accept that firefighters have the right to withdraw their labour and that they are entitled to have picket lines, but will the Prime Minister clarify the legal position—for example, insurance matters and safety at work—if striking firefighters continue to occupy fire stations and use all their facilities?

The Prime Minister: Firefighters are, of course, entitled to mount their picket lines. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is an odd situation when fire stations are used to put across the case in this dispute. The way in which fire services are managed must be considered during the course of the dispute.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Does the Prime Minister accept that most people consider that dual controls, modernisation proposals such as carrying defibrillators and paramedic training are simply commonsense measures that they want to be implemented to improve the service that they receive? However, they do not understand why an Opposition party that basically agrees with that position is being so opportunistic as to attack the Government.

The Prime Minister: The Opposition position was described on Sky News just a short time ago by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), who said something like, "We basically agree with the Government's position." However, that does not stop them making the remarks that they have made today. If I may give them some advice, I do not think that it is very wise opposition.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that although he was clearly right to reject a 16 per cent. pay settlement, none the less the Government are much to be blamed for their failure to speak with one voice and to ensure that the local employers' negotiating body fully understood the limitations on its negotiating position?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, I reject both points. As the Deputy Prime Minister said yesterday, any additional pay must be funded out of modernisation. That has been the case from the beginning; it has been repeated every time the Government have been asked and it is repeated again now.

On the right hon. and learned Gentleman's second point, the local government employers have always known, because we have said so from the outset, that additional pay must be paid for by modernisation.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Oh!

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman may find it a boring thing to say, but that suggests that we have been repeating it a lot. With any luck, the penny will finally drop, even for the Conservatives.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): As the Prime Minister may know, there was a huge fire in a factory in my constituency on Friday. Will he join me in paying tribute to the armed forces who worked so magnificently to put out that fire and in recognising that FBU members attended to ascertain whether there was danger to life? Above all, will my right hon. Friend ensure that there is no repeat of the situation that arose on Friday morning and that the employers are under no illusion that they can come to a settlement and pass the bill to the Government?

The Prime Minister: On the latter point, my hon. Friend is right: it is clearly understood that there can be no question of doing that.

On the first point, I pay tribute to the armed forces and to the way in which they fought the fire in my hon. Friend's constituency. I also pay tribute to those firefighters who have come off their strike action to try to provide protection for people's lives. It is fair to say that they have made an agreement about emergency

[The Prime Minister]

cover in a gold command situation. That is sensible and right, and I hope that the sense that prevails in that aspect will prevail across the whole of the dispute.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): What proportion of any pay offer will be funded directly by the Government, and what proportion by local authorities and hence council tax payers?

The Prime Minister: I shall explain again. The 4 per cent. is already agreed and local authorities can pay that from their existing settlement. Over and above that, the money has to come from modernisation—from changes in working practice: precisely how much is a matter for negotiation between the two sides. I can do no more than repeat that the basic parameter is that if the amount is above 4 per cent. it has to be paid for by changes in working practices.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): This morning, firefighters on the picket line in my constituency told me that they want talks. They want to talk about modernisation. The ideas and suggestions that they put to me were highly positive and flexible. What would my right hon. Friend say in response to them?

The Prime Minister: There must be firefighters who are concerned about the action that has been taken and also about how to get themselves out of the dispute. There will be firefighters who have many reasonable points to make, and the way to do so is to sit down at the negotiating table, not to call a series of eight-day strikes that cannot really help the situation. I come back to the Bain report. It has been disparaged by parts of the FBU, but Sir George Bain has been known to the trade union movement for a long period. He did a magnificent job over the minimum wage. His two wing men were the person from the Local Government Association, who was also a former employer, and Tony Young, the president of the TUC last year. Those people can hardly be described as a biased committee. I hope that if firefighters look at the changes proposed in the report, they will see that they can get above-inflation pay increases, but paid for and funded in the way that I have described.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Given that the Army was warned at the end of July that it would need to prepare for such a strike; given that a considerable number of red fire engines are held in reserve and not behind picket lines; and given that Conservative Members estimate that it would take two weeks to train people to use those fire engines, whereas Labour Members estimate that it would take 12 weeks, why has not the Army been undergoing training since the end of July to use those available fire engines without having to cross picket lines?

The Prime Minister: Preparations to provide cover began in August. The military will be provided with whatever they need but, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, we prefer to take their advice rather than his.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): Has my right hon. Friend any plans to meet the leaders of the FBU, bearing in mind the fact that, as most people know, if these disputes go on for any length of time they usually end up in bitterness and recrimination? Today, I noticed that, through the media, the leaders of the FBU offered to meet him. Can he give an answer about that?

The Prime Minister: There have been many meetings with the Fire Brigades Union. The Deputy Prime Minister has constantly met the union and explained the position to it. It is only right to say that, at every stage of the dispute, he has attempted to resolve it and to prevent it from happening. The plain fact is that the meetings can go on for ever, but they must be based on certain clear understandings, and the beginning of understanding how all this has come about is the existing pay formula. Only when that pay formula is changed by agreement can we get a proper negotiation. Of course Ministers will continue to meet the FBU, or anybody else, but this will be resolved only if people realise that it must be resolved on the basis of reason.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to repudiate his official spokesman, who said last Friday that firefighters were not living in the real world? Does he accept that their world is a damn sight more real than that of most politicians? Will he tell the House what the extra costs to date have been in police overtime, local authority extra expenditure and Army expenditure? Will he try to address this question once again: is pump-priming available for a long-term settlement based on modernisation, or not?

The Prime Minister: Whatever the costs of fighting the dispute, they are less in our judgment than the costs of yielding to a claim that would trigger other claims right across the public sector, which there is no way the Government could afford. After all, as a result partly of the way that the economy has been managed, we are making the largest public spending investment in our public services that this country has seen since the second world war. We cannot go outside and breach those limits. Frankly, it is all a question of realising that, in the end, there is a reasonable way to approach this. We have tried to be reasonable, and if people do not want the reasonable way, we have, I am afraid, to stand firm and say that the interests of the country as a whole come first.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): The Prime Minister has said that any settlement has to be fully costed and linked to modernisation. Is he aware that the leader of the employers' side negotiators said at the weekend that the deal last Thursday was costed and that the information was available—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry; I am quoting directly from Mr. Ransford. The agreement said that any additional payment above 4 per cent. would be linked to modernisation and verified by a panel including the Audit Commission. May I appeal to the Prime Minister to go back to No. 10 and invite the union and the employers to meet him?

The Prime Minister: The difficulty is this: I have obviously studied the agreement—I have read it—that was entered into or may have been reached early on Friday morning, and if my hon. Friend looks at

paragraph 6 of that document, he will see that it makes it quite clear that there are, I think it says, significant costs over and above those that can be paid for by modernisation. What is more, there were no costings attached to that at all. Even more than that, we were then told, in effect, that we had to agree to that document and that the strike action would go ahead in any event.

I urge my hon. Friend, if he has any influence with the FBU, to go back to it and simply say that if it produces an agreement with costs attached, it is not really reasonable to say to the Government, "You have to sign the cheque for it, but we can't actually tell you what the costs will be and, what's more, if you do not do it in the next couple of hours, we are all on strike for eight days." The Government cannot operate like that, so if my hon. Friend is saying to me on behalf of those in the FBU that they are prepared to talk about modernisation reasonably and to work out the costing involved in that, he should get them to sit back down with the employers and work it out, and we will help in any way we can, but we cannot fund it outside of the modernisation.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There will be another statement tomorrow.

NATO Summit (Prague)

4.4 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement on the NATO summit in Prague on 20 to 22 November. With my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary, I represented the United Kingdom at the North Atlantic Council, at the special meeting of the North Atlantic Council, with the seven new countries invited to become new members, and at the Euro Atlantic Partnership Council. At the outset, I pay tribute to President Havel and our Czech hosts, and to the skilful chairmanship of the NATO Secretary-General, George Robertson, who has been widely and rightly praised for his leadership in that role.

The summit reflected the extraordinary changes in the global security environment in which all nations now operate. NATO itself has changed. We decided on seven new members: I congratulate Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia on their invitations; they are well deserved, and they reflect the progress in reform that all seven countries have made since the end of the cold war. All are on course to be in the alliance by the next summit in 18 months' time, and to be contributors to European security. That enlargement will strengthen NATO and make the whole continent of Europe more secure. Those invitations will not be the last. The United Kingdom will help those who want to join, and who meet the criteria, to succeed in future.

Secondly, NATO continues to build new relationships outside its formal membership. Most importantly, the relationship with Russia has been transformed in the last year. We now work with Russia as an equal partner, co-operating in a whole range of areas. A good example is the Balkans, where NATO and Russia are together making an immense contribution towards our goal of a peaceful and stable Balkans playing a full part in the European family.

One of NATO's greatest benefits has been the forum it has provided for its European and transatlantic members to deal with security challenges together. My great hope is that we are now beginning to include the new Russia as a real partner in meeting the new threats we face. There was a useful meeting in Prague of the NATO-Russia council at Foreign Minister level. NATO is also pursuing its practical co-operation with Ukraine and strengthening its wider partnerships with the Mediterranean, central Asia and the Caucasus.

NATO is also building a close and effective relationship with the European Union on crisis management, for example, in the Balkans. At Prague, we decided to maintain a NATO presence in Macedonia for a further limited period. Once the EU-NATO links are in place, I am keen to see a European security and defence policy operation in Macedonia, to show that Europe can play its part in bringing security and stability to that part of our continent.

Thirdly, NATO needs to develop new capabilities. The cold war is over, and there are new missions and new threats. The key is flexibility of response, adaptability of military forces, and modernisation of defence capabilities. The Prague summit agreed on these new instruments to help to meet those new challenges: a new NATO response force will provide NATO with effective forces available at short notice; all allies have committed to improve their capabilities in specific ways to support and equip forces that are flexible and deployable; and we agreed on a revised, reduced and refocused command structure.

Above all, the summit was a profound demonstration of unity in the face of the new threats that confront us. Every nation spoke of the menace of international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. We all recognised that there is no place to hide from them. The terrorists do not distinguish between the "soft" or "hard" nations on terrorism. Every European country knows that it is under threat, whether it is known as a strong supporter of US policy or not. Every nation talked of cells of the al-Qaeda terrorist network or related groups ready to strike at innocent people.

This is not a war that we can avoid. There is no appeasing the fanatics. They will not go more lightly on us if we are less outspoken in our condemnation of them. Their enemy is anyone who is not them, and they feel as strongly—sometimes more so—against the moderate Moslem as they do against the Christian or Jew or Hindu.

The NATO summit affirmed that simple truth. It was a remarkable statement of defiance. It linked very clearly—and, I believe, rightly—terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The threat from weapons of mass destruction in the hands of rogue unstable states is not part of some different danger. It, like terrorism, represents savage indifference to human life. It, too, crosses national boundaries without discrimination. It, too, cannot be negotiated with or appeased—simply defeated utterly.

The strength of the NATO summit statement on Iraq was testimony to that belief. There was complete unanimity around the table that the choice for war or peace lies with Saddam, and that if he breaches the will of the United Nations, the United Nations will have to act. There was strong support for multilateralism and for the decision of President Bush to go through the UN, but equally strong insistence that multilateralism and the UN be seen to work.

Some of the most powerful expressions of these sentiments on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction came not from the old but from the new members of the NATO alliance.

President Havel was a prisoner of the old communist regime; he was witness to the dissolution of the Warsaw pact; he has now presided over NATO's largest gathering. The President of Lithuania, who has seen his country raped and destroyed by war and totalitarian oppression and who lived for 50 years in Chicago as an exile from his homeland, is now back as its President. The President of Latvia, for years a Professor in Montreal, spoke in the most moving terms of her country's long dark years of struggle for freedom and of its pride in becoming part of NATO.

Each representative had a story to tell and all with the same theme: they know the value of the fight for freedom, for democracy, for the rule of law, the struggle to break free of totalitarian intolerance and fanaticism. They know the meaning of terrorism and of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of brutal and repressive states. They know that extremism has just taken a new

form for the 21st century, and they were complete in their determination that these new threats had to be faced, conquered and consigned to history just like the old threats and struggles from the 20th century. They had a lot to tell us about the values we believe in. Sometimes we can be complacent about them, but they were not. They know their worth, and the ultimate message from the NATO summit was far more powerful than discussion of capabilities or formal structures. It was that, if we care about these values of freedom, the rule of law and democracy, we should not flinch from the fight in defending them. I know that this country, Britain, will defend them with courage and certainty.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Prime Minister is right that NATO is the foundation stone of our national security. No other organisation could come close to fulfilling that task, which is why we particularly welcome the Prague statement on Iraq.

The Prime Minister is also right to highlight the threat from terrorists as well as from weapons of mass destruction, particularly those possessed by rogue states. Those who say that the issues are not linked are wrong. They are linked, and they are also linked by their effect in the hands of the wrong people.

The Prague commitment to transform NATO with its new members, new capabilities and new relationships with our partners is a step in the right direction. It is positive for them and it is positive for us. However, there are practical questions. The main question for the Prime Minister is: have the key issues been conclusively resolved? When will European members of NATO start increasing defence spending instead of cutting it?

The Prague statement is long on future capabilities but short on specific spending commitments. How can we be sure that our NATO allies will deliver stronger defence? What assurances has the Prime Minister received? Can he clarify how the Prague statement differs from the previous NATO defence capabilities initiative? What guarantees are there that Prague will deliver where previous initiatives have so far failed?

We also welcome the commitment to the new NATO response force, which is vital to enable NATO nations to contribute effectively to the war against terrorism, which the Prime Minister stressed. The Army, however, now finds itself committed to both the Euro army and to NATO. Can he confirm that NATO commitments, rather than those of the Euro army, will always have priority?

That question underlines the failure of the summit to deal with the relationship between the Euro army and NATO. The Prime Minister promised that this key issue would be resolved four years ago. Last year, he again told the House:

"We are determined to finalise soon the EU's arrangements with NATO."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 19.]

Following assurances the Prime Minister gave to President Bush, the President said:

"He also assured me that European defence would in no way undermine NATO . . . there would be a joint command, that planning would take place within NATO".

Will the Prime Minister answer the following questions? Where is the joint command now? Where is the planning within NATO that he promised? As it stands,

"The EU's Defence Policy cannot be 'within NATO'."

Those are not my words but those of his Secretary of State for Defence in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). How is the statement that the EU's defence policy cannot be within NATO consistent with what the Prime Minister told the House and the President?

The confusion between the EU and NATO is already threatening the coherence of the peacekeeping operation in Macedonia. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes it is. The Prime Minister says that he would like a Euro army operation in Macedonia once the EU-NATO links are in place. Is he saying, therefore, that no Euro army operation should take place until permanent arrangements between the EU and NATO have been made? Perhaps he could answer that.

The Prime Minister will recall that the Euro army was a French policy that he signed up to at St. Malo. It was a bad decision. It has undermined NATO, confused our allies and threatens to weaken European security.

The Prime Minister: Some European members, such as France, are increasing defence spending. After years of falling defence expenditure—cut by, I think, a third under the Conservatives—Britain is also increasing its defence spending. It is true that we need to do more, however, and we are urging people to do that. The prior capabilities commitments differ from earlier arrangements in that they include specific commitments on individual countries, so that takes things forward.

I totally disagree with the right hon. Gentleman on European defence. It is absolutely correct that it has not been possible as yet to reach agreement between Europe and NATO. That is because there is a disagreement, effectively between Turkey and Greece, over the terms. It is important to overcome that disagreement and I am reasonably optimistic that we will. It is extremely important that we push European defence forward. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to reconsider his party's position on that. There will be circumstances in which Europe is able to act but NATO is not, perhaps because of American unwillingness to act. If NATO as a whole does not wish to be engaged, it makes perfect sense for European defence to take over.

Incidentally, it is not a matter of creating a Euro army. The armies remain part of the armies of individual countries. It is simply a case of them coming together to do things properly, as they would in a NATO exercise. The operation is important in Macedonia because the Americans have made it clear that they prefer it to be led from Europe. Instead of taking a blanket opposition to any concept to European defence, the right hon. Gentleman should realise that if it can be done on the right terms—if it is fully complementary with NATO; if it is on the basis that Britain, the Americans and all the Europeans agree; and if we get over the disagreement between Turkey and Greece—we will enhance our ability to undertake defence operations when NATO does not want to be involved. That is an additional string to our bow rather than a drawback.

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): In welcoming the statement and the success of the summit, it is only fair to echo the tribute paid to George Robertson for the highly principled and successful conduct of his secretary-generalship. For those of us who remember the Monday afternoon years ago when, under the procedures of the House at the time, we were unable to have a meaningful exchange about the cataclysmic events that had taken place with the collapse of the Berlin wall, it is hard to imagine any British Prime Minister making a statement confirming that seven new accession countries, based on the principles of democracy, are joining NATO. That is a great justification for the entire raison d'être of NATO and its success over the years.

Does the Prime Minister share my curiosity? We just heard the argument that greater coherence and integration of NATO—a wider NATO—and, at the same time, greater coherence and integration of the defence realm in Europe are bad ideas, but if that is the case it is puzzling that countries are queuing up to join both organisations. Instead, they see the success and future stability that such membership and co-operation can bring.

Can the Prime Minister say a little more about the comparative funding? The Americans are always unhappy about the European contribution to defence—there is nothing new about that—but does he anticipate that countries that may not have contributed as much per capita as we would like can do more in that direction?

Finally, on the important matter of Iraq, while welcoming the endorsement at the summit of UN resolution 1441, will he confirm that in signing up to that unanimously, all participants at the summit were signing up to the UN having the final categoric judgment if material breaches take place and that the ultimate decision, if military force ever does have to be used, has to be made under the mandate of the United Nations as well?

The Prime Minister: On the last point, that is not what the NATO statement said and it is not what the resolution says either. We have made it clear throughout—this is in the terms of the resolution—that of course there will be further discussion in the Security Council. We have also made it clear, rightly, that in the end, if there is a breach, the UN must act. If it does not act, we are in a serious situation, but I hope and believe that it will in those circumstances. There was a remarkable degree of unanimity around the table that we should go the multilateral route, but it has got to work—there cannot be an unreasonable blockage against it working.

On the point made by the right hon. Gentleman about defence spending, some countries are increasing their defence spending, but others are not. As important as the amount spent is the way in which it is spent. If we look at the amount spent in Europe on defence, frankly there are much better ways in which it could be spent—that is why the Prague capabilities document is important.

On the issue of Europe and NATO, I am forcibly struck by how crazy it would be for this country to turn its back on Europe. The new countries coming into NATO see their whole future around the membership of NATO and the European Union—it is important to them. The idea that, at a time when Europe expands to 25 and other countries are queuing up to join, we should take ourselves off to the margins of Europe would defeat this country's national interests. I personally do not believe that people will regard the Conservative party as a serious party until it rejects that type of anti-Europeanism completely.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that if military action is taken against Iraq by America, or America and Britain, without the express authority of the United Nations it will lack international political legitimacy? Does he agree that that would severely damage not only the United Nations but NATO, an organisation that I strongly support?

The Prime Minister: I simply go back to what I said a moment or two ago. It will all depend on the circumstances. As my hon. Friend knows and as was pointed out at the time of Labour party conference, in Kosovo, for example, we took action outside the UN because there was an unreasonable blockage against action being taken. I do not believe, however, that we will get to that point. The countries that signed up to the deal at the United Nations know that if there is a breach by Saddam we have to act. At the heart of the agreement, and throughout all the negotiations at the United Nations, America, ourselves and some countries agreed to go the multilateral route and others agreed that that route should work. The inspectors are put back in and, if they find that there is a breach, we act. That is a fair and reasonable way to proceed.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The Prime Minister has faced up to the challenges confronting NATO and ourselves, but he has not faced up to overstretch in our armed forces, which will have to help to implement those challenges. Will he confirm that at the Downing street press conference, the Chief of Defence Staff did not just say that the 19,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen involved in firefighting duties were not available at present—a very obvious point—but that they are not able to train for the vital war fighting duties that they may face in the next month or two, which, by inference, could put their lives and missions at risk?

The Prime Minister: He did not say that, with respect—the hon. Gentleman himself made all the remaining points. He said that if 19,000 are tied up they are not available for other duties. That is obviously right. However, he went on to say—if necessary, I shall send the hon. Gentleman a copy of what he actually said—that they would have full operational cover for any requirement placed on them, including Iraq. That is the position.

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the alliance formed through NATO 53 years ago has played a key role in bringing security and in making war between individual nation states unthinkable in the European continent? Does he further agree that when the decisions of the Prague summit are implemented, as they undoubtedly will be

under the strong leadership of the NATO Secretary-General, NATO will become an alliance providing security not just in Europe, but across the global stage?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. It was a Labour Government Foreign Secretary who played such an enormous part in bringing NATO about all those years ago, and it is the present Foreign Secretary who is engaged in the work of making sure that we expand the NATO membership and, equally important, making sure that we have a new relationship with Russia, in which Russia sees itself as a partner of NATO, and not in a position of hostility to NATO. That is a huge change that has come about in the past year.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Is the Prime Minister aware of increasing reports in *Le Figaro* and other European newspapers that at the Prague summit France and Germany discussed and signed a four-page document on European security? How does that square with what he has just told the House?

The Prime Minister: Whatever the French and Germans may agree or not agree, anything that is agreed will have to be agreed by all 15 members at the Copenhagen summit. However, I do not think the hon. Gentleman is right in what he says. Everyone wants to see European defence conducted consistently with NATO. The difficulty has been the disagreement between Turkey and Greece. That has held up progress for a couple of years or more. The only way that we can get over that is by reaching agreement. I saw the leader of the party that won the election in Turkey recently, Mr. Erdogan. I also saw President Cezer of Turkey at the Prague summit. They told me that they thought it would be possible very shortly to reach an agreement on European defence. I very much hope that that is true, as it would push matters forward enormously, not merely for European defence, but for Turkey. We should not be in the least fussed about what the French and the Germans may agree together. I am sure that the agreement will be considered carefully by others at the Prague summit, but we take our own position.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The inclusion of Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia is good news for the stability of the Balkans. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will keep working towards other countries in the Balkans joining NATO and further enhancing stability and security in that region?

The Prime Minister: I certainly will. It is precisely the pull of European Union membership and NATO membership that means that those countries in the Balkans, which, after all, have given us in the rest of Europe the most terrible headache for the past 100 years, are making extraordinary strides and improvements. They are doing so because of the magnet of European Union and NATO membership. The point that my hon. Friend makes is absolutely right.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): In the context of the accession of the Baltic states to NATO and, hopefully, their accession to the European Union in future, are all the outstanding issues to do with Kaliningrad now resolved?

The Prime Minister: I think that they are basically resolved. There is still a discussion that needs to take place finally between the European Union, Lithuania and Russia, but I believe that, in principle, that agreement is now there.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I welcome the summit and the expansion of NATO membership. Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the key role played by British military advisers in helping those countries qualify? Finally, given the wider membership, does he agree that we need to speed up the reform and the streamlining of the NATO command structure?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do. My hon. Friend is right. One of the things that we agreed was to refocus, reduce and streamline the NATO command structure. As my hon. Friend says, that should happen as quickly as possible.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that NATO is setting up a rapid reaction force, including the United States, to tackle international terrorism and other wide-ranging threats to our security, why does not the Prime Minister accept that, in practice, the EU rapid reaction force will wither on the vine as the concept of rapid reaction becomes enshrined in the NATO structure, where it should have remained all along?

The Prime Minister: For that very reason—the hon. Gentleman puts his finger on exactly the point that must be confronted. With respect, the United States does not want its forces to be involved in every single bit of peacekeeping or every humanitarian mission. That is simply not the case. We now have an agreement on Macedonia and it is generally considered best that European forces take that on. In circumstances in which NATO decides that it does not want to be involved, it is sensible to have the arrangement in reserve. That is what has been said about European defence and it has been properly done. Incidentally, that is why every other country in NATO is supporting the concept of getting the agreement. The British Conservative party may have set its face against it, but that is not the position of the American Republican party, never mind any other Conservative party in Europe. The agreement is simply that, in circumstances in which NATO does not want to be involved—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where does it say that?"] If hon. Members go back and look at every single thing that has been said about the agreement from the beginning, they will see that it has always been the case that if NATO does not want to be involved, those are the circumstances in which European defence comes into play. As I said a moment ago, if hon. Members set their faces against European defence in any set of circumstances, we will not have the opportunity to produce a defence force in circumstances in which NATO does not want to be involved. We will be the only country in Europe not playing our part in the debate about European defence.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that while we should welcome the historic enlargement, many problems remain? For example, last week, I think, the Hungarian Defence Minister made a candid confession that after having been invited to join

[Donald Anderson]

NATO in 1997 and formally joining in 1999, his country had fulfilled less than one third of the commitments that had been made. Would it not now be prudent for future enlargements—I am glad that the door remains open—to involve a two-stage process, in which invitations are issued, but are contingent on fulfilment of the commitments before formal membership is granted?

The Prime Minister: The point that my right hon. Friend makes is right. It was always anticipated that some countries would have a catch-up period even after they became members of NATO, but in each case a process is in place to try to track what happens and ensure that it is done properly. He will accept that some countries have made enormous changes to get as far as they have.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): My right hon. Friend will know that a large number of members of NATO and the international community regard UN resolution 1441 as carrying no specific mandate for a war against Iraq. Will he give the House an assurance that before he commits any British troops or support to such a war, he will seek, first, a specific mandate for a war through the UN, and secondly, a specific vote in advance from the House of Commons?

The Prime Minister: I think that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will deal with both those points in the main debate. In the end, it is anticipated that there will be another discussion in the Security Council. All that we have said is that we hope very much that that discussion will be successful. The resolution is certainly predicated on the basis that if there is a breach, there is agreement to act. I believe that that is a sensible position. As for consulting the House, we have done so throughout and always have done on these occasions. In respect of Kosovo and Afghanistan, we did our level best to do that. In the course of his speech, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will deal to anyone's reasonable satisfaction with the point that my hon. Friend makes.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): To what effect will the discussion in the Security Council be? Will the Security Council have the final judgment on the weapons inspectors' report?

The Prime Minister: It will be for the weapons inspectors to say whether there is a breach and there will then be discussion about the seriousness of that breach. We have undertaken to take the matter back to the Security Council. All that we have been saying throughout is that the implication is that if there is a significant breach, there must be action. I think that there is international consensus that it is not sensible to tie ourselves down now to every single set of circumstances, that we want to keep some freedom of manoeuvre and that we should keep maximum pressure on Saddam. He has to know that unless he gets rid of weapons of mass destruction peacefully through the weapons inspectors, it will be done by force. There was remarkable unanimity; even countries that were more hesitant about agreeing to the UN resolution accept that the world must act if there is a breach, inspectors are defied and Saddam does not co-operate properly.

President Bush made a principled and difficult decision to go through the United Nations. He was right to do that. We supported him strongly and we are now obliged to ensure that the UN route works. I believe that we can do it in a way that avoids conflict, if at all possible. In any event, Saddam must know that he will be disarmed of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the accession of Romania to NATO will be a huge boost to peace and prosperity from a nation that suffered under Ceausescu's terror regime?

The Prime Minister: Well, it is remarkable to remember Romania under Ceausescu 15 or 20 years ago, the changes that it has made and its huge struggle to achieve improvements. If people want an antidote to cynicism about politics, they should listen to speeches from those in former communist countries about what membership of NATO and of the European Union mean to them. They know all about freedom because, until recently, they had none.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his role in such a successful summit. What assessment has he made of the changes necessary in Ukraine so that it can be permanently at the table?

The Prime Minister: A strong message was given to Ukraine at the summit. It is important, if it wants to take its place properly in partnership with other countries, that some specific rules and liberties are maintained and respected. I hope that it received that message as strongly as it was intended.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): When the Prime Minister met the new leadership of Turkey, did he discuss the statement of former European leaders such as Valery Giscard d'Estaing that there was no place for a Muslim country in the EU? Did my right hon. Friend say that Turkey is an effective partner in NATO, that it could perform that function in the EU, and that the United Kingdom will have no truck with such racism?

The Prime Minister: We have made a strong statement in support of Turkey's membership of the European Union. On the basis of discussions that I held with Mr. Erdogan and the President of Turkey, I hope that it will be possible to make a commitment to that country at the European Council in Copenhagen. I hope that we will set a firm date for negotiations, that they will form part of a package to lay to rest some of the outstanding difficulties on European defence and that we shall at least find a proper way forward on Cyprus. The dispute holds us back. It is right to extend the hand of friendship and partnership to Turkey; I hope that it will be reciprocated.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend realise that the NATO Parliamentary Assembly that preceded the summit included the welcome presence of the member of that body who had just become Prime Minister of Turkey? In his speech to the

Assembly, Abdullah Gul made it clear that Turkey is a Muslim country but a secular state, and that there is a historic opportunity to resolve the Cyprus issue once and for all.

The Prime Minister: I agree with those sentiments. The Prime Minister was right, and Turkey's eventual accession to the European Union would offer tremendous possibilities and opportunities for our future. I therefore hope that the new spirit of progress and engagement works out.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Given our recent difficulties in achieving agreement, let alone unanimity, among NATO allies on, for example, the Gulf war, exercises in Kosovo, and the coalition against terrorism, how convinced is the Prime Minister that the rapid reaction force will live up to its name?

The Prime Minister: We have an agreement in principle to establish it, and I hope that it can come about. On the whole, the agreements that we have reached in NATO—for example, over Kosovo and the war against terrorism—have been pretty impressive. Given that there are many different countries with different interests round the table, it is perhaps more impressive than the hon. Gentleman's question implies. Of course, agreeing to the rapid reaction force in principle is not the same as implementing it; we have to make sure that it is followed through.

Point of Order

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will see on today's Order Paper that under our new arrangements for the delivery of ministerial statements to the House, there are five statements down to be made today, and that one of them is to be made by the Minister for the Armed Forces on the defence training review rationalisation programme. I was made aware on Thursday night that that statement was to be made, when a journalist from *The Times* newspaper telephoned me at 7.30 pm, and I eventually obtained a copy of it on Friday. Do you not agree, Mr. Speaker, that this is a most unsatisfactory way of dealing with the House, especially when the matter involves a great many right hon. and hon. Members? We know that the Ministry of Defence was thrown into complete confusion last week by the honesty of the Chief of the Defence Staff when he blew the whistle on the Government's short-changing of our armed forces. Nevertheless, will you give advice to Ministers that they have a duty to the House to ensure that statements are delivered at the time that they are supposed to be made to the House under the new arrangements designed to help Ministers?

Mr. Speaker: Ministers have a clear duty, and I will look into the hon. Gentleman's complaint. I take it very seriously, and I will report back to him on this matter.

BILL PRESENTED

Local Government

Mr. Secretary Prescott, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Secretary Margaret Beckett, Mr. Secretary Darling, Mr. Secretary Milburn, Ms Secretary Hewitt, Mr. Paul Boateng, Secretary Peter Hain, Mr. Nick Raynsford and Mr. Christopher Leslie, presented a Bill to make provision about finance, and other provision, in connection with local and certain other authorities; to provide for changing the dates of local elections in 2004; to amend the Audit Commission Act 1998; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 9].

Orders of the Day

UN Security Council Resolution 1441

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Liberal Democratic party.

4.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move,

That this House supports UNSCR 1441 as unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council; agrees that the Government of Iraq must comply fully with all provisions of the Resolution; and agrees that, if it fails to do so, the Security Council should meet in order to consider the situation and the need for full compliance.

Before I come to the case for the motion, may I say how sorry I am—and I think that I speak for the whole House—that the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, is unable to be with us today. He attracts great respect in the House because of his contribution to its work. I have been able to talk to him, and I know that the prognosis is good. I would like, through you Mr. Speaker, to wish him a very speedy recovery.

On 7 November, I made a statement to the House about the negotiations on the new United Nations Security Council resolution. I did so not because the negotiations had been concluded, but because that was the last day before the prorogation of Parliament. I said then that I hoped that a large majority of the Security Council would vote in favour of the resolution. I said that as much in hope as in expectation. On the following day, 8 November, Security Council resolution 1441 was adopted 15:0—unanimously. All five permanent members supported it, as did countries as diverse as Mexico, Cameroon, Ireland and Syria. The resolution represents the considered view of the international community that Iraq must end its decade of defiance of the United Nations.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I will give way to her later.

For the United Kingdom, support for the UN has always been a central tenet of our foreign policy. It is the embodiment of our belief in an international order of peace and security. The UN charter is a robust document.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: If I may be allowed to make a little progress first, I shall of course give way.

The UN charter provides in chapter VII for mandatory obligations to be binding on all member states, and it makes it clear that these resolutions may be backed by military action.

Today, Iraq stands in breach of nine separate chapter VII Security Council resolutions. It has completely ignored 23 distinct obligations out of a total of 27. That plainly cannot be allowed to continue. As President Bush said to the UN General Assembly on 12 September, the UN has either to enforce the writ of its own resolution or risk becoming irrelevant. Happily, the Security Council responded to his challenge.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for giving way and I apologise for intervening so early in his speech, but I do so for a particular reason.

Over the past two days, there have been media reports that the Secretary of State for Defence is likely to make a statement today on troop deployments or calling up the reserves. If that were to be the case, obviously he would not be able to do so until his speech at the end of the debate. That would be totally unsatisfactory, as the House could not debate those issues. If he is likely to make a statement, will the Foreign Secretary outline what is in it so that it can form part of the debate?

Mr. Straw: I say to the right hon. Gentleman that, as the Prime Minister made clear, we have quite properly, because it is our duty, ensured that the House is kept fully informed and, where appropriate, is able to vote on substantive motions on the issue. That will continue. When and if there is an appropriate moment for a statement to be made on calling up reserves, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who is in his place next to me, will make it. As it happens, and although I shall speak briefly on the preparedness of our troops, no such statement is currently in prospect.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. As he knows, I receive a large amount of correspondence on this issue, and I have here half my weekend's post on Iraq and the UN resolution. My constituents are concerned that the resolution deliberately makes it difficult and potentially impossible for Iraq to comply, mainly because it requires Iraq to produce within 30 days a full inventory—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am sorry to interrupt, but interventions should be a little more spontaneous and certainly fairly brief in the context of the limited time available for the debate.

Mrs. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The concern is that Iraq is being asked to produce within 30 days a full inventory of all activities and all chemical facilities in that country, including non-military areas. Will my right hon. Friend comment so that I can feed back the information to my constituents?

Mr. Straw: May I say to my hon. Friend, as I say to my other hon. Friends, that I shall deal with that issue and others that I know are of concern to many people in the country? I hope to reassure them. May I also say that nobody who reads the full text of resolution 1441, including paragraph 3, can be in any doubt that it is straightforward for Iraq to comply? It can comply if it wishes.

Mr. Kaufman: My right hon. Friend refers to the Government's consistent support for the UN. Would it

not be a good idea at this point to place it on record that paragraph 3 of clause IV of the Labour party constitution also says that we should co-operate with the UN and that that part of the constitution was moved by Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn?

Mr. Straw: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend—as ever, I have to say. It must be one of the few parts of clause IV that was not amended by people such as me, when we had the opportunity to do so and to modernise it in 1994. He is quite right that it is a timeless part of our constitution and I am very glad that we are so committed to it. It has also to be said, as he tempts me down that path, that I am just old enough to remember when Mr. Wedgwood Benn was one of the leading modernisers—

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): That is when you were on the left.

Mr. Straw: I still am. Some of us still are—unlike my hon. Friend, who will doubtless go through some contortions to explain why he takes his current position on the Security Council resolution.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: I want to make some progress now.

My speech endeavours to deal with key questions that I know are on the minds of many Members on both sides of the House. As I have said, President Bush told the General Assembly on 12 September that the UN must either enforce the writ of its own resolutions or risk becoming irrelevant. Happily, the Security Council responded to that challenge.

Negotiations on resolution 1441 were long and intensive. It was some eight weeks in gestation, and that period was one of unrelenting high-level diplomatic contacts. The Prime Minister made frequent telephone calls to President Bush, and spoke regularly to other Heads of Government. I had daily, sometimes hourly, contacts with my counterparts. But the success of that diplomatic activity owes much to the expertise and professionalism of many British diplomats and officials in New York, in London and around the world, and I pay tribute to them.

I want to describe the process of inspection set out in resolution 1441, then to answer four key questions. The questions are these. First, what constitutes a material breach? Secondly, who decides and what happens if there is a material breach? Thirdly, would there be a second Security Council resolution if military action proved necessary? Fourthly, if Her Majesty's Government were to decide that military action was necessary, would the House be able to vote on it, and if so when?

Resolution 1441 has one central aim: the peaceful removal of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction through an effective inspection regime. Although it is a complex resolution, it is carefully constructed. It sets out in its operative paragraphs the steps that Iraq must now take. At its outset, in paragraph 1, it makes it clear that Iraq

"has been and remains in material breach of its obligations"

under existing Security Council resolutions, in particular through its

"failure to cooperate with United Nations inspectors and the IAEA"

—that is, the International Atomic Energy Agency. Paragraph 2 clearly states that this is Iraq's

"final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations".

Paragraph 9 demands that Iraq confirm within seven days of the passing of the resolution

"its intention to comply fully with this resolution".

Iraq has now sent two letters in response to that paragraph, one nine pages long and the second—which arrived over the weekend—13 pages long. Despite their verbosity and their argumentative nature, we are treating them as a yes. I say that in particular to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell).

The next deadline is 8 December. By that time, under paragraph 3, Iraq must have provided the inspectors, UNMOVIC, the IAEA and the Security Council with an

"accurate, full, and complete declaration of all aspects of its programmes to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and other delivery systems".

Dr. Blix and Dr. El Baradei have already given Iraq advice in regard to that disclosure. The inspectors have already sat down with the Government of Iraq to offer them advice on how to comply—not how not to comply, but how to comply. There are no tripwires or traps in the resolution; it sets out a very clear procedure.

Aside from indications from intelligence, some set out in the dossier that we published on 24 September, the Government of Iraq will have to account for large stocks of weapons of mass destruction which the previous inspectors' reports—the UNSCOM reports, the last of which was prepared in January 1999—said were unaccounted for. I have the reports here: they set out, in 203 pages, all the material that the inspectors said was unaccounted for when they had to leave in 1998. This has been on the record for at least three and a half years.

The material included up to 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals, up to 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agent, including 1.5 tonnes of the VX nerve agent, more than 30,000 special munitions for delivery of chemical and biological agents, and large quantities of growth media acquired for use in the production of biological weapons—enough to produce over three times the amount of anthrax Iraq had previously admitted to having manufactured.

Inspections by UNMOVIC and the IAEA will resume in Iraq by Wednesday 27 November, in just two days' time, four weeks ahead of the Security Council's deadline. Under paragraph 5, the inspectors will be required to update the Security Council on progress by 26 January.

Paragraphs 4, 11 and 12 deal with non-compliance, which I shall come to in a moment. Paragraph 13 reminds Iraq that it has been repeatedly warned

"that it will face serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations".

Llew Smith: As consideration has obviously been given about going to war with Iraq, has similar consideration been given to going to war with Israel,

[Llew Smith]

because it too has weapons of mass destruction, it too is daily breaking UN resolutions, it too is invading another country and it too has a leader in Sharon who is a state terrorist?

Mr. Straw: The point that my hon. Friend seeks to make is about the proper and full enforcement of all UN Security Council resolutions. We support the proper and full enforcement of all resolutions, including 242, 338, 1397 and 1402 in respect of the middle east. Those resolutions impose obligations not just on the state of Israel—and we want to see them enforced—but on the Palestinian Authority and on the other Arab states. There is a process for dealing with those. The chapter VII resolutions of which Iraq stands in breach impose particular unilateral obligations on the Government of Iraq. We uphold, support and enhance the authority of the UN not by the relativism that my hon. Friend proposes—I infer from what he said that because there has been inadequate compliance in one area, there should be inadequate compliance in the other area—but by ensuring the fullest possible compliance of the will of the UN in every area.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I give way to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke).

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Following the point that the Foreign Secretary has made about the quantities of materials imported by Iraq that are unaccounted for, if the Government of Iraq respond in the next two or three weeks that they no longer possess any weapons of mass destruction, could that response in itself be taken as sufficient evidence of a breach of the UN resolution, sufficient to trigger the next stages in the process?

Mr. Straw: What the right hon. and learned Gentleman raises is what constitutes a material breach. I will deal with that straight away.

I have already explained that Iraq remains in material breach of previous resolutions but that Security Council resolution 1441 offers Iraq a final opportunity to comply. Paragraph 4 of the resolution says that a further material breach arises where there are

"false statements or omissions in the declarations submitted by Iraq . . . and failure by Iraq at any time to comply with, and cooperate fully in the implementation of, this resolution".

Paragraph 4 therefore defines in general terms what a further material breach will consist of.

As with any definition of that type, it is never possible to give an exhaustive list of all conceivable behaviours that it covers. That judgment has to be made against the real circumstances that arise, but I reassure the House that material breach means something significant: some behaviour or pattern of behaviour that is serious. Among such breaches could be action by the Government of Iraq seriously to obstruct or to impede the inspectors, to intimidate witnesses, or a pattern of behaviour where any single action appears relatively minor but the actions as a whole add up to something deliberate and more significant: something that shows Iraq's intention not to comply.

Mr. Clarke: With respect, that does not quite answer my question. The Foreign Secretary has defined what a material breach is. Would a statement by Iraq that it no longer possesses any weapons of mass destruction be a material breach in itself?

Mr. Straw: Operational paragraph 4 makes it clear that a material breach is a failure of disclosure and other failure to comply—there are two parts. Plainly, whether there has been another failure to comply as a result of a failure to disclose depends on the circumstances. I do not anticipate that we will be served up with the usual mantra from the Iraqi Government that they have no weapons of mass destruction. The Iraq regime will have a copy of the 203-page UNSCOM report setting out all the weapons of mass destruction and precursor agents that were unaccounted for when the inspectors left. If the Iraqis are serious about complying, which they now say they are, the first thing they have to do is to say what has happened to that material. The inspectors will test whether they are willing to act in good faith and comply with the will of the international community.

Aside from the particular definition in paragraph 4, a material breach has to be something serious. Nobody, I hope, wants military action against Iraq or any other country to be taken gratuitously. It should happen only as a last resort, and that is the position of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): In *The Times* today, the deputy political editor says:

"Tony Blair looks set to get strong parliamentary backing today for war with Iraq".

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government's understanding of the motion is that it offers support for the United Nations and its resolution, not for war? Surely, if Saddam Hussein were to come to the conclusion that war is inevitable, as some have said, that would be a disincentive to his disarming. It is clearly important that our allies understand what this vote means, too.

Mr. Straw: Distinguished though the deputy political editor of *The Times* is, he does not speak for the Government.

Mr. Savidge: She.

Mr. Straw: She—I am sorry. There you go. What can I say in response to that gender correction without getting into trouble?

I intend to deal directly with the question of military action. The resolution provides a peaceful solution to Saddam's holding of weapons of mass destruction. It is there to resolve the problem peacefully and to authorise military action only if that is the position into which the Government of Iraq have manoeuvred the international community.

Paragraph 4 concludes by saying that any further material breach will be reported to the Security Council "for assessment" under paragraphs 11 and 12.

Paragraph 11 directs the inspectors to report to the Security Council any interference or failure to comply with its disarmament obligations, making it clear that these include all the other relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, as well as 1441.

Paragraph 12 then has the Security Council

"convening immediately upon a report under paragraphs 4 and 11 to consider the situation and the need for full compliance with all of the relevant Council Resolutions in order to secure international peace and security."

That brings me to the second question: who decides and what happens if there is a further material breach? If there is evidence of a false statement or omission, together with a failure to comply in other respects, it can be reported to the Security Council as a further material breach either by a Security Council member or by the inspectors. The Council will undoubtedly require the opinion of the inspectors, regardless of who makes the initial report.

There is then a clear requirement for an immediate meeting of the Security Council to make the assessment of which I spoke. Where the breach is flagrant—say, a physical and serious attack on the inspectors—the decision on whether there has been a material breach will effectively have been made by the Iraqis, who will clearly have decided to reject any thought of compliance. In such a case, there will be no decision to be made. The Security Council will undoubtedly then act. It is of course possible, however, that there is credible evidence of a further material breach, but the Security Council is unable to reach a conclusion.

That brings me to the next question I posed: will there be a second Security Council resolution if military action proves necessary? Resolution 1441 does not stipulate that there has to be a second Security Council resolution to authorise military action in the event of a further material breach by Iraq. The idea that there should be a second Security Council resolution was an alternative discussed informally among members of the P5 of the Security Council and the elected 10 during the weeks of negotiation, but no draft to that effect was ever tabled by any member of Security Council, nor put to the vote. Instead, every member of the Security Council voted for and accepted this text.

I should make it clear, as I did on 7 November, that the preference of the Government in the event of any material breach is that there should be a second Security Council resolution authorising military action. However, the faith now being placed in the Security Council by all members of the United Nations, including the United States, requires the Council to show a corresponding level of responsibility. So far, it has done so and I believe that it will do so in the future, but we must reserve our position in the event that it does not. In any event, Saddam Hussein needs to be in no doubt of the resolve of the United Nations to require him to comply. That is the reason why the language of "serious consequences" is used in paragraph 13 in the event of his non-compliance. So the discussion that will take place in the Security Council, in the event of material breach, will be on the understanding that action will follow.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The right hon. Gentleman has gone a long way to reassure those of us who are uneasy about the morality of war against Iraq. He will go even further to attract us to support the motion if he says that the Government will use their best endeavours to bring forward a motion of authority before the second Security Council resolution, and that they will lay an express motion of authority in this House which we can debate before military action is taken.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I am just about to come on to the substantive motion and I hope to give the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the House satisfaction on that. As far as moving a second resolution is concerned, the moment there is any evidence of a material breach — whether it arises because of Iraq's flagrant action and there is no argument about it or in a report from a member of the Security Council or the inspectors—there will be a meeting of the Security Council at which it is, and always has been, open for any member to move any resolution they wish. Our preference is for a Security Council resolution, and I hope that we would move it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: There may be particular circumstances in which we do not judge that to be possible, but my preference is for a Security Council resolution that we are able to move.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): As I understand it, the only grounds on which an individual member state could take military action against Iraq would be under the right to self-defence or in taking humanitarian action. I cannot see that such a situation applies to this country. On what basis, therefore, could action be taken without a specific UN Security Council resolution?

Mr. Straw: The United Nations charter on international law is not that precise. I have already said what our intentions are. As for humanitarian action, exactly this issue arose in 1999 in respect of Kosovo. Could there be military action against Milosevic, whom we now know to have been a brutal dictator, in the absence of a clear United Nations Security Council resolution, and given also that the Russian Federation, a member of the P5, moved an unacceptable resolution that we had to veto? The judgment was that the international community could take action, and that has never been challenged.

We have placed great faith in the Security Council and so far that has been reciprocated. We must continue to do so, but to sustain the authority of the United Nations, we have to reserve the position—only reserve it, because I do not believe that this will arise—if a consensus within the Security Council is not possible. I say to my hon. Friend and to the Liberal Democrats, whose amendment I shall deal with shortly, that had we not taken that reservation in 1999, no military action against Milosevic would have been possible in respect of Kosovo, and that tyrannical dictator would still be ruining the lives of millions of people in the Balkans.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The right hon. Gentleman said that the Government's preference was for a second resolution. Does he, therefore, disagree with the Leader of the House who, on BBC Radio 4 last Friday, said that a second resolution would be needed to authorise military action if Iraq defaulted? Was the Leader of the House wrong? Does he not represent official UK Government policy?

Mr. Straw: Attentive though I am to the remarks of my right hon. Friend, unfortunately I missed that interview, although his deputy, the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), tells me that the Leader of the House did not say that. I shall send for the record and ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to come back to that point.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend not only for giving way but also for his willingness to respond to Members' concerns. My question is about the other side of the coin: if the inspectors report that they are receiving full co-operation and that Iraq is moving towards removal of weapons of mass destruction, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is extremely unlikely that the question of military action would arise and that, at the end of the tunnel, we can offer Iraq some prospect that sanctions will be lifted?

Mr. Straw: Yes, there is a pathway to peace. One or two of my hon. Friends—although not my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe—may entertain the occasional suspicion of the Government—

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend should sit down again—he is not one of them.

Felicitous though all who speak from the Treasury Bench must be with words, the words would not come if Iraq had properly complied with the resolution yet one of us had to come to the House to explain why, notwithstanding that fact, we were going to take military action. The circumstances would not arise. We could not do that. The Cabinet could not do that. The armed forces could not do that. That is the settled view of the international community.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I must make some progress, but I shall give way a couple of times before I finish.

No decision on military action has yet been taken by Her Majesty's Government and I fervently hope that none will be necessary. Resolution 1441 sets out a clear and straightforward pathway to peace for Saddam, if he will only take it. However, we have got this far in terms of Saddam's compliance only because active diplomacy has been backed by the credible threat of force. For that threat to remain credible, it is crucial that we make proper preparations.

As the UN process moves forward, so should our preparedness for military action in the event that the process fails. In that context, our Ministry of Defence has been carefully considering what would be required. It is taking steps to ensure that service men and women are available in the right numbers and that they have the right skills and equipment. The more prepared we are, the greater the likelihood of full compliance by Saddam, without the use of force.

I shall deal with the fourth question that I raised: if Her Majesty's Government were to decide that military action was necessary, would the House be able to vote on it and, if so, when? If force becomes necessary, any decisions made by Her Majesty's Government will be careful, proportionate and consistent with our obligations in international law.

Any decision by Her Majesty's Government to take military action will be put before the House as soon as possible after it has been taken. The issue of a substantive resolution was raised with me by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 25 September, and as I told the Committee in evidence, we in the Government have no difficulty about the idea of a substantive motion on military action in respect of Iraq, at the appropriate time.

As to the appropriate time, I hope that it will be before any military engagement, but as the House has always accepted—and must accept—there are circumstances in which the safety of our forces requires an element of surprise. In those circumstances, it would be utterly irresponsible to come to the House beforehand—*[Interruption.]* Of course, it would. I hope that Liberal Democrat Members are not suggesting otherwise. [HON. MEMBERS: "They are."] If we can come to the House without placing our troops at risk, we shall do so, but if it would place our troops at risk we shall have to act in the same way as the Conservative Government did in January 1991—when they had the full support of the present Lord Ashdown, then the leader of the Liberal Democrat party, who accepted that the safety of our troops was paramount. The then Government properly came to the House just five days after the decision was taken.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Will the Foreign Secretary answer a question that a serving member of Her Majesty's armed forces posed to me in my constituency on Saturday? He had been in New York at the time of the attack and had witnessed the vote in Congress, and he asked why the Government has had nine votes on hunting with dogs—important though that may be—since May 1997, but cannot produce a substantive motion now before forces are deployed to gain the support of all sides?

Mr. Straw: As it happens, the hon. Gentleman asks the wrong person about hunting; I dealt with it when I was Home Secretary—I am happily released from that fate—but it is not something that has ever lathered me up.

The hon. Gentleman is now tilting at windmills. The House properly and rightly asked for a substantive resolution as soon as we had a Security Council resolution. We have one. We are asking the House—apart from the Liberal Democrats, and I shall come to them—to endorse the Security Council resolution, and what is good enough for the United Nations ought, with respect, to be good enough for the House—except apparently for the Liberal Democrats.

On military action, I say again—I hope that the hon. Gentleman listens to these words and I look forward to a speech not by him, but by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), who is standing in for the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell)—that if we can and it is safe to do so, we will propose a resolution seeking the House's approval of decisions in respect of military action before military action takes place. If, however, it is unsafe to do so because it would place the lives of British servicemen and women at risk, we shall not do so until after the action has taken place. I fail to understand how any serious party that aims to be in government could possibly argue with that position.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I have taken many interventions, and I wish to make progress.

We are not proposing hypothetical resolutions because I very much hope that military action can be avoided; that is the aim of the resolution. So far, Iraq has taken a step to comply with resolution 1441, but we must be realistic; Saddam Hussein's record of deceit, delay and defiance is well established.

Saddam Hussein now faces a clear choice: he can take the pathway to peace set out in the resolution or, by frustrating the inspectors and defying the international community's will, he can provoke military action. He can choose the path of full co-operation, leading to the suspension of sanctions and the re-admittance of Iraq to the family of nations, or he can expose his people to the serious consequences cited in resolution 1441. The choice is his.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I shall continue.

The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, spoke for the world community as a whole when, as resolution 1441 was passed, he said:

"I urge the Iraqi leadership—for the sake of its own people, and for the sake of world security and world order—to seize this opportunity, and thereby begin to end the isolation and suffering of the Iraqi people. If Iraq's defiance continues, however, the Security Council must face its responsibilities."

That position is backed by the European Union. In a statement adopted at the General Affairs Council on 18 November, it urged the Iraqi government

"to grasp this final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations. This is the only way for Iraq to avoid further confrontation."

Alan Simpson: Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: I regret not.

At the NATO summit in Prague last Friday, a similar statement was issued and explicitly endorsed by all 19 members. I should also say that, following resolution 1441, the Arab League made it clear that Iraq should work with the inspectors.

I come to the Liberal Democrat amendment—

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Before that, will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: Yes, of course.

Hon. Members: Ah!

Mr. Davis: The Foreign Secretary has referred to the informal discussions that took place between the five permanent members of the Security Council before resolution 1441 was passed. He has said also that no member of the Security Council put forward any objection or amendments to the resolution as it was going through the Security Council. But is it not correct to say that during those informal discussions, the British ambassador gave assurances about the interpretation of resolution 1441, and that the Russian ambassador at the Security Council read out a list of those assurances and told the Security Council that it was only on the basis of the assurances from the United Kingdom that he was going to vote for the resolution? Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that those assurances still apply?

Mr. Straw: I am glad that my right hon. Friend has asked that question. I did not say that no amendments had been put forward—in fact, after the US and the UK had tabled the resolution, a number of amendments were proposed and we accepted some of them. I will not bore the House by reciting them, but I happen to know almost all of them off by heart—indeed, one night I found myself dreaming about amendments to operational paragraph 4.

In any vote of that sort, there is what is called an explanation of vote, which is read into the record after the vote has taken place. Sir Jeremy Greenstock offered his explanation of vote, gave undertakings and we stand by the undertakings—

Mr. Hogg: What were they?

Mr. Straw: They were couched in terms similar to the ones that I have read out today.

The point that I was making to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) is a different one. No draft resolution proposing that there could be military action only if there were a further Security Council resolution was either tabled before the Security Council—it could easily have been—or voted on. That gives me a cue to deal with the Liberal Democrats, but first I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson), who has been trying to intervene.

Alan Simpson: To return to the element of surprise, it will come as no surprise to the Foreign Secretary that a large number of hon. Members on both sides of the House are keen to ensure that, if we are willing to take action in furtherance of western democratic values, we practise those values in this Chamber; nor will it come as a surprise that there are large elements within the American Administration who intend to bomb the living daylights out of Iraq, with or without a UN resolution. Will he give a commitment to table at the

[Alan Simpson]

UN a second resolution seeking specific endorsement for a war in the event of a breach, and to have that discussed in advance by the House?

Mr. Straw: First, I am as signed up to western democratic values as my hon. Friend is. Secondly, any fair observer might say that I have given serious undertakings to the House about the endorsement of any decisions that Her Majesty's Government have to take. In any of the world's Administrations, the initial decision has to be made by Government, but it has to be subject to endorsement. I accept—I did not take a different view in opposition—that the House has rights and that the Government's duty is to meet those rights. That is what I have been trying to do today.

As for a second Security Council resolution, in answer to the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) I said that our preference was for a Security Council resolution, full stop. Within that, our preference is to ensure that we are able to table such a resolution. However, I cannot state precisely what the circumstances will be. I do not want to embarrass my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South or anyone else by reading out quotations from those who, six months ago, were demanding that we go to the United Nations, but I will paraphrase. My hon. Friend said that if there was to be action, it had to be dealt with by the UN. That is exactly the route that we are taking. Six months ago, no one believed that we could get a 15:0 decision, but that is what we have done. There is still an air of disbelief as to whether we will maintain our faith in the Security Council. We will do so.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I have given way many times already. I want to deal briefly with the Liberal Democrats' amendment and then make progress.

I hope that the Liberal Democrat spokesman will recognise that, in so far as any Foreign Secretary could, I have met much of the burden of the amendment—for example, in respect of a substantive motion in the House of Commons, with the caveat that everyone else accepts but which is not in the terms of the amendment. The amendment could not safely be voted on in any event. I say to him seriously that it would place British lives at risk. There is no pointing in his shaking his head. He has had every opportunity to take a different view. One of his hon. Friends sat on the Select Committee when I gave the undertaking on 25 September, and appeared to acknowledge the terms in which I gave it for the reasons that I have spelled out.

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: I will give way in a second. The Liberal Democrats still say that there must be a separate resolution in advance of any commitment to military action.

In addition, I have to tell the hon. Gentleman what the Liberals are doing. I thought of resisting the temptation of saying that this follows a pattern of behaviour in which, to pick up a hunting analogy, the Liberals try to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. At the same time as they support UN resolution 1441—I hope that they will do when it comes to a vote at 10 o'clock—they want to rewrite it and add to its language terms that no member of the Security Council ever sought formally to include in the resolution.

Finally, I point out to the Liberal Democrats that—to re-emphasise the Kosovo point—the previous leader of the Liberal Democrats played a very honourable role in exposing what was going on in the Balkans and in ensuring that military action was taken, notwithstanding the fact that a security resolution could not be achieved because of a blockage in the Security Council. It is no good saying, "Oh well, it was all to do with humanitarian purposes." At the time, that was highly questionable. There were people on both sides of the House who said, "Do not take action." There were people saying that we should take action only with a Security Council mandate.

We do not know the exact circumstances that might arise—God forbid that they do—where military action proved necessary. It could prove necessary on a humanitarian basis as much as anything else. We do not know the circumstances. What the Liberal Democrats are doing through an ill-thought-through, ill-considered amendment is to say that in no circumstances—humanitarian or involving self-defence or anything else—can military action be authorised unless it is authorised by a separate Security Council resolution, even though they know the history of Kosovo, when one member of the Security Council decided to block action that they now accept was justified and justifiable.

Mr. Moore *rose—*

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh) *rose—*

Donald Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I give way to the Liberal Democrats' spokesman, but I ask him to think carefully about withdrawing the amendment. It does not serve the interests of the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Moore: I shall return to many of the points that the Foreign Secretary has made in the past two or three minutes in my speech, if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, will he accept the proposition that the fact that people debate a substantive motion in the House does not in itself put the lives of our armed forces at risk? Does he accept that the Liberal Democrats have no desire to be party to anything that puts the lives of our forces at risk?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is speaking to a different amendment. I have always accepted that most Liberal Democrats are full of good intentions; it is just how it turns out in the wash. That is the problem. There are those with good intentions, but those good intentions are not reflected in the words that they have signed up to. Generally speaking, substantive resolutions do not put British lives at risk but, in particular cases, they easily could. It is the "in particular" that I am concerned about.

Donald Anderson: May I remind my right hon. Friend and, indeed, the Liberal Democrats of another useful precedent at the time of the Kosovo conflict when the Security Council was unable to act? I refer to the mandate for the renewal of the United Nations force in Macedonia, which was blocked by the People's Republic of China for wholly capricious reasons, namely, the fact that Macedonia had recognised Taiwan. That surely adds strength to my right hon. Friend's wish to retain a certain reserve in this respect.

Mr. Straw: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend. Those two examples show the practical problems we face. Notwithstanding the practical problems, it was a huge achievement by the whole international community to pass resolution 1441. I believe that if military action proves necessary, we will get a second Security Council resolution, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said. I also know that if we allow those who act capriciously to block the plain obligation of the international community, there will be no chance of resolving the problem peacefully or of ensuring that a decision to take military action lies within the United Nations.

Mr. Chidgey: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I want to make progress because many hon. Members wish to speak.

The real losers of Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship have been the Iraqi people themselves. Their suffering has been immense under a regime that murders, tortures and rapes political opponents and ethnic minorities. It has used poisonous gas to kill thousands of its people and ignores the plight of its sick and hungry. Since 1991, the United Kingdom has given more than £100 million in aid to Iraq bilaterally through the European Union. Later today, we expect the United Nations to adopt a British-drafted Security Council resolution extending the oil-for-food programme for another six months.

The Iraqi regime and some of its apologists elsewhere have peddled much propaganda about the oil-for-food programme, yet that UN programme is the Iraqi people's lifeline. While Saddam Hussein spreads stories of rising death rates and drug shortages, the latest United Nations report tells a very different story. It shows that acute malnutrition rates in Iraq are half the level they were before the oil-for-food programme began in 1996. Devastating conditions such as polio, diphtheria and diarrhoea in children are less widespread than they were when Saddam Hussein's forces invaded Kuwait. The programme's delivery of high-tech medical equipment, such as brain scanners, means that ordinary Iraqis have access to advanced medical treatment. Billions of pounds of all types of goods are being delivered under the programme each year.

Our policy has increased the supply of humanitarian goods to the Iraqi people; Saddam's policies have tried to frustrate the oil-for-food programme, and Iraq is currently failing to spend more than £1.5 billion allocated by the United Nations for humanitarian goods. Hon. Members who are sceptical about that should not take my word for it. Instead, they should pull off the internet the latest report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, dated 12 November 2002. It spells out in considerable detail exactly the contribution that the United Nations and the oil-for-food programme have made to the people in Iraq. On page after page there is reference to gratuitous obstruction by the Iraqi Government.

To pick up on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith), there are those who say that we should do nothing on Iraq because other countries are also subject to Security Council resolutions. As I said, Iraq is the only country that is in such clear and serious violation of a series of UN obligations under chapter VII. We want other resolutions implemented and we work tirelessly to achieve that in Liberia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Libya and, of course, in respect of Israel and Palestine.

Far too many people on all sides have perished needlessly in the terrible conflict. We mourn them all, but the deaths are always more starkly brought home to us when they are of British citizens. One British citizen, Yoni Jesner, was killed on 19 September in a suicide bombing set by terrorists. Another, Iain Hook, a UN worker under contract from the Department for International Development, was killed on Friday last in Jenin, it seems as a result of fire by a member of the Israeli defence force. As soon as I heard the news, I spoke to the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. Netanyahu, who promised an immediate investigation. We are also seeking an investigation by the United Nations. The House should also know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and I sent messages of condolence to his family.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I thank the Government for their action in the circumstances and for the prompt way in which they helped the family by saying that they would see what they could do. May I add my condolences to the family of my constituent? He acted in a way expected of someone who was such a loyal and long-standing worker for the United Nations. He had been in equal danger in many other places and could easily have lost his life during the past 20 years.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Mr. Hook was one of his constituents, and I shall certainly pass on his thanks to staff, particularly the British Consulate-General in Jerusalem, for their work. That is our duty—the staff rise to their duty on every occasion.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I am sorry, I will not give way as I wish to bring my speech to a close.

Grim as the situation in the occupied territories and Israel is, there are some positive developments that we should not overlook. A process of negotiation is going on under the leadership of the so-called Quartet—the United Nations, the United States, the European Union and the Russian Federation—which is making progress towards agreement on how we get to a settlement. Determined moves to break the cycle of violence in the occupied territories continue. Palestinian reform efforts are continuing. There is now international consensus on the need for a settlement based on two states—Palestine

[Mr. Straw]

and Israel—living side by side. We support and are engaged in all of this. I assure the House that wherever we can enhance our support in any way, we shall.

We have no quarrel with the Iraqi people. We want to help them to restore Iraq to its proper place in the community of nations, abiding by its international obligations and free from the burden of sanctions. That can only happen once Saddam's weapons of mass destruction have been destroyed, in line with a decade of United Nations resolutions. We hope that that can be done by peaceful means, and we shall give the weapons inspectors every support. Ultimately, however, the choice falls to Saddam Hussein alone. Resolution 1441 is his "final opportunity" to take the pathway to peace, but no one should be in any doubt of the world's resolve if he fails to take it.

I commend the motion to the House.

5.36 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I rise to support the Government motion, which effectively rehearses the principle of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1441, which we have already welcomed in the House. It emphasises the fact the resolution was carried unanimously by the Security Council, significantly, as the Foreign Secretary pointed out, including the support of Syria. It reiterates the need for full compliance by Iraq. We support resolution 1441, so we shall support the substantive motion tonight.

May I add to the remarks of the Foreign Secretary about the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell)? I, too, would like to send him our best wishes—we hope he makes a speedy recovery. I also join the Foreign Secretary in his remarks about the tragic death of Iain Hook in Jenin last Friday. We were all shaken by that incident, and I am glad that there is an inquiry. I hope that we shall have its findings soon and make proper representations as a result.

Ideally, I should have liked the motion to be more specific and stronger. It should have reiterated the words of the resolution and said that this is the "final opportunity" for Iraq to comply. I should have liked it to stress that continued violation of its obligations will result in Iraq facing serious consequences. Had it done so, it would have sent a clearer message from the House than the more limited wording before us. In the end, however, it is not the words of motions but their meaning that is important—in this case, the overall message that the House will send to the international community in general and Saddam Hussein in particular.

The purpose of today's debate is, first, to show that the House is every bit as resolved as the United Nations Security Council to see an end, one way or another, to Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and, secondly, to dispel the uncertainties which still, despite the Foreign Secretary's best efforts, cloud parts of the issue. We need to understand clearly the nature and extent of the task ahead and the way in which it is likely to develop. Saddam must finally be disabused of the notion that he still has room to manoeuvre. Our understanding and his understanding of the meaning of the resolution must be unequivocal.

We must be absolutely clear about the objective which, as it always has been, is to eliminate Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. We can be in no doubt that those weapons, whether nuclear, chemical or biological, will, if developed to completion, pose an unacceptable threat to the region and the wider international community.

Mr. Hogg: Does my right hon. Friend endorse what I take to be an assurance from the Foreign Secretary first, that he will return to the House for the authority of a substantive motion in the event that British forces are to be, or have been, deployed and secondly, if at all possible, that there will be an express motion in the Security Council authorising further action?

Mr. Ancram: I agree with everything that the Foreign Secretary said in relation to our duty to the House in the event of military action being taken, and I certainly endorse what my right hon. and learned Friend said. With regard to a second resolution, I hope that he will allow me to make my points on that in my own time in my remarks.

The concept of Saddam Hussein in possession of such weapons and such systems is intolerable. As the Foreign Secretary said, Saddam Hussein has demonstrated that he is prepared to use similar weapons against his neighbours and against his own people. I have heard it sometimes suggested that he would not use weapons of mass destruction. The survivors of Halabja must shake their heads in disbelief when they hear such comments made. Saddam with a nuclear weapon is unthinkable, not least because such a weapon, once established, becomes a deterrent against its own removal.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): The House knows that, as the right hon. Gentleman has just said, Saddam Hussein used weapons of mass destruction against his neighbour, Iran, and against his own people. Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why, when he was a member of the then Tory Government, they did not condemn Saddam's use of weapons of mass destruction at the time?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman raises that in every debate on the subject. *[Interruption.]* He must treat the matter seriously. We are speaking about the development in Iraq at this time of weapons of mass destruction which could be used not only internally against Saddam's own people, as we know he can, but more widely than that. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would join the Foreign Secretary and me in trying to ensure that Saddam Hussein is not in a position to use such weapons, because they have been eliminated.

That is why the unanimous vote of the Security Council on resolution 1441 was so important. It has confirmed and underwritten the objective of eliminating those weapons. It makes it clear to Saddam Hussein that this is the end of the road. The resolution is not part of some diplomatic game; it is stark and it is for real. The wording of the resolution is clear: continued violation by Iraq of its obligations will result in serious consequences—no ifs, no buts.

We know, too, what those serious consequences will be. As the Prime Minister rather esoterically told Radio Monte Carlo on 14 November, if Saddam fails to disarm,

"the consequence is that the weapons will be disarmed by force"—

not "may be" disarmed, not "could be" disarmed, but "will be" disarmed by force. That clarity is important. If, as we hope, the objective of eliminating Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction can still be achieved without recourse to arms, there must be no doubt in his mind that if, in the event, armed intervention is required, we have the determination to see it through.

I know that this is an issue that gives rise to genuinely held and sometimes contrary views, and I have said before that we must respect each others' opinions, but I believe that it is vital that we be totally honest and transparent in what we are debating and what we are voting on. This is no time for fudged positions; it is a time for clarity, because when considering potential British military involvement, the Government owe nothing less to the House and to the British people. Clarity is needed also because if, for one reason or another, the House cannot debate military action before any decision to deploy British armed forces might have to be made—we heard from the Foreign Secretary tonight the circumstances in which that might happen—it is vital that we know what we are voting for tonight.

The motion is a little bland in that respect. It leaves a number of key questions unanswered. The resolution itself is not entirely clear. I hope that, despite the Foreign Secretary's best efforts, I can still elicit a little more light about some of the key questions which I believe have still not been answered, but which the House will be asked to support and endorse tonight.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I wish to put to the right hon. Gentleman a point that I had hoped to put to the Foreign Secretary. I should like his opinion on the term "material breach". If, for example, an American plane was brought down in one of the no-fly zones, which are not legalised by any UN resolution, would that be a material breach?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question, as I intend to deal later with what would amount to a material breach.

The point is that the Government can no longer shelter behind the shield of not addressing hypothetical situations. The inspectors are now on the ground. There can be no hypothetical situations—only contingencies and options to which the Government must have worked out their responses. Yet there is still some confusion—I say this in all seriousness to the Foreign Secretary—on some of the important questions.

I must ask the Foreign Secretary again: does he agree with the Prime Minister, without equivocation, that if Saddam does not dismantle his weapons of mass destruction, it will be done for him? Will there be no more prevarication, negotiations or long drawn-out international debates in which Saddam can seek to divide and rule? Is he also clear that, while it is preferable to have a second resolution before action is taken, if action has to be taken, there is no requirement for such a resolution? Does he accept that the "serious consequences" to which the resolution refers mean military action and that, with or without a resolution, as set out in paragraph 12, such action will follow continued violation by Saddam of his obligations?

I want to explore that matter in a little more depth, because it is important. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that resolution 1441, in conjunction with previous resolutions and article 42 in chapter VII of the United Nations charter, is sufficient in the circumstances to legitimise military action? That appeared to be the case on 7 November, when he told the House at column 435 of *Hansard* that

"we have always made it clear that within international law we have to reserve our right to take military action, if that is required, within the existing charter and the existing body of UN Security Council resolutions, if, for example, a subsequent resolution were to be vetoed."

I ask that question, because on the same occasion, he said at column 438:

"it remains to be seen whether the Security Council or individual members judge that a further resolution is necessary to deal with the material breach that is presented to them. It is complicated, but it is clear."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 2002; Vol. 392, c. 435-38.]

I have to say to him, with all the generosity that I can muster, that it may be complicated, but it is hardly clear.

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that article 42 in chapter VII, which, as he rightly reminded us, deals with action in respect of threats to peace, refers in terms to

"such action by air, sea or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security"?

Does not paragraph 12 of the resolution specifically refer to restoring or securing international peace and security? Will he confirm whether that was the basis on which he reserved

"our right to take military action",

to which he referred again today? Is he clear that that precludes a future veto? Does he agree that in the event of non-compliance by Saddam, it would be unthinkable that he could avoid the serious consequences because one permanent member of the Security Council, possibly for their own political or commercial reasons, decided to veto the decision? Will he assure the House that that situation cannot and will not arise? I understand from his earlier remarks that that is probably the case, but it is vital that we deal in this debate not with what is probably the case, but with what is the case under the terms of the resolution.

There is a further point of confusion that I would like the Foreign Secretary to tidy up. On 7 November, when the matter was before the House, the words of paragraph 12 and article 42 were identical. They referred to restoring international peace and security, but the late amendments made in the Security Council the next day altered the resolution so that it sought not to "restore", but to "secure" international peace and security. What was the significance of that change? The French seemed very pleased with it and I wondered whether it was a ploy on their part to detach resolution 1441 from article 42 of the charter so that they could subsequently argue that chapter VII did not apply. The Foreign Secretary shakes his head. The matter has never been explained; perhaps he would like to do that now.

Mr. Straw: The words mean what they say. As I said in response to an earlier intervention, there was a

[Mr. Straw]

process of amendment. However, it is as plain as a pikestaff that the resolution is based on chapter VII. Indeed, the sentence immediately before paragraph 1 reads:

"Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations".

Mr. Ancram: Perhaps I have a suspicious mind. I used to wake up after dreaming about words, and I know what negotiating such a text is like. However, words matter and replacing "restore" with "secure" must have a significance that has not been explained. Hon. Members deserve an explanation because it may be germane to our debate.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that all hon. Members want weapons of mass destruction to be removed from Iraq, if they are found there, and elsewhere. However, he has spoken at length about confusion and the precursors to United Nations resolutions. Does he know about paragraph 14 of resolution 687, which demands the removal of nuclear weapons throughout the middle east? Israel is the only nation with proven supplies of nuclear weapons; it has perhaps more than 200 nuclear warheads. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that there is a link between the confusion and what is perceived—rightly or wrongly—in the Arab world as a partial attitude towards Iraq when Israel can harbour such weapons with impunity?

Mr. Ancram: I do not want to get involved in a long debate about Israel. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Israel is a democracy and would not be described as a rogue state in the same sense as Iraq. I have spoken at length about confusion because many arguments may soon turn on it. It is therefore important that we be clear that there is no room for a veto. Of course, we would prefer a second resolution, but we cannot be put in a position whereby one permanent member of the Security Council can veto necessary action against Iraq. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will reaffirm that there can be no veto even if there is a second resolution.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): The right hon. Gentleman refers to the need for certainty, but he listened as closely as me to the Foreign Secretary's speech. While the right hon. Gentleman conveyed uncertainty, and spoke hypothetically, using phrases such as "would prefer a second resolution", and "would, under certain circumstances, be prepared to move," it was clear from my right hon. Friend's language that, in the circumstances that the right hon. Gentleman describes, there will be no second resolution, and that Britain will not move such a resolution. That will happen only if a further resolution that allows military action against Iraq can be obtained on the nod.

Mr. Ancram: I am in the slightly unusual position of agreeing with the hon. Gentleman. That is why I read out the Prime Minister's statement on Radio Monte Carlo, in which he said,

"the consequence is that the weapons will be disarmed by force".

He did not say, "after another resolution has been passed" or "subject to another resolution." It is important to be clear about that point. I should hate to return in four or five weeks to find that hon. Members had voted on a misunderstanding tonight. I therefore ask the Secretary of State for Defence to make matters clear.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman's researcher drew his attention to the joint statement of China, France and the Russian Federation on their interpretation of resolution 1441. It states that the resolution

"excludes any automaticity in the use of force. In this regard, we register with satisfaction the declarations of the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom".

If the right hon. Gentleman succeeded in getting the Foreign Secretary to repudiate the position of Sir Jeremy Greenstock, would that be good for British diplomatic representation at the United Nations?

Mr. Ancram: It is important to be frank in our discussions tonight. There is no point in a debate on a substantive issue if we do not clarify what is currently unclear. I test the position that the Prime Minister has set out against the Foreign Secretary's statement today. He has genuinely tried to explain the matter, but a lack of clarity remains and it must be tackled.

Mr. Kaufman: The right hon. Gentleman has referred to the precursor paragraphs in resolution 1441. The second line states that a resolution was made on 29 November 1990, that another was made on 2 March 1991, and that there was nothing in between. Yet we were parties—rightly, in my view—to a land war that began on 15 January 1991. It is important not to erect hurdles that were not built on the previous occasion. Although I would support a second resolution, paragraph 13 of resolution 1441 may be sufficient if the circumstances requiring military action arose, even though we all hope that that will not happen.

Mr. Ancram: That is a constructive contribution, for which I am grateful.

Let us consider material breach. I was asked what would happen if an aeroplane belonging to one of the allies was shot down. That is an important question because we know that our light planes have been fired upon since the resolution was passed. Paragraph 8 stipulates that

"Iraq shall not take or threaten hostile acts directed against . . . any Member States taking action to uphold any Council resolution".

That answers the question that the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) asked.

Would any further attacks by surface-to-air missiles on allied planes automatically be perceived as a material breach? The United States appears to regard them in that light. Would there be an automatic response? In those circumstances, would the inspectors, who may not know the details, or the country whose plane was involved, report the material breach? More clarity would be helpful.

Paragraph 7 stipulates that the inspectors

"shall have . . . the right to . . . unrestricted, and immediate movement to and from inspection sites".

It is important to understand what impediment or delay in allowing or facilitating such access will be regarded as a material breach.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) made an important point about what happens under paragraph 3 if, on 8 December, Saddam Hussein enters a nil or gratuitously irrelevant return in the required "accurate, full and complete" declaration of his weapons of mass destruction and the associated programmes. What would happen if he claimed that he had no weapons of mass destruction? Given the Government's dossier and repeated assertions by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary that they have evidence from September this year that Saddam is developing weapons of mass destruction, would not such a return be false by definition?

The dossier stated that

"Iraq has continued to produce chemical and biological agents."

It also stated that

"it has military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons . . . That it has developed mobile laboratories for military use . . . That it has illegally retained up to 20 al-Hussein missiles",

and so on. There was much more. Would the Government, whose dossier had been contradicted, perceive a failure to declare those items, which existed in September, as a material breach of Iraq's obligations under operational paragraph 4? When the Foreign Secretary was asked such a question, his reply did not satisfy me that he accepted such failure as a material breach. He went on to discuss what would happen if it constituted a material breach.

Paragraph 4 states that

"false statements or omissions in the declarations submitted by Iraq pursuant to this resolution and failure by Iraq at any time to comply with, and cooperate fully in the implementation of, this resolution shall constitute a further material breach".

So the false statement or omission to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe referred would, under this provision, automatically constitute a material breach.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I want to ensure that my right hon. Friend is clear as to which direction I am coming from on this question. I have spoken to two authoritative and influential Americans recently, both of whom thought that a nil return would, in itself, represent a material breach and, therefore, give sufficient authority under resolution 1441 for military action thereafter. I am quite prepared to contemplate military action if there is a material breach of that resolution, but I would hope to see much more material support of the assertion that a nil return constituted a breach, before we went any further. A dossier of imports, without any report from the inspectors or any further opportunity to follow it up, would be a rather reckless basis on which to proceed or to state that there is now international authority for an attack.

Mr. Ancram: That is why I am pursuing this question. The paragraph to which I have referred makes it clear that

"false statements and omissions . . . shall constitute a further material breach".

It does not say "may constitute"; it says "shall". The only question, therefore, would be whether they were false statements or omissions. The Government have told us that they have evidence, which they produced in their dossier, that these materials exist. If Saddam Hussein said that they did not exist, would that, in the Government's view, constitute an omission or a false statement and, therefore, a further material breach that would have to be pursued in the way described by my right hon. and learned Friend?

If there were also evidence, as the dossier suggested, that weapons had been actively hidden over the last few months, either within Iraq or outside it, would such evidence amount to a material breach? We need clarification on that point, too.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I hope that I can be of some assistance to him. At the Prime Minister's press conference this morning, he was specifically asked about the possibility of a nil return from Saddam Hussein—albeit perhaps not using those particular words. The Prime Minister stated categorically that the British Government had evidence that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and that, if there were a nil return, it would be a material breach. The consequences of that would, of course, be a different matter.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that clear, and I think that the Foreign Secretary should have put that on record. That is certainly my interpretation of the resolution. It is better, however, that such statements should be made in the House, before elected Members, rather than to members of the media at a press conference. I wonder whether the Foreign Secretary disagrees with the interpretation that the Prime Minister gave this morning.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): May I pursue the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)? It seems to me that we shall get into difficulties if the inspectors are given a free and unfettered right to search for weapons of mass destruction, if that continues without interference, and if they are unable to find any such weapons. Surely we could not, at that point, say that, because we believe that those weapons were there last September, a nil return would justify an attack on Iraq. That would be difficult to explain to the British people.

Mr. Ancram: To try to meet the realities, I mentioned not only a nil return but what I called a gratuitously irrelevant return. There have been suggestions that Saddam Hussein might fill the document with all sorts of little items such as screwdrivers—which may or may not be used in the making of weapons—and say, "Now I have fulfilled my declaration." We must be clear on this, because this uncertainty—which has been demonstrated on both sides of the House—is more dangerous than anything else.

Mr. Galloway *rose—*

Donald Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: I shall not give way; I must make some progress.

[Mr. Ancram]

I want to ask the Foreign Secretary about military preparedness. When I asked him about it earlier, he said that he would deal with the issue, so that it could be a matter for the debate. I do not think that he did so; if he did, he did it so quickly that I must have missed it. It is important, if there is a possibility of a decision being taken before the House can be reconvened to debate it, that we should have a little more information on that at an early stage of this debate rather than hearing it from the Secretary of State for Defence at the end. I would be happy to give way to the Foreign Secretary if he wants to give us any information now. How is the ability of our armed forces to participate affected by the firefighters' strike? What is the preparedness of our armed forces for such involvement, in terms of both manpower and equipment? These are important questions that need to be answered if we are fully to debate this issue.

I also want to raise an issue that has not been mentioned. The resolution contains a reassertion of the "sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq". I have said in an earlier debate that that is an important element of this resolution, and I wonder whether the Foreign Secretary or the Defence Secretary might tell us what steps are being taken to ensure that, whatever happens, the integrity and sovereignty of the state of Iraq will be maintained as set out in the resolution.

These are the essential questions that must be answered. The House has a right to know the answers, and so does the country at large. It is clear that we face an evil that cannot be ignored, and we have a duty to act. We have no right to leave the consequences of preventable evil to those who will succeed us. This is the evil of a man who has already shown that he has no scruples about using weapons of mass destruction against his own people, about invading his neighbours, and now, allegedly, about harbouring international terrorists. This is a man who sees state and non-state terrorism as inextricably linked.

None of us wants war, but to secure peace, it is sometimes necessary to prepare for war. Sometimes, it is even necessary to undertake it to secure peace. The Government are right to stand alongside the United States and the United Nations in supporting the objective that, one way or another, these arms must go. We support the Prime Minister and the Government in this stance. We face a sombre situation, and of course, hon. Members are anxious. We would not be human if we were not. I am reminded, however, of the old saying: "Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but it can empty today of its strength."

The Prime Minister and the American President have shown great courage and strength all along. On 8 November, the Security Council was unanimously courageous and strong. Today, it is the turn of the House. We have never in the past lacked courage and strength, and I trust that we shall show those qualities again tonight.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): May I remind hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed an eight-minute time limit on Back-Bench speeches? He has also asked me to advise the House that, because so many wish to contribute to the debate, it would be inappropriate for hon. Members to approach the Chair.

6.7 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I welcome this debate, but I think that Front Benchers could have been a little more considerate and taken a bit less time over their contributions; there is now less time for Back Benchers.

There is but one question that needs to be answered, both in the House and throughout the world community: will the world be a safer place if we go to war with Iraq? If the answer is no, we should do everything in our power to avoid such a war. We know that Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. The United Nations Security Council condemned that occupation and ordered a complete withdrawal, giving a deadline of 15 January. When Iraq failed to comply, the Gulf war began. The allied forces, led by the United States, bombarded Baghdad for six weeks. A ceasefire was announced on 28 February, and the UN terms of the permanent ceasefire were agreed by Iraq in April of that year. Strict conditions were imposed, demanding the disclosure and destruction of all weapons stockpiles.

The UN-backed economic sanctions were imposed as a tool to enforce the ceasefire. By early 1992, however, it had become apparent that Iraq still possessed chemical and biological weapons. It was not co-operating with UN arms inspectors in providing accurate information and allowing inspections of sites suspected of hiding and manufacturing weapons. That ended in 1998 with the UN inspectors being withdrawn. Since then, there has been intense international pressure to disarm Iraq.

In America, there is a newly elected President, although some might disagree that he was elected, and a new Administration who seem to be consumed by a policy of regime change. President Bush and his Administration seem to be determined that military action must be used to disarm Iraq, thinking that only by eliminating Saddam Hussein can the west stop the military threat to his neighbours and that of international terrorism to the wider world.

Such a policy has found little support among other countries, other than the United Kingdom. Our Prime Minister has given some considered, qualified support on the question of regime change. There is a split in the American Administration between those who want to take unilateral action, known as the gung-ho brigade, and those who support the counter-argument from the State Department, where Secretary of State General Colin Powell, who was President Bush senior's chief of armed forces during the Gulf war, wants to legitimise any military action to disarm Iraq through agreement in the UN Security Council.

General Powell's strongest ally has been the Prime Minister, who is seen as having been influential in persuading the Bush Administration to move nearer to General Powell's position. I do not have to praise our own Prime Minister, save to say that a lot has been said about his involvement and relationship with the American Administration. I recall President Clinton saying at this year's Labour party conference that if the Prime Minister had not been there to pull the American Administration back from gung-ho conflict, who else would have been? Some credit should be taken by our Prime Minister for holding the US within the UN Security Council and achieving the resolution.

Saddam Hussein's newly declared willingness to let the UN arms inspectors back into Iraq unconditionally muddied the waters for the White House hawks, who want military action as a prerequisite to regime change. There are clear signs of tension in the White House. The Security Council has drawn up a resolution on disarmament that ensures that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction will be eliminated. Along with other hon. and right hon. Members, I argued that there should be no unilateral action and that the question should go through the Security Council. That being the case, I shall support the Government motion in the Lobby tonight.

I, too, must comment on the middle east. The reaction of the Arab states and the Muslim world to the threat of military action against Iraq is fierce. The same can be said for the majority of European Union member states that do not support unilateral action, the consequences of which could see an Islamic fundamentalist uprising throughout the region, particularly in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. That could result in a regime change far removed from that envisaged by the American Administration. Neither should we underestimate the folly of the continued laissez faire policy of the United States on Israel's continued illegal occupation of Palestinian territories. The west can no longer ignore Israel's tragic, inexplicable and disproportionate actions against Palestinians.

The United States and its allies failed to dispose of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf war, and although his country remains poor, his popularity remains. That is a thorny issue similar to that of Gaddafi in Libya. Both are tyrants and despots, but their peoples prefer them to what they see as would-be pro-western puppet regimes. That reality puts great pressure on America to explain its end game when it talks of regime change. The surrounding countries—Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait—would need to be on side, as would Turkey and Syria, but there is no evidence of such support, other than a questionable press release from the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister. It is unlikely—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

6.15 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I beg to move, To add at the end of the Question:

"and believes that any decision that Iraq is in material breach of Resolution 1441 is for the UN Security Council as a whole to determine and that no military action to enforce Resolution 1441 should be taken against Iraq without a mandate from the UN Security Council; and further believes that no British forces should be committed to any such military action against Iraq without a debate in this House and a substantive motion in favour.".

I preface my remarks by apologising on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) for his unavoidable absence. We trust that he will be back in his rightful place on these Benches before too long.

This is an important debate on perhaps the most significant issue facing the country and the international community at this time. It involves not simply Saddam Hussein's evil regime and the nature of the threat posed by it to world peace, but how the world in general and this country in particular deal with the consequences of that threat.

The House last debated those issues during the September recall of Parliament, when my right hon. and learned Friend set out the clear principles that should underpin our consideration of these matters: no country should ever exclude the use of military force to protect the safety and security of its citizens, but any military action must be consistent with the principles of international law and be considered only as a last resort. Furthermore, any decision to commit British forces to armed conflict should be subject to a debate in the House on a substantive motion.

The previous debate occurred a few days after Saddam's offer of unconditional and unfettered access to UN weapons inspectors was made. Today's debate takes place as more inspectors arrive in Baghdad, given authority by the unanimous Security Council resolution of 8 November. That represents significant progress, which we on these Benches welcome.

As resolution 1441 makes clear, the inspectors enjoy the full support of right-thinking people wherever they are in the world. Saddam Hussein has no choice but to comply with it. This time, he must not call the international community's bluff. We argued from the beginning that the UN must be at the centre of all efforts to resolve the situation in Iraq. We opposed, and continue to oppose, the threats against Baghdad of unilateral action, which seemed all too possible throughout August.

Therefore, we should recognise the achievement of the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and the UN officials, working with the Security Council members, in producing a resolution that enjoys unanimous support. We should also acknowledge the efforts of the Foreign Secretary and the British UN mission in achieving that unanimity. Ministers have shown that they can exert influence over America to work within the proper constraints of international law. We commend that approach and hope that it continues to be the model for transatlantic relations.

The resolution forms the basis of the Government motion that we are debating and which we shall support. Nobody contests the need for the Iraqi regime to

"comply fully with all provisions of the Resolution",

or the fact

"that if it fails to do so, the Security Council should meet to consider the situation and the need for full compliance",

or

"that continued violation of its obligations will result in Iraq facing serious consequences",

as the proposed Conservative amendment made plain.

The Liberal Democrat amendment sets out additional matters that we want clarified, specifically the continuing role of the United Nations and the position of the House in determining the nature of any British military or other contribution to that process. In the circumstances, we are glad that our amendment has been selected, and hope that it will receive support throughout the House.

Resolution 1441 rightly points out that Saddam

"has been and remains in material breach"

[Mr. Michael Moore]

of successive UN resolutions, and that this is a "final opportunity" for him to comply with his obligations; but it would be foolish to exclude the possibility of further breaches of UN resolutions by the Iraqi dictator. Failure to comply with and co-operate fully in the implementation of the resolution will constitute further "material breach", which the executive chairman of UNMOVIC or the director-general of the IAEA should report to the Council to allow its members to "consider the situation".

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Would not Saddam Hussein's agreement to readmit the UN inspectors have been inconceivable had there not been a credible threat of military action? Is it not now inconceivable that Saddam Hussein will completely and fully disarm, as required by the UN, without the threat of military action? Why, then, does the hon. Gentleman's party give Saddam Hussein breathing space by saying that no military action should be taken until or unless the issue is returned to the UN?

Mr. Moore: If the hon. Gentleman listens to all of my speech, as I hope he will, he will realise that what I consider important is the fact that the UN, not the threat of war, is driving this process.

There must be no doubt that the senior inspectors will determine that a breach has occurred, rather than the intelligence agencies of the United States or other countries. When the inspectors report, it must be the whole Council that determines whether the breach is material, and what action must be taken.

The resolution warns Iraq of the serious consequences of

"continued violations of its obligations".

The nature of the Council's response will inevitably depend on the contents and the circumstances of the report from senior UN officials in Baghdad. Liberal Democrats believe that we cannot rule out the possibility of military action, but that it must be the last resort, when all other options have been exhausted. It must also be proportionate to the circumstances. We will listen carefully to the Defence Secretary's comments on any deployment of UK forces.

We must also keep the situation in the middle east in mind. Throughout the period during which the tension over Iraq has been building up—indeed, long before that—the fragile security situation between Israel and the Palestinians has caused great concern. Let me add my condolences to the family of the constituents of the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) at this time of their loss.

A war with Iraq would complicate matters immeasurably, not only in Israel but in the wider Arab world. Such considerations cannot be ignored lightly. Nor can we lose sight of the terrible price that would be paid by innocent Iraqis in any war with their country. The complexity of these issues underlines the need for any military action to have a mandate from the Security Council. Ideally, the mandate would be in the form of a new resolution, but Council members may not consider that necessary.

Given the Government's position on Iraq and the statements of support for the United States, we are only too aware that British forces may be committed to a war in Iraq, even in the face of international opinion and opposition from other Security Council members. We cannot judge the circumstances in advance of their existence. We can, however, set out the way in which we will consider the Government's plans in the event of our military forces being committed to action.

Sending military personnel to a war is one of the most serious decisions that any Government ever make. We do not underestimate the seriousness with which the Prime Minister and his colleagues treat that responsibility, but we in the House must play our part too. We are sent here by our constituents to make the Government accountable, and to ensure that proper consideration is given to the decisions that Ministers make. We do not believe that in calling for a motion in the House we put our forces' lives at risk. We would not expect the Government to do so.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): It was suggested earlier that any reference back to the Security Council would somehow give Saddam Hussein a breathing space. Is not the point that if we are to proceed with military action against Iraq it should take place within the framework of international law, and that only by keeping it firmly within that framework will we allay the problems of instability that such action might pose?

Mr. Moore: I entirely agree that the framework of international law must govern the whole debate, and the actions of our Government and Governments elsewhere.

When British lives are to be put at stake—and other lives too—owing to this country's actions, it is only right for the House of Commons to be involved in the process. Not least when there is no new UN resolution and when the circumstances of the UN mandate for military action are in doubt, the House must be allowed to make a judgment and to have a vote—and that must be on the basis of a substantive motion setting out the nature of the commitment of British armed forces to war.

Alan Simpson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it cannot be right for the Government to be accused of putting British lives at risk when, in a debate here, some of us at least wish to argue that British troops should not be sent to take part in a war in which we should not be engaging? Does he also accept that the motion leaves it open for troops to be deployed with no further endorsement either specifically by the UN or by the House? I am talking about a democratic armlock that we should apply.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions should be brief.

Mr. Moore: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about some people never wishing to commit British troops in circumstances such as this. That is a position that anyone is entitled to take, and one that we can respect. As I have said, I do not believe that by

considering these matters in the House we necessarily put lives at risk. I reject what the Foreign Secretary said about that.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in his explanation after the vote, the US ambassador to the UN made it clear that if the US believed it was under some kind of threat from Iraq it would take action anyway, irrespective of any UN resolution?

Mr. Moore: With respect, I think any country that believed it was under threat would invoke the self-defence provisions of international law. *[Interruption.]* Any material breach of the provision of this resolution must come back to the Security Council— *[Interruption.]* The Foreign Secretary need not get so excited. Any such breach must come back to the Security Council on the basis of reports from the UN inspectors. We cannot judge the circumstances before they exist.

No one here today underestimates the seriousness of the situation in Iraq, or the deadly consequences of any failure to resolve the pressing issues before us. In the face of contempt from Saddam and scepticism in the United States, we have seen that international law, implemented through the United Nations, is the proper way in which to tackle Iraq. That approach requires resolve not just from the Government, but from Parliament. Difficult decisions lie ahead, but the manner of dealing with them is straightforward.

As we say in our amendment, we must ensure that at all times all Governments act through the United Nations. We in the House must assert ourselves, and ensure that any military action undertaken by British military forces has been properly debated here and enjoys the support of the House of Commons. In this country, we properly assert our superiority to Saddam Hussein and his regime by our commitments to the principles of international law and parliamentary democracy. We must continue to demonstrate those commitments.

6.29 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate, particularly as I may be expressing a minority view in the House. However, it is important that that be heard.

The Foreign Secretary clearly set out his position and the case for the motion that the Government have asked us to support. I do not underestimate the effort that he and the Government have put in here and at the UN in reaching that position, and I recognise what he said about his future position and what he would like to happen—he would prefer a resolution at the UN and a resolution of the House—but I am still fundamentally opposed to an attack on Iraq.

I will not vote for the Government motion this evening. I hoped to have the opportunity to vote for the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and others, but I will not have that opportunity—the amendment has not been selected. The amendment that has been selected is that of the Liberal Democrats. I shall support that amendment, not because I entirely agree with it but because it is nearest to my view.

I say to colleagues who are considering how to vote that I suspect they will not have a second chance. Please do not support the Government motion in the belief that, at some point, before any military action, there will be the opportunity to vote on that military action. I do not believe that they will have that opportunity. I ask every hon. Member to think about that before deciding how to vote.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gerrard: I have only eight minutes. I must disappoint my hon. Friend.

A lot of the debate has been about the legality of the situation and about UN resolutions, coupled with the arguments that the UN must act or it will be discredited, and that Iraq is different from other states ignoring UN resolutions because of chapter VII. Much of that debate has taken place as if over the past few months the UN has arrived at resolution 1441 through the freely expressed wishes of all the other states in the UN, and as if enormous pressure has not been exerted by the US, with the threat that it would take unilateral action if the UN did not act. That comes from a country that has routinely chosen to ignore UN resolutions in the past and did not pay its subscriptions for much of that time.

One of the key problems is that we are being asked in the motion to support the UN, yet at the same time we are being told that the US Government and our Government reserve the right to ignore anything that the UN says, if they do not like what the UN decides when it looks at the weapons inspectors' reports. What would happen if we had a second resolution that explicitly called for military action and there were a veto? Would that prove that the UN had failed? We have been willing to use the veto in the past, as has the US. Are we saying that we will never use the veto again? That seems to be the implication of choosing to reserve our right to ignore a possible veto from another country. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot say, "You must support the UN" and at the same time say, "We reserve the right to do whatever we want if we do not like what the UN decides."

Mr. Straw: I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend. What he has just described is a parody of the circumstances that I set out. I also made it clear that any decisions that we took in respect of military action would in any event be careful, proportionate and consistent with our obligations under international law, the basis of which is, principally, the UN charter. He must deal with the real circumstance, which has been described not only by me but by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, that arose in respect of Kosovo and Macedonia. That is what we are having to take account of and that alone.

Mr. Gerrard: I understand what my right hon. Friend says, but the argument in respect of Kosovo was that we took action under international law and under the UN charter because humanitarian action was needed. I cannot see at present the humanitarian argument or the self-defence argument applying to Iraq. The situation may change, but I cannot see that at present.

The argument about chapter VII and Iraq being different—the argument that this situation is different legally from the situation that applies to Israel and the

[Mr. Gerrard]

way in which Israel ignores resolutions—may sway politicians but it will not cut much ice with the public in most Arab countries.

Another issue is the political argument. The fact that an action may be legal does not necessarily mean that it is sensible. I can think of situations where legally I could personally use violence but where it would not necessarily be sensible. I have fears about the political consequences of any war on Iraq. I believe that it could have devastating consequences for the whole of the middle east.

I have not seen one country neighbouring Iraq, the ones that should be feeling most under threat, demand that military action be taken—not one. The nightmare scenario would be an attack on Iraq that provoked the involvement of Israel. That is a real worry.

I do not for one moment support Saddam Hussein. I do not think any of us does. We all know that he is an evil dictator, but he was an evil dictator when Donald Rumsfeld was shaking his hand and when this country was supplying him with weapons. Anyway, we are told that this is not about regime change.

There is no evidence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda. I am sure that the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister and George Bush would be glad to provide such evidence if it existed. I do not believe that at the moment we are threatened militarily by Iraq. Such a situation would justify us taking some action.

Who will suffer from an attack? Who are the people who will die? The nature of modern warfare means that it will be innocent civilians who will die. When we vote on whether we should go to war or not, we should remember that. People may argue that that is necessary and for the greater good, but I ask hon. Members not to vote for war without recognising that they would be voting for the death of many innocent people. I am not prepared to have that on my conscience.

6.37 pm

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): We all agree that Saddam Hussein is a wicked man. I first went to Baghdad in 1950 and I have met every leader of Iraq from Nuri Pasha to Saddam Hussein. With the exception of Nuri, who was a great man, they have all been very rough customers whose behaviour would have raised eyebrows even in the Whips Office, so it is not on that that we are concentrating.

The elder President Arif told me that one of the party tricks of Qassim, the general who overthrew the Hashemite royal family, was to invite friends for a meal and then to have one of his opponents tied by his wrists and ankles to four jeeps that drove off at full speed in opposite directions. Those are the sort of people who have been governing Iraq since 1958. However, the thing that differentiates Saddam Hussein from the appalling Governments who have preceded him is that he clearly is a threat to the rest of the world; the others were not. If he has weapons of mass destruction, clearly, we should take pre-emptive action to disarm him, but we cannot sensibly view Iraq in isolation. It is not only part of a critical region; to some extent at the moment, it is the focus for a world crisis.

The real problem facing the west is our double standards in dealing with the Arab world. One can see that in two obvious respects, although there are many others. First, we talk about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction without acknowledging that Israel also has such weapons. I heard it on fairly good authority that it has 104 nuclear warheads, both tactical and strategic, and a few minutes ago we heard a figure quoted of more than 200. Of course, no one will ever confirm or deny those figures. There is no doubt that Israel has nuclear weaponry vastly in excess of what it needs to defend itself from its immediate neighbours—more than twice the nuclear capacity of France, I am told. We do nothing whatever about that.

Secondly, there is the question of Security Council resolutions. I thought that the Foreign Secretary's remarks about our attitude to resolution 242 of 1967 were disingenuous, to say the least. Of course it is true that we would like to impose a settlement of the Palestine problem and that every Foreign Secretary of every party has tried his very best to do it, but we all know why it has not been done: because the Americans have prevented it. The Arabs all know that, and the sense of double standards embitters the entire situation and is one of the reasons why even the most moderate Arabs, who used to hate and fear Saddam Hussein, are beginning to have considerable sympathy for him.

In the days when I used to visit Vietnam, the Americans were talking a great deal about the battle for hearts and minds. Of course, they did not win that battle and they did not win the war. As far as I can see, since the terrible attack on the twin towers, there has been no serious attempt to win the hearts and minds of the Arab or Islamic worlds, but the battle needs to be fought and won if any progress at all is to be made in the wider war on terror. That will be a much more difficult task for the west than the disarming of Iraq.

Only about nine months ago, the United States Congress voted $4 billion a year for the next four years to supply armaments to Israel. Everybody in the middle east knows that every tank that they see on CNN, every bomb and missile, every bullet that kills or maims a Palestinian has been paid for by the United States. I have been a lifelong admirer and friend of the United States. I have often regretted that I was not born an American. I would love to have been a US federal Senator. If I had been, with my seniority, I would be chairman of the top committee there. I have been there innumerable times since, from Oxford, I debated there with 50 American universities. I was in New York on the morning of 11 September last year, and I was there only a fortnight ago attending the Business Advisory Council of the United Nations, of which I am a member.

Clearly, I am not remotely anti-American, but the fact is that America has grossly mishandled the Palestine problem for many years, and is beginning to drag Britain into a very dangerous situation. Neither the Romans, nor Byzantium, nor the Ottoman empire, nor the British empire was so universally hated as America is today by the poor people throughout the world, and that is a great tragedy for the most historically generous nation that the world has ever seen.

We all know Emma Lazarus's famous words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty:

"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free".

For well over a century, the United States superbly lived up to that invocation, but today the sad truth is that the huddled masses of the poor world have turned against the United States. That is sad, and it is dangerous.

Israel is fully entitled to absolute security within its legal frontiers, and we must ensure it, but we must not continue antagonising a billion members of the Islamic faith, and we must stop dismissing them with the contemptuous word "fundamentalist", because how would we like to be called Christian simpletons, mercenaries or materialists? Many of my Islamic friends are men of immense culture, intelligence and sensitivity.

6.45 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I do not wish to emulate the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell), for whom eight minutes was just about enough—he was about to have a heart attack. I agree with him absolutely, however, that it is absurd that the United States is not putting pressure on Israel, if only for the purposes of expediency in the weeks and months ahead—although one would hope that it would do it because it is right to put pressure on Israel to achieve a balanced and fair outcome of a dispute in the middle east that is so destructive to the international community, and especially to those who live within firing distance of the various weaponry used by both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

This is yet another debate on Iraq. Looking at the inventory of discussions in the Chamber and in Committee and of the meetings between the Prime Minister and the Chairmen of the relevant Committees, I do not get the impression that the Government are ducking or trying to stifle debate.

In fairness to the Foreign Secretary, I thought that he was reasonably clear about the Government's aspirations and intentions on a second resolution. I have no problem with the views that he expressed and I desperately hope that there will be agreement in the United Nations Security Council should it need to determine whether military action should be taken—but I hope that no such need will arise because Iraq will have complied fully with the terms of resolution 1441.

Not only do I support the motion, I do so enthusiastically. There are those in the House and outside who fervently believed that the US would act without a UN Security Council resolution. To my relief, it went down the Security Council path, it compromised and it was patient. We should recognise the role played by the Prime Minister, Colin Powell and Members of Congress, along with many other people in the United States, who put pressure on President Bush and the Administration and pushed them down the path that could secure the most support in the international community.

Some people in the House and outside are opposed to the build-up of US forces in the region, but let me offer a quotation:

"sometimes diplomacy must be backed by the threat of military force if it is to succeed."

That was not Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz or Richard Perle—in fact, it was Kofi Annan. The United Nations Security Council has enormous moral authority, but I doubt that a thousand of its resolutions would convince Saddam Hussein of the need to open his presidential palaces and all the other sites in Iraq. No, it is the threat—and I hope only the threat—of the use of military force that will ensure that he complies.

What President Bush has said on regime change is not crystal clear. He was in favour of it initially, but I am encouraged by the view that he will be satisfied—as I hope, most others will be—if Iraq acquiesces in and supports, even if not enthusiastically, the United Nations resolution. Should Iraq disarm, I hope that there will be no need for any military action. I do not want an occupation force such as the United States deployed in the aftermath of dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I shall return to more mundane but very important issues. On the deployment of 10.2 per cent. of the whole of the British armed forces—Army, Air Force and Navy—to Operation Fresco, it does not take a genius to work out that that is a significant number. We must hope that a fair agreement is eventually signed between the Fire Brigades Union and the local authorities, the Government, or both. The firefighters' dispute is clearly having an adverse effect on whatever preparation might be required for our armed forces. Over the weekend I met firefighters from the Royal Regiment of Wales who are serving in my constituency. They did not sign up to be supplementary firemen but, without patronising them, I must say that they are doing a magnificent job.

I should have said earlier that the members of the Defence Committee send our best wishes to our colleague, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). There are few people in the House with greater authority or who are more popular among colleagues on both sides of the House than the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and we desperately hope that his recovery is swift and total. We also send our best wishes to his wife, who must be having a difficult time.

In conclusion, let me say that I read *The Daily Telegraph*, and an article today under the description "Countdown to war" had the headline, "Cuts will leave Army struggling in the sand." The Defence Committee has criticised the Ministry of Defence on more than one occasion for underspend and overstretch—indeed, its dissatisfaction with one or two things in the Ministry of Defence is well known. However, this article, not uncharacteristically for *The Daily Telegraph*, is somewhat over the top. Looking through my notes, I would certainly challenge much that it contains. It says that DROPS, the vehicle for unloading, is ancient. Well, it is 20 years old and still useful. The Bowman saga of radiocommunications goes back many years. The Government were absolutely right to dump it and relaunch the competition. The in-service data will now be from late 2003 onwards. In the meantime, personal role radios, non-secure, are in use—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.53 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I am very pleased that I shall be able to support the Government's motion this evening. I would not have been able to support the first proposal put before the United Nations because I believe that we cannot act unless we take the United Nations into consideration as far as is humanly

[Mr. John Gummer]

possible. I put it very carefully because it cannot be possible that in all circumstances, notwithstanding who wishes to impose a veto and what we feel to be the interests of free people everywhere, we can give a total veto to the Security Council of the United Nations. However, I find it difficult when I hear the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary talk about the principled position of Mr. Bush, the President of the United States, in going to the United Nations. There should be no question of that—it should not be a matter of discussion. It is the feeling that he has done us a favour that I find difficult to take.

I also find it difficult to take a good deal of the hypocrisy in all these discussions. Our newspapers have, with their usual strong balance, pointed to the hypocrisy in the French and Russian positions, owed so much as they are by Iraq. I note that the moment the polls closed it was possible to come to a compromise, but not one minute before.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I do not have time.

Mr. Foulkes: What about injury time?

Mr. Gummer: Very well then.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Will he remind the House of whether Mrs. Thatcher went to the United Nations before invading the Falkland islands?

Mr. Gummer: When one's own territory is invaded and one goes to defend it, one can hardly ask anyone else's permission. If we had not gone, we would not have been deserving of the name of a sovereign state. However, that is not the situation here.

All the nations involved have mixed motives. However, I want to bring home to the Foreign Secretary and, indeed, to my right hon. and hon. Friends, the necessity of acting within international law if we are not to set this part of the world alight. Behind the situation is an attitude towards the Arabs and Islam, which I believe to have been unacceptable for many years. My hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell) pointed to the continued massive support of one side in the Arab-Israeli battle. I remind the House of my constituent who was killed in the course of the United Nations seeking to make sense of a situation in which one nation is constantly being invaded by its neighbour, which is, in turn, constantly being terrorised by suicide bombers. We are all at risk until the Arab-Israeli conflict is brought to a conclusion.

I am worried that so often the situation seems to be black and white when it is really extremely complicated. Until Israel is secure behind her legal borders and does not believe it right to build settlements and constantly invade her neighbour, and until she is safe from her neighbour's constant incursion—usually, although not publicly, supported by its Administration—we cannot have peace in that part of the world. We will not get there, however, if the United States does not recognise its role in not behaving with even-handedness, which is crucial to the situation.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I warmly commend what my right hon. Friend says—he and I agree entirely on these matters. Does he agree that many of us who support the Government tonight might not support them in future if they were to act without the authority of the UN?

Mr. Gummer: I was much cheered by the words of the Foreign Secretary. I have had occasion in the past to be critical, so I must be honest in my support of what seemed to be an unequivocal statement that in all the possible circumstances he would seek a return to the UN and would put a motion in front of the UN and in front of this House, provided that the safety of British troops was not thereby imperilled. Of course the Liberals do not understand that. I am not a warlike person until I hear the Liberals—they have an effect on me. If only there was a bit of rationality. They run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Why was the Foreign Secretary surprised? That is the definition of a Liberal Democrat.

In the world in which we live, it is not right for a nation, however strong and powerful, to decide of its own volition to use force against another, unless there is no alternative. I ask the Foreign Secretary to try to explain to the United States that no war on terrorism can be successful unless there is also a war on inequality and poverty. We cannot have a world in which the effect of American subsidy for its cotton crops is that the state of Mali receives $137 million in aid but has $143 million taken from it.

The war on terrorism must have a moral and ethical centre or it will not be successful. Those of us with grave doubts about the actions and words in this battle share those doubts with all the patriarchs of all the Christian denominations, led by the Pope, who normally do not speak with a single voice in this part of the world. We cannot choose one part of the equation and try to find justice only in one place while forgetting everything else. We want the British Government to be more clearly supportive of a wider view of how we can deal ethically with terrorism.

If only I could hear an occasional word from the Government that sounded as though they were prepared publicly to disagree with the United States. I am sure that much is being done behind the scenes, but every now and again, despite all the disadvantages, we have to say "Thank God for President Chirac". He at least made a demand. I hope that the British Government will sound a bit more independent and a bit more willing to bring home publicly what I am constantly assured they say privately.

We could be America's very best ally by ensuring that the United States realised that the war on terrorism could not be limited to a chosen enemy, when circumstances were electorally satisfactory, but that it had to reach out in situations that are extremely difficult electorally. I should find the situation much more credible if President Bush took strong, continued, even-handed and imaginative action to deal with the Arab-Israeli issue. If he could do that, he would win Arab support for what may be a very necessary war.

7.3 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): The House should welcome the election of Amram Mitzna as the leader of the Israeli Labour party. At last, there is an opportunity to open up real debate that could put policies such as land for peace back in the mainstream of Israeli politics, as well as compromise and the removal of settlements.

I am a friend of Israel. I believe that the only hope for peace in the middle east is security for Israel, within recognised borders, vis-à-vis all its Arab neighbours, and that a viable Palestinian state must be committed to living in peace alongside Israel and not act as a base for incursions or terrorist action against it.

Our only hope is for a change of politics and of Government in Israel, so I welcome the fact that Mr. Mitzna said that he wants, without preconditions, to open a dialogue with Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. I appreciate all the difficulties in Israeli society at present, so that is a brave political position. Those of us with the interests of the state of Israel at heart realise that it is necessary for the future.

I want to address my remarks to some of the comments made earlier by my colleagues. There is a clear distinction between resolutions adopted under chapter VI of the UN charter and those adopted under chapter VII. Chapter VI requires both the state of Israel and the Palestinians to meet certain obligations. There is a range of resolutions under chapter VI. However, chapter VII is mandatory and specifies the state of Iraq. If we require full implementation of all the UN resolutions—242, 338 and so on—it is important to realise that they impose obligations on both sides and that, in different ways, both sides have broken the resolutions over a number of years.

The international community must put pressure on both sides to return to negotiations. As in the case of the fire dispute, the only way to achieve resolution is to go back to the negotiating table.

We must also realise that whatever conflict exists between Israel and the Palestinians, it can never be used as an excuse for inaction against the brutal fascist regime in Iraq which has systematically oppressed its own people and attacked its neighbours. It is not only that terrible things were done to the Kurds: Scud missiles were fired on Saudi Arabia and Israel, and chemical weapons were used in the invasion of Iran.

Saddam's record is such that I have deep reservations as to whether he will comply with the terms of the UN resolution. However, if he did so, we could lift sanctions and open up a new chapter in the region. In time, the people of his country would have the confidence to rise up and overthrow the oppressive regime under which they have had to suffer for so many years.

There are many refugees in my constituency: Iraqi Kurds, Shi'as and Sunnis have visited my surgery recently. A Wahabi man who visited me had to flee from Saddam's regime because of his religious beliefs. Some of my Iraqi Kurd constituents are in wheelchairs because they have been shot. There are people whose relatives died from gassing and people who have been tortured. They all tell me that they do not want a war, but they definitely want to get rid of the terrible regime that has oppressed them.

Those of us who say that we should do nothing about that or that we should merely pass another Security Council resolution have to answer this question: at what point does the international community enforce the decisions that have been taken? My Labour colleagues should remember what we decided at our party conference this year. Composite 5 stated:

> "Conference believes that the authority of the UN will be undermined unless it is enforced, and recognises that in the last resort this could involve military action."

It is not true, as some people allege, that the policy is an American-inspired plot and that it does not reflect our views. We held that debate at our party conference and the choice was made.

I did not believe that the Americans would take the UN route. I did not believe that it was possible to achieve a unanimous resolution of the Security Council. I did not believe that the UN could adopt a united position in favour of the implementation of total disarmament of the weapons of mass destruction of the Iraqi regime. I say that as someone who has been an officer of the UN parliamentary group for a number of years and is currently its vice-chairman.

I believe in the UN; I want the UN to be strong. I do not like a world where there is one superpower, or where Europe is weak and the United States is such a dominant force in the modern world because of its economic, political and military power. I want a strong UN, but the way we get a strong UN is not just by passing resolutions but by implementing them, and this is a great opportunity to achieve that.

In the very short time left to me in this debate, I wish to say that we have to make it clear that Saddam faces a choice. If there is to be a war, it is not of our making; it is of his making because he can announce tomorrow that he is fully complying and taking the necessary steps to achieve that. I hope that that will be the case, but if there is a material breach in January, February, March or whenever, we have to be ready to follow through the consequences of that action on behalf of the world community, the credibility of the UN and, above all, the long-suffering people of Iraq.

7.11 pm

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): It is clearly necessary that UN resolutions on Iraq be upheld and that weapons of mass destruction be removed. It is clearly also in the national interest and in that of the whole world that that be done. In a sense, what there is to say about this subject should be almost as simple as that, but not quite. Once again, I wish to raise my Muslim constituents' perspective on resolution 1441 because I believe that their views are worth being held in respect by the House. I want to say at once that I do not agree with every point made by all of them, but their point of view is worth hearing none the less.

My constituents are extremely sensitive to the signs of the times, and they note the American Government's determination to address Iraq's breach of UN resolutions, but they ask—various hon. Members have raised this already—if UN resolution 1441 and other UN resolutions are to be applied to Iraq, whether it is not also reasonable that UN resolutions should be applied elsewhere with similar force and effort.

My constituents refer in particular to two conflicts: often to the one in the middle east, which has been so well ventilated today that I do not propose to do so further, and, of course, to the one in Kashmir. Many of

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my constituents originate from Azad Kashmir and have friends or family who originate from there or from behind the line of control. They point out to me that, although UN resolutions on Iraq are mostly relatively recent, some UN resolutions that apply to the conflict in Kashmir have existed for almost 50 years and ask that the people of Kashmir should be allowed to determine their own future, but my constituents see no prospect of those resolutions being implemented. They also point out that, although Saddam invaded Kuwait in the early 1990s and the Iran-Iraq war began in the 1970s, India has illegally occupied part of Kashmir since the late 1940s, and as far as the international—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would now direct his remarks to the amendment and the resolution.

Mr. Goodman: I shall certainly return to resolution 1441. I was going to say that, although my constituents note that UN resolutions pertain to all those things, they do not see those resolutions being as urgently addressed as resolution 1441 and the other resolutions on Iraq. I find it hard to overestimate the frustration, cynicism and hopelessness that my constituents of Pakistani and Kashmiri origin report to me when they read the signs of the times and when they see so much effort being expended on UN resolution 1441 and the other resolutions that affect Iraq, but so little effort, as they see it, being applied to those that apply to Kashmir.

I believe, and many hon. Members on both sides of the House agree, that the Government have good reason to take the resolutions that affect Kashmir as seriously as resolution 1441 and the others that affect Iraq because, like Iraq, India and Pakistan also possess weapons of mass destruction, and we know from the events of last May how serious the threat of a conflict involving those weapons is.

Now that America is the policeman of the world and has a position in the world rather like that exercised by Britain in the 19th century—it has very great power—I ask the Government to ask the Americans not merely to concentrate their attention on matters that affect Iraq, but to understand that if the Muslim world is to be persuaded that it is important to resolve the situation in Iraq, it must also be persuaded that the Americans and the Government take the situation in Kashmir as seriously as they take that in Iraq. That is my plea to the Government this evening on behalf of my constituents.

7.16 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I begin by endorsing wholeheartedly the chorus of good wishes to our right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell).

I note that we have before us a motion that asks us to endorse a UN Security Council resolution that has been agreed unanimously, even with the participation of Syria—the only member of the Arab League on the Security Council. It is therefore hardly surprising that it is very difficult to oppose the motion. Of course resolution 1441 is clear and, indeed, the language is very strong; it talks of "material breach",

"immediate, unimpeded, unconditional unrestricted access"

and "serious consequences", but perhaps its most important element is that it talks of a "final opportunity".

The UN Security Council is looking back over the history of non-compliance and telling Saddam Hussein and his regime, "You have one more chance. This is the final opportunity." Of course if there is a further Iraqi breach, the matter will return to the Security Council, as is required in paragraph 12. During the two months' negotiation, the concerns of France and the Russian Federation were met on 8 November, when the explanations of the vote were given. US Ambassador Negroponte said that the resolution contains no "hidden trigger" and no "automaticity". He also said:

"If there is a further Iraqi breach . . . the matter will return to the Council",

as the motion states.

What are the possible outcomes of the resolution? Of course it is possible that Saddam Hussein will wholly comply. It is possible that the United States, with its view of itself as the universal world enforcer, will go off on its own irrespective of any decision of the Security Council. Those outcomes are less likely than the third outcome: Saddam Hussein, as a master of the game of deception, is likely to drag out the process for as long as possible and will seek to divide the international community and to play until the campaign for the US presidential election begins at the end of next year.

Where do we draw the line? Clearly, the international community has a very difficult task ahead. We put enormous responsibility on the weapons inspectors. As Dr. Blix has said very clearly, they are the servants of the Security Council. They do not make decisions; they refer their findings to the Security Council, which interprets whether the breach is trivial or sufficiently substantial to merit the "serious consequences".

We have to be realistic about what the weapons inspectors can achieve. Those who participated in the Wisconsin project in June this year raised the most powerful doubts, in particular, about the ability of UNMOVIC to receive and use intelligence, and about the experience of the personnel. The experience of previous inspectors is clear: Wyn Bowen told a recent meeting in the House of Commons that UNSCOM never managed to achieve surprise, despite tactics such as splitting the team and revisiting sites. Iraq has had substantial time to move and conceal material. The new team is relatively inexperienced: two thirds of its members are wholly new to Iraq, and it takes time to learn the tradecraft. It is therefore a huge job to cover the 700 or so sites that have been named.

I ask the Foreign Secretary and the Minister now present, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), whether they are confident that UNMOVIC will have sufficient resources in terms of personnel and translation services. Is the international community prepared to respond positively to any request for further resources? The great danger is not that Saddam Hussein will refuse to answer on 8 December, but that he will flood the UN with such a vast amount of dual-use material and so on that it will make UNMOVIC's task extremely difficult. Colonel Terence Taylor, director of the International

Institute for Strategic Studies in Washington, said that if there is a formal nil declaration by the Iraqi regime on or before 8 December, it "will not be credible."

One of the most difficult tasks is to determine what constitutes a material breach—a point made by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). There is a difference between the UK and US Governments on that point. The US has claimed that breaches of the no-fly zones could constitute a breach, but the UN Secretary-General, who is the interpreter of the resolution, has firmly stated that that would not be a breach. Equally, the US president has said that denial by Iraq of any weapons arsenal could

"invite the severest of consequences",

whereas British sources have been far more circumspect.

A further question is whether we can deal with Saddam Hussein in good faith—can he be trusted? Previous experience and the history of concealment suggest that he cannot be trusted, but that does not mean that he should not be given a fair chance to comply this time. However, there is already some evidence that Iraq is playing games, and we must carefully examine the rather ambiguous letters that Naji Sabri, Iraq's Foreign Minister, sent on 13 and 23 November.

In passing, I note that we need to plan for the post-conflict position now, rather than imagining that it will solve itself.

There will be strains during the coming period, so it is extremely important that the international community remain united and continue in the spirit of the unanimous vote of 8 November. My judgment, having been to Washington with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, is that our Prime Minister has played a crucial role in two respects: first, persuading the president to follow the UN route and, secondly, persuading him that there must be some form of parallel track with the Israel-Palestine conflict. Given the urgency of that crisis, it is not good enough to say that we should wait: the Quartet group, which set out its proposals in September, should not do nothing until the two sets of elections—Palestinian and Israeli—take place in January, because those elections are unlikely to effect any fundamental changes on the ground. When people complain that the Prime Minister is too close to President Bush, I remind them of the criticism of the US by Chancellor Schröder and President Chirac and ask who has had the greater and more positive influence on the US president.

I come finally to the parliamentary—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.24 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): It is entirely right and proper that so many right hon. and hon. Members have dwelt at length on wider middle east issues. I begin by quoting a leading—possibly the leading—Israeli politician, who said of the middle east peace process:

"We can see the light but we cannot find the tunnel."

We all know what he means. In many senses, the same is true of the Iraq question. We can see the light—it is getting Saddam Hussein to disarm and return his country to normality. The question is how—where is the tunnel?

About two weeks ago, as a member of the all-party United Nations group, I had the great privilege of going to the United Nations with the hon. Members for Putney (Mr. Colman) and for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). There, we had remarkable access to many of the key players in the United Nations and the Security Council. In my brief remarks, I shall pick up some specific points that I learned during that two-day visit but that have not yet been made in the debate.

First, it is right to put on record the fact that there is huge confidence at the United Nations in Dr. Hans Blix. There has been some press comment in this country that he might not be up to the job, and some doubts have been expressed about his ability to deal with the inspections process. I agree with the practical points made by the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and I acknowledge the huge scale of Dr. Blix's task, but I believe that he understands precisely what it is that he needs to do and how best to achieve it. One of the reasons for the confidence in Dr. Blix is that he was one of the key authors of the 1969 Vienna convention on the law of treaties, which defines what a material breach is, so we can safely say that the task is in extremely good hands.

One name has not so far been mentioned in the debate—Sir Jeremy Greenstock, our permanent representative to the Security Council.

Mr. George Howarth: (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): He has been mentioned four times.

Mr. Luff: I am sorry—I cannot have been concentrating. I pay particular tribute to Sir Jeremy Greenstock, because although we talk about the achievement of politicians on such occasions, it is often to the diplomats that much of the credit must go. I have no doubt that Sir Jeremy's diplomatic skills with both the Americans and the other members of the Security Council have been largely instrumental in bringing about that remarkable achievement, resolution 1441.

I am not sure that much praise should be given to the Liberal Democrats. Their amendment is regrettable, giving breathing space to Saddam Hussein and having all the disadvantages in relation to our troops that the Foreign Secretary set out so admirably in his speech. I urge the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) to withdraw the amendment rather than press it to a vote, because it is a serious error of judgment.

One of the things we heard praised in New York is the Iraq programme, for the establishment of which the British Government can take some credit. It is often misleadingly referred to as the oil for food programme—the Foreign Secretary himself used that terminology—but it is so much more ambitious than that. Apologists for Saddam Hussein who sometimes criticise the Iraq programme are levelling their criticism at the wrong target. The problems, such as they are, with the programme are inevitable when the client is a monolithic state such as Iraq, and the programme is administered by a multilateral agency such as the United Nations. However, the main difficulties are caused by Saddam Hussein himself—for example, cutting off the flow of oil for 30 days in solidarity with other, wider, middle eastern questions, and thus removing funding

[Mr. Luff]

for the programme. It is Saddam Hussein and no one else who inflicts misery and suffering on the people of his country.

If I have one criticism of the UN it is that it has not done the job of talking about the Iraq programme sufficiently well. The programme is a remarkable achievement, cited by the Foreign Secretary today, and the UN should be far more up front in talking about it and giving credit to its achievements.

That leads me to my other major concern, which is our humanitarian preparedness in the unfortunate event of a war. If there is a war—every Member of Parliament hopes that there will not be a war; that is common ground between us—it is inevitable that the Iraq programme and that type of humanitarian relief for the people of Iraq will end. We all know how desperately poor the international community's response to the 1990 to 1992 Gulf crisis was: hundreds of thousands of people suffered unnecessarily because we did not think through the humanitarian response to that crisis.

There is a strong view held with great sincerity by many UN member states that to prepare for a humanitarian crisis is to acknowledge the inevitability of war. I do not accept that argument. To prepare for the worst is not to wish for the worst, and we should prepare for the worst. Indeed, that may have the incidental advantage of reinforcing in Saddam Hussein's mind the seriousness of the international community's purpose. Please let us do more to prepare for the humanitarian consequences of a war that none of us want.

There is no doubt that the credibility of the United Nations has been greatly enhanced in the past few weeks and months. That is greatly to be welcomed. I share some of the reservations that have been expressed about the American Government's attitude towards Israel and about the need for even-handedness. However, I remind the House that—the right hon. Member for Swansea, East made this point—Syria voted for the resolution. That is a remarkable achievement. We had the privilege of meeting a representative of the Syrian Government when we were in New York and it is clear why Syria voted in the way that it did. The Arab states themselves view Saddam Hussein as a very serious threat. Members of the House should not forget the unanimity behind the resolution when they cast their votes on the Liberal amendment or on the main motion.

Sadly, I fear that war is very likely. Perhaps it will be further off than some people had originally imagined, but I am not optimistic that Saddam Hussein will ultimately comply with the terms of a very tough resolution. However, there is a substantially enhanced chance that any such military action will take place on a multilateral basis. The mood in the United Nations and the Security Council is clear, resolute and firm. They understand what they have signed up to in resolution 1441. That is to be welcomed. There will be disagreements over what is meant by a material breach, and there will be matters of interpretation. However, all the members of the Security Council understand the seriousness of the situation that they now face.

We know that war is not an attractive or an easy option, and no one should wish for war. I do not think that anyone does. We know all the options open to Saddam Hussein in the event of a war. For example, he could effectively take the people of Baghdad hostage as the price for negotiations with the international community. It would be a bloody and awful business.

I saw a sign on the wall of an office in the United Nations. It did not belong to the current occupant of the office but to a previous one. It read:

> "More than at any other time in human history,
> humanity faces a crossroads.
> One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness,
> the other to total extinction.
> Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

That rather light-hearted but serious interpretation is relevant now. There are no easy choices in situations such as this. Those who wish that Saddam Hussein would deal with the situation himself or would miraculously disappear seem to believe that there is an easy path out of this tremendously difficult situation. I am afraid that they are whistling in the dark. I hope against hope that there will be no war, but the world must grapple with evil and not avert its gaze or pass by on the other side.

7.32 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): In the summer, I expressed serious misgivings about the possibility of military action against Iraq. I was extremely worried that unilateral action would be taken by the United States with the support of the United Kingdom. I was also extremely worried about the consequences for Israel and Palestine, as a result of Saddam trying to involve Israel in any war that might take place. However, it has to be said that the latter worry continues while the former does not.

Just as I did in 1990–91, I have looked for a Security Council policy. I was not looking for the policy of the British Government—Labour now, Conservative in 1990—but for a clear United Nations policy that I could support. That is the only way in which world order can be maintained. Therefore, what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, has achieved has changed the position from the summer. We now have a unanimous United Nations Security Council resolution.

The resolution is not a brief expression of opinion, but sets a programme and timetable. It provides trip wires that make it clear that at the end of the process—if that process is followed through right to the end—is military action. What is important is not so much the fact that it is a unanimous resolution of the Security Council, although that is greatly to be welcomed, but the fact that it has been accepted by the Government of Iraq. If they had rejected the resolution, that would have created an immediate danger of war. However, once they accepted the resolution, they accepted its content and its consequences. That being so, it is impossible for anyone now to say that, should military action take place at the end of the process, that would be somehow springing a trap on the Iraqi Government. The moment on 8 November that the resolution was passed and the moment the following week that the Iraqi Government accepted it, they accepted what would happen if they did not comply with it.

I disagree with those hon. Members who believe that the position is obscure. It could not be plainer. There is a timetable, and it moves forward by stages, if necessary,

until the beginning of March. If, by the beginning of March, Saddam Hussein has not complied with the resolution, the United Nations gets a report from the inspectors and the Security Council automatically convenes. We do not have to ask for it to convene; the resolution tells it to do so and to receive a report. If that report is unfavourable, the Security Council resolution talks about the serious consequences that can follow. Those serious consequences will not be a surprise to us in the House or a surprise to those in Baghdad. Baghdad has gone down this road before. It was warned of serious consequences but it believed that they would not be imposed. They were imposed, so nobody can now be in doubt about what would take place if the resolution were defied at any point.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has performed a service not simply to the House, but to world order by the way in which he has influenced the United States President. It is perfectly clear in my mind that this approach was not the preference of the United States President, and it certainly was not the preference of Cheney, Rumsfeld and Rice—the three witches of this particular confrontation. Toil and trouble is what they are looking for. Powell, who had been sidelined, has been listened to, and I am sure that, to a considerable degree, that is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

I go further. When my right hon. Friend spoke on these issues at the Labour party conference, he built into his approach the need to have implementation of Security Council resolutions on Israel and Palestine as well. He talked about action before the end of this year and, even given the fact that the Israelis will have an election in January, that is the next part of the programme that he should follow. It is intolerable that the Israeli Government should refuse to sit down and talk with the Palestinians.

Of course, the Israelis suffer from utterly grievous terrorist acts, which are to be condemned and which have the most appalling human consequences. However, the fact that they are suffering from such acts is no excuse for them not to participate in talks. Indeed, some terrorist acts, such as the one on the Jewish settlement a few days ago, are a direct consequence of the Israeli Government's policies in maintaining settlements and exposing their soldiers—something that Yitzhak Rabin hated—to being killed to protect people who should not be there.

I know that the situation is difficult. Not only does Israel have its worst Prime Minister ever, but it has its worst Defence Minister and Foreign Minister ever. That does not mean that we should slacken in our efforts; indeed, it makes it much more important that we continue in them. It is all very well to say that trigger-happy Israeli soldiers are not killing people deliberately, but they are still killing them. We need an overall settlement because the middle east will not settle down unless both Iraq and Israel are forced to comply—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.40 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I am always concerned when people call for absolute clarity or precision in foreign affairs. Unfortunately, foreign affairs tend to be a messy business. Although there are fixed points in the process, we can have no illusions about the character of the Iraqi regime and there is little doubt that there is either the capacity or the propensity for it to build weapons of mass destruction. I also hope that there is little doubt that the effects of a prolonged and large conflict in that country would be disastrous not only in Iraq but in the region as a whole.

The circumstances in which the elements come together change as circumstances of the international community change. There is a world of difference between unilateral posturing and a unanimous resolution of the Security Council, and between a material breach as defined by one or two members of the Security Council and an action agreed by all. I was greatly influenced by the visit to the United Nations to which the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) referred, which gave me the opportunity to talk to some of the representatives of the permanent five and the elected 10 on the Security Council. I concur entirely with the view that Sir Jeremy Greenstock has done an excellent job on behalf of the British Government and the British people in the United Nations. The Foreign Secretary has also played a significant part.

Members of the Security Council have passed a unanimous resolution, which they believe re-establishes the primacy of international law and the United Nations. That is important. They believe that they have achieved, at least pro tem, an effective containment of Iraq and, in the long term, its disarmament. Let us hope that that is the case. They also believe that they have perhaps thwarted the unilateralists in the United States Administration and put them back in their box while strengthening the position of the State Department and, by extension, Secretary Colin Powell. That is also welcome.

I intervened on the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) to highlight the fact that it is clear that the Security Council supported the resolution on the basis of no automaticity. The understanding was that the issue would return to the Security Council, as the letter from the Chinese, French and Russian permanent representatives makes clear. It is also clear that they received assurances to that effect from the British and the American representatives. It is right that the issue should return to the Security Council. The argument that it is possible to set aside the decision or the future considerations of the United Nations Security Council if someone does not agree with them is the argument of the vigilante through the ages: if the law does not agree with me, I will decide what is the law. I do not accept that argument, nor does my party.

I strongly formed the view that Hans Blix enjoys the confidence of members of the United Nations. He deserves that confidence. He demonstrated to us his independence, integrity, intelligence and understanding of his role. The same applied to Mohammad el-Baradei, who represented the International Atomic Energy Agency. They have a difficult role to perform. Their position would be strengthened by the addition of more inspectors from the Arab world to the ranks of the UNMOVIC inspectorate. I hope that the British Government press others to provide that.

[Mr. David Heath]

The process will be long. It will take time just to baseline—or re-baseline—on nuclear weapons. It is no good the Americans or anyone else getting impatient with the process if it does not provide them with the evidence to which they think they are entitled. It is clear that the process must be: first, to receive reports from the independent inspectors: secondly, to have an assessment by the Security Council; and, thirdly, to make a decision on the correct course of action.

If I have a concern it is that no genuine post-conflict analysis of what will happen in Iraq if military action takes place has been demonstrated in this country or elsewhere. In terms of contingency planning, I echo what the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire said. We know that military planning is going ahead apace. That may be necessary to strengthen the position of the United Nations Security Council. I also want humanitarian planning, although I understand the reluctance not to do that openly. If there is a major conflict in Iraq, a massive number of displaced persons will try to find their way to Kuwait and the Gulf states. It is right to plan for that now. The Pentagon may not like it, but I hope that the British Government do and will start to think in those terms. We need to think about maintaining Basra as an available port for humanitarian support and a safe haven for displaced persons in the event of a conflict taking place.

My conclusion is still that military action is likely to be the wrong option. The war will not be carried out from 50,000 ft. It cannot be subcontracted to the Northern Alliance or anyone else. This time it will mean American troops and, if we join in, British troops on the ground in an unpleasant action. It will have serious consequences for the region. The domino effect could be disastrous. It is literally a matter of last resort for us to act in that way and the decision can be made only by the Security Council, as the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) provides.

I do not understand some of the points made in criticism of the amendment. We ask for two things: the first is that the matter be referred back to the Security Council, and the Foreign Secretary agrees with that; the second is that the House decide whether young men and women are sent on behalf of this country to offer their lives in support of the United Nations or the British position. That is a decision for a sovereign Parliament to take. It does not put anyone's life at risk. I hope that even those who have doubts will not take the preposterous position adopted by some and will support us in the Lobby.

7.48 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I support UN Security Council resolution 1441. It is important to understand why it is necessary to undertake the inspections and why there might be a need for military action. We know that Iraq started two major wars, one against Iran in the 1980s and the other against Kuwait in 1991. The Iraqi Government face international sanctions and the threat of war. They have chemical and biological weapons, of which the former has been used on tens of thousands of their civilians, both in experiments on them and to murder them, and they are close to developing their own nuclear weapons, which they would not hesitate to use if they were allowed to do so.

The Government's 50-page dossier highlighted various concerns. As I said, Iraq has military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, which it has used even against its own population. Saddam is just one or two years away from building a nuclear weapon, and if he managed to obtain weapons-grade material from abroad, chemical and nuclear programmes would be well funded by the illicit earnings of the Iraqi regime.

Iraq has tried covertly to acquire technology and materials that could be used in the production of nuclear weapons, and it has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons, some of which can be deployed within 45 minutes of an order to use them. It retains weapons from pre-Gulf war stocks, and remains capable of producing chemical agents such as mustard gas, tabun, sarin, cyclosarin and VX. It still has a missile programme, producing missiles with ranges of 650 km, and is developing weapons that will go even further. We cannot allow that to continue.

We are coming to the end of a long and tortuous process. On 28 February 1991, the Gulf war ended, leaving Iraq subject to UN sanctions. Six and a half years later, in October 1997, the Iraqi Government started to obstruct United States weapons inspectors before allowing UN weapons inspectors to enter a year later in November 1998. A month later, they were ordered out of the country after UNSCOM chief Richard Butler reported that Iraq was not co-operating. A year later, in December 1999, UNSCOM was replaced by UNMOVIC and Iraq again rejected the resolution. Three years later, Iraq has finally accepted resolution 1441—11 years after the Gulf war ended and five years after the first weapons inspectors were rejected.

What will happen now? I have listened with interest to the arguments by Labour colleagues and Opposition Members. Iraq has until 8 December to declare its chemical, biological, nuclear and missile programmes. Inspections, as we know, are just days away and the first progress report will be written within 60 days of their commencement. Let us hope that Iraq co-operates fully and declares everything to the inspectors. The consequences of not doing so, as resolution 1441 euphemistically says, will be "serious". US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said:

> "It won't be a world war III as the US military is vastly more powerful than 10 years ago at the time of the Gulf war, while Iraq's capabilities have declined."

The ground combat in the Gulf war lasted just 100 hours. Mr. Rumsfeld also said:

> "I can't tell you if the use of force in Iraq today would last five days, five weeks or five months, but it certainly isn't going to last any longer than that."

I noted with interest that the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs asked what would happen at the end of such a war. Saddam would almost certainly be toppled as the Americans took control of Baghdad. In that scenario, there are two possible outcomes that are not mutually exclusive. The first would involve an occupation plan, with Iraq governed by an American military commander, in the way that Japan was governed after the second world war. In the

second, the country would disintegrate into three parts, with the Kurds taking control in the north, the Shia Muslims in the south and the Sunni Muslims in the centre. Saddam Hussein must be aware of both possible outcomes—all the more reason why there should be full co-operation with the inspectors and why resolution 1441 is a chance for the Iraqi regime to follow a new path. The UN has shown that it is willing to make itself relevant in the face of threats that confront us in the 21st century. Now the Iraqi regime must prove itself by complying with resolution 1441. If it does not, its future will not be in its own hands.

7.54 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I congratulate the Government and the United States Administration on once again confounding the critics, many of whom have spoken today and have predicted that they would act recklessly, precipitately, and without the authority of international law. Those critics are wrong—resolution 1441 is proof of that. I am happy, as an Opposition Member, to pay tribute to the work of the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister in securing the resolution.

Behind some of today's contributions is an attitude and prejudice towards the United States that simply cannot go unchallenged in the Chamber. First, there is a view, exemplified by the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), the first Government Back Bencher to contribute to the debate, that the US Administration are a bunch of cowboys who, in the words of the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson), cannot wait to bomb the living daylights out of Iraqis—*[Interruption.]* I see that that view has support from Government Members, but it is a patronising attitude, and was expressed in a milder, slightly more sophisticated way by the Liberal Democrats, who said that only wiser British counsel has cooled the American hotheads. It is a modern version of Harold Wilson's idea that we are Athens to America's Rome, but it is a patronising approach both to one of the most sophisticated foreign policy communities in the world and the US Administration. It is wrong and has not been borne out by events during the past year.

I remind Members that there was no knee-jerk reaction to the events of 11 September—perhaps the greatest provocation that any western democracy has experienced in the past 50 years—and that the Americans worked with the international community to build a coalition against international terrorism. They were then were supported by other countries' troops in prosecuting action in Afghanistan. There was no precipitate action against Iraq and there has been no unilateral action of the kind that was predicted month after month in the Chamber.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The hon. Gentleman may be right in his analysis of the American defence and intelligence community, but does he accept that reports authored by Dick Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz dating back to 1998, including the report produced by the Project for the New American Century, make it clear that regime change in Iraq has been part of the policy of people who now advise on and set foreign policy for the American Government?

Mr. Osborne: Regime change was also the policy of the Clinton Administration—I did not hear the hon. Gentleman make the same criticisms of that Administration. People like Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and even Richard Perle, who spoke in the House a week ago, are some of the most intelligent and sophisticated people in the international community—*[Interruption.]* Members may disagree, but that is the case. Those people are extremely sophisticated and intelligent. The idea that they are a bunch of cowboys and rednecks is a misunderstanding of the way in which the US Administration operates, and beggars belief.

Jeremy Corbyn: Would the hon. Gentleman be referring to the same President who talked about wanting bin Laden dead or alive and an "axis of evil"? Would he be referring to the regime that holds international law in contempt by refusing to sign the convention establishing the International Criminal Court?

Mr. Osborne: I am talking about the American President who, immediately after 11 September, made a well-judged decision—not to act pre-emptively, as some Members, including probably the hon. Gentleman, predicted, but to work with the international community. He has done more work with the UN than the previous American President ever did, and has not launched strikes against Iraq to get himself out of domestic political problems as his predecessor did. He is trying to build an international coalition. The United States deserves support from the international community. For 50 years, it has, at great cost and risk, defended the freedom of western Europe. In times of enormous provocation, during crises in Berlin in the late 1940s and in 1961, it put its head on the block and defended countries such as Germany. The German Chancellor now says that he wants nothing to do with the United States. For the first time in NATO's history, article 5 has been invoked, and NATO countries have agreed that the attack on 11 September was an attack on all members. When it comes to the crunch, however, there is little support for the US from other European Governments. As a British Member of Parliament I am proud that a British Government, albeit one whom I do not usually support, have put their head above the parapet and supported the United States. I note that other countries, such as Australia, which is not even a member of NATO, have done something similar.

The second presumption in many contributions today is that it would never be right to take pre-emptive military action against Iraq or any other dictator. That argument takes several forms—for example, "Why now? Why not wait? Iraq is not a threat to us today." That is the argument for appeasement down the ages. It is always a persuasive argument and many Governments have fallen victim to it, including Conservative Governments. However, it always makes matters worse to avoid the threat now in the hope that it will go away.

There are parallels with the way in which we have dealt with international terrorism during the past 20 or 30 years. A very persuasive book by Alan Dershowitz, one of the United States' leading legal authorities, entitled "Why Terrorism Works", was published this month. He makes a powerful and persuasive case that the root cause of terrorism is not poverty or injustice, as

[Mr. Osborne]

there are many people in poverty and many who suffer injustice who do not resort to terrorism. The root cause of terrorism, he argues, and I agree, is that terrorism works for the people who use it. It advances their cause, brings publicity to what they do, achieves their ends and, more often than not, gives them a seat at the negotiating table.

Ever since the first international terrorist act in 1968, when a plane was hijacked by the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the international community has appeased terrorists, bought them off, released them from jail and given them top seats at the negotiating table. We cannot allow the same approach today to international terror. We cannot allow such an approach, whether it applies to international terrorists, al-Qaeda, suicide bombers in Israel or rogue states such as Iraq. The United States, with the support of the Prime Minister, has led the way in strengthening the resolve of the international community. It has done so with my support and the support of the Government, and I hope that the motion is evidence of that. I support it entirely.

8.1 pm

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): Given all the talent in evidence in the Chamber, I am grateful to be called. I was amused by the contribution that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne). Does he recall that the wonderful and sophisticated country that he so admires is the same country which, under a previous Administration, succoured Saddam Hussein as a trusted ally and built him up into the demagogue that he became? The hon. Gentleman should reconsider his analysis.

I congratulate the Government and my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister on restraining the sophisticated Government of America, so that the matter was put in the hands of the United Nations, which is where it should be. That gives the entire international community a fresh chance to establish the rule of international law, which has always been a patchy process and has for too much of the time depended on which state or group of states was the most powerful, rather than on the rights of any case. That is why resolution 1441 is a considerable achievement. It is very important that it be honoured.

The resolution must be honoured on both sides. Although there is a mandatory obligation on Iraq to conform to 1441, there must also be a moral obligation on all Security Council members to take careful account of Iraq's response to 1441. If Iraq is seen by Hans Blix and his team of inspectors to have conformed with 1441 when they make their final report to the Security Council, that has to be the end of the story. That will have done a tremendous amount for the establishment of international law.

We are all uncomfortably aware that some loud voices have been raised among the sophisticates in Washington who clearly do not believe that Iraq has any intention of confirming to 1441, which is a prescriptive, strict and demanding resolution. We can all think of commentators close to the American President who do not believe that Saddam will conform and who probably do not want Saddam to conform. They will gladly seize on any excuse to say that he has substantially breached the resolution and use that as an opportunity for promoting unilateral action. That would be extremely reprehensible. It would be taking a match to the powder keg that is the middle east. Should that happen, Britain must have no part of it.

If we are to have true international law, it must be seen to be even-handed and to be upheld by all communities. It is a fair criticism, which I am happy to hear made tonight by Opposition Members, that the United States has not been even-handed in its approach to international law. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the middle east. If the United States were as enthusiastic about the implementation of resolution 242 in Israel and Palestine, we would be getting somewhere.

Earlier this year our Prime Minister promised a fresh impetus to try and restart peace negotiations in the middle east between Israel and Palestine. We should not wait for the hiatus of the coming Israeli general election. The process should be restarted now and the Prime Minister should make it clear to the President that if he is looking for British support anywhere along the line, the political price that he needs to pay is to put some American muscle into the Palestine peace process. As it is, the United States is simply arming Israel with a virtually unlimited supply of weaponry and it is condoning the most incredible illegal acts by the Israeli Government.

So long as that festering sore exists, there will never be true peace between the world's enormous Islamic community and—for want of a better description—the Christian west. It is hardly surprising that the Christian west is looked on with distrust, which will always lead to unrest throughout the world.

It is vital that we direct our focus through the United Nations. Although I slightly regret the fact that a Liberal amendment has been selected, so that the Liberal Democrats are seen to take the moral high ground—which is a bit bogus, but never mind—the principles expressed in the amendment are correct and unarguable. The simpler amendments that call for a vote in Parliament would have been adequate because they would have taken account of the first part and left the Foreign Secretary enough room for manoeuvre in the event of blocking action in the Security Council. None the less, the Liberal amendment is right in principle and it is consistent with the main Government motion, so at the end of the day—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time allocation.

8.9 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I refer hon. Members to the amendment tabled by Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party, which seeks to clarify the situation in much the same way as the Liberal Democrat amendment.

Despite the complete unacceptability of Saddam Hussein's regime in any right thinking forum, there is no provision in international law to enforce regime change. Indeed, not only is there no provision, but it appears that regime change would be directly in conflict with resolution 637, which confirms

"the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Iraq."

It would therefore be astonishing if such provision were used as the justification for any impending aggression against Iraq. If the US and the UK acted unilaterally and without UN sanction, they would be acting outside the law. They have said that if resolution 1441 had not been adopted, there might well be a case for unilateral action. The Prime Minister has not ruled that out and on several occasions we have heard remarks similar to what the Foreign Secretary said even on 7 November:

"we would very much prefer decisions to be taken within the Security Council . . . we have always made it clear that within international law we have to reserve our right to take military action, if that is required, within the existing charter and the existing body of UN Security Council resolutions, if, for example, a subsequent resolution were to be vetoed."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 2002; Vol. 392, c. 435.]

That leads us to consider under what rule of international law the use of force against Iraq could be justified. I should like to refer to the opinion given by Rabinder Singh, QC, and Charlotte Kilroy, dated 15 November 2002, a copy of which I was kindly sent by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In referring to the right within international law to use force, the Foreign Secretary seems to rely on Security Council resolution 1441, the existing body of UN Security Council resolutions and the UN charter and/or customary international law. However, the opinion states:

"The use of force against Iraq would not be justified under international law unless:

(a) Iraq mounted a direct attack on the United Kingdom or one of its allies and that ally requested the United Kingdom's assistance; or

(b) an attack by Iraq on the United Kingdom or one of its allies was imminent and could be averted in no way other than by the use of force; or

(c) the United Nations Security Council authorised the use of force in clear terms."

Clearly, that situation has not arisen, and there appears to be a difference of opinion about whether resolution 1441 authorises the use of force. The proponents of military action suggest that it might do so, but in my submission it does not authorise any member state to use force.

Previous Security Council resolutions, such as resolution 678, have adopted clear and strong language to authorise the use of force. States are authorised to use "all necessary means" or take "all necessary measures". Those are not merely issues of semantics. Undoubtedly, the consideration of such words took a lot of time when resolution 1441 was discussed. It is known that the UK and US sought an express authorisation, but such authorisation is manifestly lacking in the final wording. Security Council permanent members Russia, France and China made their position clear: they did not want the resolution to authorise force.

Instead, resolution 1441 provides at paragraphs 4, 11 and 12 that, in the event of non-compliance, the matter will be referred to the Security Council, which will convene to consider the need for full compliance and so on. That clearly means that it is for the Security Council to decide on any further action that might be taken against Iraq. Would it not be extraordinary if the UK and the US, having failed to obtain an express authorisation for the use of force, having incorporated minute changes to the final draft whose sole purpose was to exclude the possibility of automaticity and hidden triggers and to preserve the role of the Security Council, and having publicly agreed in their explanation of the vote for adopting resolution 1441 that there was no such implied authorisation for the use of force, nevertheless regarded the resolution as providing such authorisation?

Of course, the UN charter refers to implied authorisation for conflicts. The implied authorisation arguments of the US would permit states to make unilateral decisions on the use of force, but that is exactly what chapter VII and the charter as a whole are designed to avoid. Furthermore, it is only the Security Council that has power under article 39 to determine whether there has been a breach of the peace or a threat to peace, and to decide whether to take action under articles 41 and 42. It is only with an express delegation of that power that a member state may use force against another member state to force it comply with a Security Council resolution. Professor Colin Warbrick, an expert in this matter, stated in a recent opinion:

"I am particularly sceptical of claims that the failure of diplomacy justifies resort to force 'as a last resort'."

He develops his argument, but there is no time for me to quote the rest of it. None the less, I commend that opinion to the House.

Some reports have suggested that Government officials are asserting that resolution 1441 contains no language that explicitly rules out the use of force, so force would be covered and the UK and the US would not be handcuffed in any way. It is unnecessary to insert wording into a resolution expressly requiring member states to obtain an authorisation to use force when the charter makes it clear that the only exception is the inherent right of self-defence, which is dealt with in article 51. On the self-defence argument, the dossier submitted to the House on 24 September will surely be recorded as one of the least persuasive documents in recent political history. Rather than persuade opponents of the necessity of military action, that threadbare document assisted the case against war. Furthermore, it assisted many waverers in this place and the general public in the view that the imminence of a threat was a mere perception and not a reality. In that regard, I pay tribute to CND for its tireless efforts to bring common sense to bear on the issue and for its invaluable briefings.

I trust that the Government will await referral of the weapons inspectors' reports to the Security Council and not allow themselves to be part of an illegal attack on Iraq, with all the awful repercussions that might ensue.

8.17 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): When I heard the speech of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), in which he extolled the virtues of President Bush, I thought to myself, "Come back, Neil Hamilton, all is forgiven."

I want to refer to two groups of people in relation to the issue of possible military action against Iraq. The first are those who will suffer most as a result of military action. They are the sort of people whom I saw last May when I visited hospitals in Basra. I saw cancer patients, including a pretty 25-year-old girl, who had a huge tumour around her neck that made her head almost

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

double its normal size. A tiny child sat on her bed. She will never see the child grow up; indeed, she is probably already dead. Many others are in the same position. Incidence of cancer has increased by 10 per cent. in the areas where bombs that contained depleted uranium were dropped.

Our troops have suffered from what we call Gulf war syndrome. The number of children who are born deformed has increased. The photographs have to be seen to be believed. Leukaemia has also increased. That is the reality of war. When people, especially those who have never experienced war and do not, for example, remember the second world war, talk lightly of bombing Iraq, it makes me freeze. They do not understand what war means. I am not a pacifist and I accept that sometimes we have to defend ourselves. We had to do that against Nazi Germany. Saddam Hussein, evil monster though he may be, has not the capability of an Adolf Hitler. It is nonsense to claim that he has.

The sanctions that have been imposed on Iraq have not weakened Saddam Hussein but they have hurt the people with whom, we claim, we have no argument. How often have I heard Foreign Secretaries say, "We have no argument with the people of that country", when we are about to bomb it? Yet the sort of people I saw are affected. I wish that my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister would arrange to see for themselves the reality of war. They have never experienced it, but they should go and see what they are letting people in for.

The bombing did not stop in 1991. It continued in the so-called no-fly zones, which no UN resolution sanctions. Sometimes people cite resolution 688, but it does not refer to no-fly zones. They are not covered by any UN Security Council resolution.

Let us consider the second group of people, who will be most pleased if we bomb Iraq. It is a secular state, which is not administered by extreme Islamists, and those who will perceive bombing Iraq as marvellous are therefore the members of al-Qaeda. We should fight the genuine international terrorists. Saddam Hussein does not threaten us through the London Underground or on our street corners, but that applies to al-Qaeda.

Mr. George Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wareing: I respect my hon. Friend, but I am sure that he understands that I have only a short time in which to speak.

Al-Qaeda must be gloating. The leaders of Arab countries may support President Bush in his aggressive war, but we can rest assured that, when photographs of civilians being torn to pieces by American bombs are shown in, for example, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman, the masses of Arab people will stir. The genuine threat to the middle east is not the madman in Baghdad—perhaps he is not so mad, since he wants to survive—but President Bush and the hawks around him. I call them the Cheney gang and I fear them most. Most people in the middle east do not like Saddam Hussein, but they will stand by the civilians who will suffer if Bush and his hawks get their way.

The hawks are still there. Richard Perle has been in London. Heaven knows how anyone could describe him as sophisticated. If he is sophisticated, the word applies to many other people who would not normally register in that category. Genghis Khan was probably sophisticated, but I do not believe that we would want him for an ally.

The Foreign Secretary and his colleagues should consider carefully before they appease the United States Administration under President Bush. I am against that because, as Nelson Mandela said, that Government are as dangerous as any other Administration in the world. The sooner the decent people of America, of whom there are so many, are able to elect a President who is not a "moron"—as one Canadian Minister has called Bush—who knows where Iraq is, and who has some ideas behind him, the better it will be for all of us and for the people of Iraq.

8.24 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): It is a pleasure to follow the trenchant views of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), who brings a refreshing reality to the Chamber in the context of the realities of war. Although I cannot agree with all his views on the American presidency, I am fascinated to hear his insight into what war actually does to people. I am grateful to him for teeing me up for what I am about to say.

I rise to support UN resolution 1441, and I would like to pay tribute to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), who talked about preparation for war. That will be the only way to make deterrence work, and to avoid violence. I believe that we can avoid violence, as long as we are realistic about the dangers that lie ahead.

I entirely agree with comments made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby about the enemy being not only Iraq but international terrorism. The Government must take a firm grip of the preparations for the attacks that are bound to fall on this country as the path to war becomes more tortuous and peace becomes more difficult to preserve. The Government's cack-handed handling of the recent threats from al-Qaeda illustrate this point well. Since the start of Ramadan, there have been more than 30 attacks world wide, and this weekend saw a pulse of activity across the world in which several people died. Yet, until recently, the Government have been happy, like an ostrich, to keep their head firmly in the sand.

Dr. Palmer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Patrick Mercer: I would rather not, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

The population is not stupid. I shall quote "superwoman" Nicola Horlick in this morning's *Financial Times*:

> "The FTSE could easily be 3000. If there was a terrorist attack tomorrow, the market would be at 3000."

People are expecting this sort of trouble, and these kinds of difficulties. We must, however, be realistic, and the Government must prepare us. An apposite point at the moment is that we live with the possibility of fire every day. Fire is a reality of life, and we prepare for it. Just outside the Chamber there are fire extinguishers; we know what to do in the event of a fire. Furthermore, we have lived with terrorism for 30 years in Northern Ireland, and we have

come to terms with it. I say to the Government that, if we are to deter Saddam Hussein, and to deter violence, and if peace is to have a chance, we must be effectively prepared for the worst eventuality.

I want to concentrate on the forces that are available to achieve that deterrence. I disagree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who talked about the nasty shooting war—I hope he will forgive my paraphrasing him—that is likely to happen in Iraq should war break out. I do not believe that that is the Government's intention at all. I believe that they intend to do what was done in Afghanistan and in Kosovo, which is to fight the opening phases of the war with a small number of special forces, aircraft and submarines, and to avoid a shooting war if at all possible. I believe that they intend to commit British troops only when a shooting war has finished.

I would like to remind the Government of a couple of quotes from the Prime Minister. He said that he would be willing to pay a "blood price", and that we would be alongside the United States "when the shooting starts". He also said:

"At moments of crisis"

the United States

"does not need to know simply that you are giving general expressions of support and sympathy."

This comes from a man who has never seen war or heard a shot fired in anger, yet is about to commit young men and young women into harm's way, without understanding the full implications. He does not understand that the "blood price" will not be paid by him. If the Government mean to stand shoulder to shoulder with their ally, and to be there when a shooting war breaks out, they must honour those words and not be hypocritical.

Like everybody else who has been there, I do not want a war. There could be no better news for this country's soldiers, sailors and airmen than the fact that war will not start, but the sure and certain way to undermine the coalition's credibility is to ensure that British forces are not there when the shooting war starts and that they have nothing but hollow rhetoric to back up those phrases about the blood price.

In 1939 and 1940, Britain was fighting a phoney war and our enemies took the propaganda advantage of describing the Government as fighting to the last Frenchman. I hope that, this time, Mr. Blair understands what the commitment must be.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should know by now that he has to refer to Members not by name, but by constituency.

Patrick Mercer: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that, this time, the Prime Minister understands that when he says something, he has to back it up and that the coalition must not be undermined by allowing our enemies the opportunity to say that the Prime Minister will fight to the last American.

8.31 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (St. Helens, South): The aim of the resolution is perfectly clear and unequivocal, and it gives Saddam Hussein every opportunity for peace and to avoid military intervention. It is not about President Bush or the Prime Minister, and the comments of the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) do the debate a great disservice. By and large, it has been excellently conducted.

The only obstacle to a peaceful resolution is Saddam Hussein, through obfuscation and deliberately misleading the weapons inspectors. It has taken most of the past 14 months to get to this position—one that many thought we could not reach. It took 11 September to stir the international community into facing the dangers of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

I beg to disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby, (Mr. Wareing), as I do not believe that we face a choice between a hierarchy of dangers—either winning the war against terrorism or dealing with Saddam Hussein. Those are part of the same strategy for security, which, to be successful, requires not unilateral action, but a global coalition against the prospect of catastrophic terror. That is why Iraq is central to the strategy for security and dealing with global terrorism.

The problem that Saddam Hussein represents is not any form of conventional military threat—by all estimates, he is a great deal weaker than in 1991—but the danger he poses both to his own people and through the laboratories that are working to produce chemical and biological weapons. They are probably working to produce nuclear weapons, if they have any weapons grade plutonium. We know that not only from our own intelligence, but from people who have defected and from what he has done to his own people. We shall soon know from the weapons inspectors more of what they believe.

We should be confident and optimistic that resolution 1441 represents a huge step forward in the international community's work. It recognises the genuine threat posed by weapons of mass destruction and the need to fight that with multilateral, not unilateral, work. Multilateralism has emerged over unilateral action. My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) referred to the UN's moral authority and he was right to refer to the importance of Saddam being cowed by military threat, but who the military threat is is even more significant. Who provides that military threat against him is most important—more important than even the threat itself.

The UN today looks much stronger than it did six months ago, when it very nearly resembled a beleaguered League of Nations. As we sit here, most of us feel content with the progress we have made; but there is a terrible irony in this position. It is the irony that if Saddam complies, the UN, through its resolution, may well have become his protector. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) raised some interesting questions in that regard. Saddam's regime will be disarmed of weapons of mass destruction one way or another; the question is, will he continue?

The Iraqi people, not only witnesses but victims, silenced and butchered by this tyrant, will continue to live in terror indefinitely as helpless prisoners and victims of the tyranny. There is no military power in the Gulf region that can overthrow Saddam, as Vietnam did in ousting Pol Pot. If Saddam remains, complying with the resolution, our victory may be more Pyrrhic than we think.

[Mr. Shaun Woodward]

We may criticise Bush for turning his attention on Saddam only because of 11 September. We may say that the President always intended to intervene, but has used those events as an excuse. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) made clear, of course the President is no supporter of Saddam. The problem is that no action, of sorts, constitutes support for him. We should also be careful in criticising misguided actions by past western Administrations, including our deliberate dealings with Iraq along with the United States. We should not let those become justification for taking no action. We must distinguish between the faults of liberal democracies, of which we are one, and the incurable evil of tyrants like Saddam.

The Opposition have asked a number of questions about the resolution. They have asked what would constitute material breaches. I think that that is pretty clear in the resolution. We have critical dates before us. Only if Saddam tells the truth will the regime remain a tyranny unchanged. If he is lying, the material regime will be changed. It will be disarmed, and Saddam may well go too. In truth, who will mourn his departure? The consequences, however, will reveal whether our global coalition acts only out of united self-interest, or works genuinely towards a greater humanitarian goal.

Military intervention would certainly lead to the disarming of Saddam, but it would also lead to a series of consequences for the people of Iraq, both during and after the intervention. Our last engagement in the Gulf was hardly covered in moral glory, given our hasty withdrawal from the battlefield, leaving hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq to endure a continuing axis of despair. There is a huge difference between our motivation now and our motivation then, but the contrast between the despair and poverty that people endure and what they see here contributes to a deep distrust of our actions now. In the huge contrast between those lives reside the roots of a clash of civilisations.

As President Clinton recently observed, we cannot seriously build the world that we want with a security-only strategy. "Prevent and punish" is not enough. We need a world with more partners and fewer terrorists. As General Marshall said at the end of the second world war,

"We ought to take a little of this money and make a world with fewer enemies and more friends".

Let us bear in mind the humanitarian crisis that may follow our actions. Turkey is already saying things that should worry us about what may happen on its borders. The regional governor of south-eastern Turkey said today

"In case of a massive influx, it would be necessary to take measures to keep them away from our border. We have our own experience of 1991 in mind. We naturally do not want it to be repeated."

I ask the Foreign Secretary what steps will be taken to prevent refugees from flowing on to the Turkish borders and being deprived of humanitarian aid in the event of military intervention.

This is a crucial debate. I support the Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

8.39 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) because he raises some interesting points, not least that it is difficult to find any way of disagreeing with the motion. Its most notable facet is what it leaves out. I agree with hon. Members' comments that it is rather bland.

The key point is what happens next. What happens should Iraq fail to comply fully with all the provisions of Security Council resolution 1441? What happens should Iraq be found attempting to conceal weapons of mass destruction? In that context, from evidence that we have seen on the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, it would be folly to depend on the inspectors who have just entered Iraq to prove the lie of concealment. In the previous inspections programme, the UN inspectors were on the verge—literally within days—of giving Iraq and Saddam Hussein a clean bill of health as free from weapons of mass destruction. One of Saddam Hussein's brothers-in-law defected to the west and produced plans of where the particular sites were.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Chidgey: I shall not give way. When I tried to intervene earlier, it was not picked up, so I shall carry on.

We were within days of giving Iraq a clean bill of health. Only through other evidence were we able to prove that we were totally misled. We are advised that, even with the latest techniques that the new inspectors have, it is not possible to detect small quantities of chemical and biological weapons components. When we say "small" in that context, we are talking about 20 tonnes.

Clearly, the strategy of disarming Saddam Hussein is focusing not on the effectiveness of the inspections but on the threat of the scale of the response if Saddam does not reveal all in his catalogue of weapons of mass destruction. To have any credence, that strategy must mean a preparedness for rapid escalation into full-scale military intervention against Saddam Hussein. The Prime Minister said recently in the House and in public that to avoid war we have to be prepared for war, yet all we are debating at the moment is whether

"the Security Council should meet in order to consider the situation and the need for full compliance."

It is the duty of the Government and their Ministers to come to the House to debate the consequences of the likelihood of Iraq's failure to comply with resolution 1441. It is the Government's duty to seek the approval of the House before taking this country to war against Iraq or anyone else—not just when they consider it "appropriate" to come here to seek approval.

It is somewhat disingenuous for the Government to claim that they put our armed forces at risk by giving the House prior notice through debating our intent. I am not a military man but I can work out that for some months we have been building, with our allies the Americans, huge forces on Iraq's boundaries. Saddam Hussein is not stupid. They are not there for no reason. They are there to act and to go to war against him if he fails to comply with the resolution. How much notice does he need of our intentions?

It is a fact that no other western democracy that is a serious military player allows its leader to launch a war without the prior approval of its Parliament. There is no fear in the United States Senate that prior approval puts US forces at risk. Why are we unique in that matter? Is it because we are so used to the standard answer to a difficult parliamentary question that the information is too difficult to compile? Hon. Members will be familiar with that.

The consequences of war against Iraq are far-reaching and long-term, and the stability of the region is at risk, through reaction in the Gulf states, which is likely to be dramatic. Many of the Governments there are at best fragile, and the reaction of Arab and Muslim peoples could result in the overthrow of the Saudi, Jordanian or Egyptian Governments, for example, which would create tremendous problems for our foreign policy objectives. At the very least, there could be extreme repression of mass dissent in those countries.

The problem may not be confined to the Gulf states. There are large Arab and Muslim populations in London, Bradford, Leeds, Paris, Marseille, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. All those people will not take our military action against Iraq casually. Military action is not some quick fix, even if it would remove the threat of weapons of mass destruction. We need to discuss the worldwide consequences of starting a war, however good the justification for it.

We should recognise the impact of any such action on the tens of thousands of young men and women in the Gulf states and elsewhere who are well educated but generally jobless and excluded from economic and social advancement. Is it any wonder that so many are attracted to quasi-religious-inspired terrorism? Would not a war against Iraq create millions more willing recruits to al-Qaeda's evil agenda?

Iraq's failure to comply with 1441 will inevitably mean military action, but that will not be a quick fix. The reactions will challenge global prosperity and security for decades to come. That is why the Government should be debating those issues today, and why it should be for the House to sanction military action against Iraq through a substantive motion.

8.47 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): This debate is obviously welcome and important, and it is good that the role of Parliament and the need for the Prime Minister to seek its approval to take our country into war are at last being discussed. If we took it one stage further, perhaps we could bring the whole operation of the royal prerogative under control, which would indeed be an enormous step forward.

It is a matter of regret, however, that under our parliamentary system only the Speaker can choose the amendments for debate. Without wanting to criticise the Chair, I deeply regret the fact that the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) was not selected for debate, because it would have given some of us an opportunity to express a clear view on the war. As it is, I will support the Liberal amendment, as it provides an opportunity at least to express part of the view that some of us have in opposition to the putative war against Iraq. We are being asked—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should say to the hon. Gentleman that the House entrusts the Speaker with that responsibility, and I do not think that it is something that the House as a whole would want to challenge.

Jeremy Corbyn: I intend no offence whatever to Mr. Speaker. I am merely saying that perhaps the procedures should be re-examined.

The UN resolution came about after weeks if not months of prevarication, arm twisting and negotiation among the five permanent members of the Security Council—the five declared nuclear weapons states, the five who have a power of veto—while the rest of the world looked on.

There are some questions to be asked. If one reflects on the influence and power that have been exercised by the United States in obtaining that 15-nil vote, one recalls that when Yemen had the temerity to vote against a UN resolution in 1991 it promptly lost $75 million of US aid, while a lot of Yemeni citizens were expelled from Saudi Arabia and sent back home. The message from the US was, "Don't mess with us; we are more powerful than the rest of the world."

It might be time to consider the need for changes and improvements and for genuine democracy to be introduced to the United Nations' operations. The 1945 post-second world war settlement is not necessarily the best way to go into the 21st century. The majority of the world's population live not in Europe or north America; they are poor and they live in the southern countries, and they feel that they are spectators at the UN's table.

Dr. Palmer: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: No, I will not give way because of the time limit.

Let us look at what has been done since 11 September last year by a US Administration who, we are told, have practised great restraint and caution in their approach to the world's affairs. I remind the House of the speeches made by the President, particularly the "axis of evil" speech, when he strung together the names of the countries that he could remember quickly and announced that they were all part of an axis of evil. Great fear was felt in those countries and the United States prepared further for war against them.

Since 11 September last year, the United States has succeeded in obtaining bases in every country that surrounds Russia, the Caspian oil basins and the middle east—all the places where, during the cold war, they could not and would not go. The United States has overwhelming military power: it has more bases around the world than at any other time in its history and it is spending more on weapons of mass destruction and the US military machine. Yet the same regime, led by George Bush, is unable to provide health care for 40 million ordinary, poor American citizens.

The American regime that we are told is engaging with the rest of the world refuses to sign up to the International Criminal Court. It refuses to sign the

[Jeremy Corbyn]

Kyoto convention and the President refused even to attend the earth summit in Johannesburg. Yet we are told that this is not a war about resources or oil. I beg to differ. This is not a war about human rights, democracy or peace; it is a war about US commercial control in the middle east. If it were anything else, there would be far greater sanctions against Israel for its numerous breaches of UN resolutions. There would be a far more serious approach to the problems in the region and far less of the bellicose, gung-ho approach of George Bush and his close advisers.

What are we doing here tonight? We have been asked to approve a motion in support of a UN resolution that either does or does not guarantee the right to go to war. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) drew attention to the legal opinion that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has obtained. In summary, it says:

"Security Council Resolution 1441 does not authorise the use of force by member states of the UN."

It goes on:

"The UK would be in breach of international law if it were to use force against Iraq in reliance on Resolution 1441 without a further Security Council Resolution."

Yet under close questioning, American and British representatives have said that they will go back to the Security Council but will not necessarily seek a resolution from it. Likewise, the US ambassador said in his summary that the US would not necessarily seek a further resolution.

Mr. Straw: I never said that we would not necessarily seek a further United Nations resolution. Indeed, I said that we would much prefer to seek such a resolution. Aside from self-defence and other issues, the problem within this framework arises only if there is a clear prospect that the right thing to do is likely to be vetoed by other members of the Security Council, as happened over Kosovo in 1998.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am puzzled by that intervention. It seems to be okay for us to go to the United Nations as long as there is no danger of someone disagreeing with us. We have to do better than that.

On 11 September last year, 3,000 people died in New York. That was appalling, awful and wrong, but since then 8,000 people have died in Afghanistan. None of those deaths could bring back those who died in New York. We are now hell-bent on a new war, yet a new generation has grown up in western Europe, north America and throughout the world that is in favour of peace. Those people realise that peace comes not from military might but from addressing the fundamental causes of war—the thirst for natural resources and the injustices throughout the world.

The people who are meeting, marching and demonstrating for peace represent the fundamental mood of many people throughout the world. They do not support the bombardment of Iraq and they want a peaceful resolution of the conflicts in that region.

8.56 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I welcome both this opportunity to debate resolution 1441 and the fact that the Foreign Secretary said that the House will be able to debate, on a substantive motion, any future commitment of British forces to possible action in Iraq.

Unlike the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), I believe that the debate is really about the present role and function of the UN and what they could be in the future. We have an exciting opportunity to fashion a genuinely new world order in which the rule of international law, as exemplified by the UN, will be enforced throughout the world to a greater degree than occurred in the second half of the 20th century.

We do not want the United Nations to go the way of the League of Nations in 1924 during the Abyssinian campaign. Nor do we want a repeat of the situation between 1933 and 1936 when Germany was rearming. If the international community had taken those events more seriously and backed the actions proposed by the League of Nations in respect of Abyssinia, international law could have been enforced.

We have an opportunity to ensure that the writ of the UN really runs throughout the world. That is an exciting prospect and the House should welcome it.

The question of double standards has rightly been raised by many Members; for example, as regards UN Security Council resolution 242 in respect of Israel. The issue of double standards is important. If we insist on the enforcement of one Security Council resolution, it is right to state that it is wrong to prioritise some resolutions over others. I look forward to the time when the UN takes seriously all the resolutions of its Security Council.

We need to understand the importance of that, especially in the Arab world, when UN resolutions on Israel are not enforced. The UN should pay particular attention to that. However, it is not valid to argue that because some Security Council resolutions have not been honoured, we should not enforce resolution 1441. That is like the arguments that I heard when we were making a humanitarian intervention during the crisis in Rwanda. People asked why we were doing that and said that because it was not possible to intervene everywhere, we should not intervene at all. I do not agree. If we can do some good in some part of the world, we should certainly do so.

I look forward to the day when the UN will have more military forces at its disposal, so that its resolutions can be enforced. It should not have to go cap in hand to the United States, the United Kingdom or any other country to ensure that its resolutions are enforced.

We need to encourage countries to give troops to the UN voluntarily. It needs to have troops at its disposal so that it has the muscle to enforce its resolutions in times of conflict and uncertainty. If we are to have a new world order in which international law is upheld, we need seriously to consider the UN's resources.

Our constituents deserve a clearer explanation of why Britain may be involved in supporting resolution 1441. Is it because of the genocide that has occurred within Iraq's borders for a very long time? There would be a respectable moral case if that were the reason. We all know that hundreds of thousands of people have lost

their lives. Is it because of the need to ensure the safety and security of Iraq's neighbours? We know that a million people were killed in the Iran-Iraq war and that Kuwait was invaded. My brother was taken hostage during that period. Is it because of a direct threat to the United Kingdom? Will missiles be able to reach these shores from Iraq? Will they be fired from a third-party country so that they can reach this country? Or is it because Iraq is backing al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations that could unleash poison gas in the London underground or commit other atrocities in the United Kingdom?

Any or all of those could be perfectly valid reasons for us to commit British troops in support of UN resolution 1441, but our constituents need to know more clearly. The Government are not afraid and are capable of making a case when they want to, but the British people have not heard the explanation to which they are entitled at a serious time such as this.

We have heard about the military planning. It is absolutely essential that proper humanitarian planning starts now for the civilian casualties that will be involved if a conflict takes place in Iraq. We are right to prepare militarily, as we hope that the threat of force will avoid war, but it is absolutely right and imperative—there is a strong moral case for this—to ensure that the humanitarian plans are put in place now. That is not war mongering; it is just acting responsibility, and we need to ensure that that happens. Contingency planning in the United Kingdom is also not in the state that it should be, and the Government need seriously to consider that as well.

9.2 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) is not in his place, as I should like to answer a point that he made. I did not think that I would have to correct a solicitor, but he said that there is no way to achieve regime change using international law without a war. That is simply not true. I note the point made by the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who talked about his brother being taken hostage in Kuwait.

International law must be a weapon used against the Iraqi regime. Individual countries, or preferably an international criminal court under the auspices of the UN Security Council, should hold Saddam and members of his regime to account for their many crimes by bringing indictments against them. There is a way to achieve regime change—I want to force it into people's minds tonight—by using international law and bringing those people before a tribunal or a court in a country where universal jurisdiction applies. That is not a fanciful notion, because bringing indictments against Milosevic and his associates in the former Yugoslavia was a vital means to de-legitimise that regime inside and outside its borders.

Let me remind the House that Milosevic was indicted while he was still Head of State, and no one thought that he would appear before the court in The Hague a year later. The setting up of a tribunal by the United Nations in that case also created an impetus to break with the past and allowed a new generation of leaders to come to the fore in that country.

Evidence against Saddam and his officials is certainly not lacking. I chair an organisation called Indict, which I have spoken about in the House many times. It is funded by the US Congress and has been for the past five years. Ironically, some members of Congress and of the Clinton Administration wanted indictments against members of the Iraqi regime, but there was a policy of containment and they never went after those indictments. However, it was possible, and it is possible now. Organisations such as Amnesty and Human Rights Watch have damning and disturbing testimony detailing extra-judicial killing, torture, rape, genocide and widespread corruption. It does not prejudice the case against them to say that more than enough evidence exists to charge Saddam, Tariq Aziz, Ali Hassan Al-Majid, the sons of Saddam, and other senior officials for war crimes and crimes against humanity immediately.

Even now, however, many of Saddam's officials travel to many parts of the world, apparently without hindrance, on official business and for personal reasons. Isolating them within their own country would surely undermine their standing and limit their ability to conduct dealings, including the conclusion of commercial agreements with certain countries and attempts to secure additional weaponry, which help to sustain them in power. As David Scheffer, the former US ambassador on war crimes, has said:

> "We know from the ad hoc . . . tribunals for the former Yugoslavia . . . Rwanda and for Sierra Leone that indictments of alleged war criminals who lead tyrannical and genocidal regimes can destroy their political careers, isolate them internationally, end their regimes and even achieve justice."

That brings me to the point made by the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire. It is often forgotten that many of Saddam's many victims were British nationals. At the start of the Gulf war, more than 1,000 British citizens were taken hostage. Some died, some were raped, others were tortured, and all suffered fear and humiliation. By taking concrete action to ensure that British victims obtain justice, the UK Government could show that they will do everything to promote the rule of law and fight impunity for the most serious crimes, and that the UK's support for the International Criminal Court is more than just lip service.

More generally, deterrence—especially as regards the conduct of any future Iraqi Government who might follow the current regime—demands justice. It has been said that international law cannot be enforced in Iraq without the use of force—that indictments as well as resolutions are not worth much unless they are underwritten by the world's most powerful armies. Conversely, however, whatever action the international community eventually decides is necessary, the law, and ultimately justice, must underpin such action. The moral case for dealing with the threat posed by Saddam that engages both hearts and minds demands that justice be done for the victims and that the standard by which any future Administration are judged be clearly laid down.

It would seem that indictments, like military intervention, are a matter of political will. I ask my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, whose motion I will support tonight, why, if Governments are willing to commit the lives of members of their armed forces, they cannot also commit themselves to law and legal procedure through recourse to the courts.

9.9 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): It is with some sadness that I rise as only the second woman to speak in the debate. I remind the House and my sisters who are not present that, since the second world war, the overwhelming majority of casualties in conflict have been women and children. Women Members should be here to make our voices clearly heard.

I have no illusions about Saddam Hussein. Many years ago, a very good friend of mine was imprisoned by him and spent eight years in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. The previous Government were not very helpful at that time—it was before the Gulf war and they were somewhat friendly with the Iraqi Administration. They certainly gave the campaigners for that man's release no help whatever. I know from their stories and from those of others what a terrible dictator Saddam Hussein is. We know that he runs an evil regime and that he has damaged his people. That has been the case for decades, so we must ask why we have to take military action now. If there is a good new reason, we must be shown the evidence, and any action must have the full approval of the UN Security Council and the House of Commons.

In the interests of joined-up government, before we go to war again will the Secretary of State consider the unfinished business that we face all over the world? Do we have the capacity to cope? In Afghanistan, only $1 billion has so far been committed out of the billions that were promised, and 70 per cent. of that has been spent on humanitarian aid. There is no security in Afghanistan outside Kabul. Afghanistan has asked for an extension of the international security assistance force, but where will the extra help come from? Will it come from the United States or from Britain? Where will it come from if we are facing war in Iraq and the middle east? Very little progress has been made in Afghanistan despite the promises of the Prime Minister. It is unfinished business.

Many Members have rightly referred to the difficult situation in the middle east. It is worse than ever. The Palestinians have no hope and Israel is seen as the United States in the middle east. More unfinished business is sowing the seeds of, and continuing to fuel, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. The Government are strangely silent on the middle east—more unfinished business.

For many people, the Balkans are a distant memory, but it is still a very unstable region. Tens of thousands of people were displaced recently as a result of trouble in Macedonia. This year, only 6 per cent. of the aid promised in the famous Marshall plan for the Balkans has been delivered. That is yet more unfinished business. We are very good at destroying but not so good at rebuilding. I have not even mentioned Africa and, sadly, there is no time to do so. It has the most unfinished business of the lot.

It is unclear just what the situation is in Iraq. However, we know that the oil-for-food programme has failed in recent years. Saddam Hussein has recently allowed oil imports to drop and negotiations have stalled because of the current crisis. What tiny progress was being made on the programme has been destroyed and will be further destroyed if we go to war. Hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq will suffer. My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) pointed out that there had been no mention so far of the humanitarian relief plans to be put in place for Iraq. The problem was bad enough in Kosovo. It was a long time before the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees got its head round dealing with the refugees there. Iraq presents an immensely greater problem, but we do not know what will happen.

What about the war on terrorism? Where is the connection with Iraq? Where is the proof? How can we afford to start a new war with Iraq when we face all these other problems? Can we risk further inflaming the world of Islam? As I said at the beginning of my speech, I want to see the back of Saddam Hussein as much as anyone else. However, we must ensure that, if we wage war on Iraq, it will help the war on terrorism and not make matters worse. We must wage war only with the authority of the UN Security Council and after a debate and vote in the House.

9.14 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): As the hon. Members for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) said, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the United Nations I led a cross-party delegation to the UN prior to the return of Hans Blix's team to Iraq. We met all five representatives of the permanent members of the Security Council, the representatives of the 10 elected members, Hans Blix and Dr. el-Baradei's first deputy. To reassure my neighbour, the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), we also met those at the UN who were working on humanitarian planning. As the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire said, we were most impressed by work on the oil-for-food programme in Iraq. The programme is a success and is restricted only by the obstacles put in its path by Saddam Hussein.

I support the main motion, especially in the light of the assurances and explanations given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I look forward to those being repeated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Ms Abbott: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Colman: No, I do not have time.

In my eight minutes, I want to make two points that demonstrate clearly the use of UN Security Council resolution 1441, which gives the best possible route through immensely difficult terrain and ensures that the UN remains the ultimate linchpin of international law. First, it is important to appreciate that UNMOVIC is superior to its predecessor UNSCOM, which was discredited by accusations of infiltration and bias. Hans Blix made clear to us his determination to keep UNMOVIC independent and operationally objective. Dr. el-Baradei of the International Atomic Energy Agency has expressed similar priorities.

Independence is also necessary to ensure that common sense prevails in reporting possible obstructions to the inspection team's missions. Clearly, both team leaders are experienced and will not blow up minor incidents into major breaches. Yet at the same time they will be sufficiently thorough to ensure that the

Security Council receives a full briefing of any problems encountered in-country. In that respect, Hans Blix has been quoted as rightly stating:

"The question of war and peace remains, first of all in the hands of Iraq".

If Iraq chooses to create problems for the inspectors, they will report that to the Security Council.

Hans Blix made it clear to the all-party parliamentary group delegation that the Security Council—not he, UNMOVIC or the IAEA—would decide whether Iraq has committed a material breach. UNMOVIC will report the facts only. In deciding what constitutes a material breach, he also expects the Security Council to refer to the 1969 Vienna convention on the law of treaties, which he had a hand in writing, as the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire explained. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said, Hans Blix expects weapons inspectors to come from middle eastern countries, but so far only Jordan has offered to participate. He suggested that qualified inspectors could come from Egypt, Algeria and Morocco. It is imperative that the UNMOVIC team is fully representative.

My hon. Friends the Members for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) and for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) raised questions about support for the resolution in the middle east. The Syrian representative on the Security Council explained the wish of the Arab League for Iraq to declare and destroy its weapons of mass destruction. It is important in such circumstances for the Arab League to encourage its members to provide qualified experts to train as UNMOVIC weapons inspectors.

My second point is that the Iraqi notional timeline of events runs to March 2003. I very much hope that the Iraqi statement on 8 December will settle the matter in the pathway to peace, as the Foreign Secretary called it. However, if it does not and Hans Blix reports the facts to the Security Council, the second and highly pivotal factor in the motion and of the text of resolution 1441 will come into play. I want to emphasise that no option is given for military action without the matter returning to the Security Council. The lack of automaticity has been talked about already, but it is worth emphasising that that aspect of resolution 1441 has brought real unity to the Security Council—a magnificent achievement in this context. In his explanation of vote, US ambassador John Negroponte, whom the delegation met, stated:

"As we have said on numerous occasions to Council members, this resolution contains no 'hidden triggers' and no 'automaticity' with respect to the use of force. If there is a further Iraqi breach, reported to the council by UNMOVIC, the IAEA, or a member state, the matter will return to the council for discussions as required by paragraph 12."

I should like to pay tribute to the people who lobbied in private to ensure that that matter returned to the United Nations, given that just a few months ago it looked as though the US was ready to act unilaterally, sidelining the UN. A resident of my constituency, the distinguished diplomat Sir Brian Barder, wrote to me arguing that the Prime Minister's visit to Camp David may go down in the history books as equally significant as the visit made by Clement Attlee to Washington to persuade President Truman not to use nuclear weapons in the Korean war.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary should be commended on bringing the United States back to the UN and back to international law. Likewise, credit is due to Colin Powell for encouraging the present US Administration to work within the UN-authorised coalition. Sir Brian Barder also highlights the fact that it is imperative that we continue along that route. The UN has demonstrated its strength and we, in return, must show our commitment to its ultimate authority.

Finally, I am sure that my Putney constituents will be pleased that the motion commits us to return to the Security Council before taking any further action. I know that they will be glad that those events have strengthened the credibility of the UN as the final arbiter of the rule of international law.

9.21 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I reiterate the support of Her Majesty's Opposition for the Government motion on the Order Paper, which in turn endorses resolution 1441 of the United Nations Security Council.

The Government have tabled an uncontentious motion, but I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will reply to the questions asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and others who have spoken in our debate. The Foreign Secretary made clear what the House would be voting for. If there is a serious breach, it is not essential for the UN Security Council to carry another resolution for military action to be taken. Nevertheless, it would be desirable, and I am sure that the House is grateful for the Foreign Secretary's assurance that he would try to obtain one.

Her Majesty's Opposition cannot support the amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats. Indeed, I invite hon. Members to vote against it. The amendment states, unlike UN resolution 1441, that

"it is for the UN Security Council as a whole to determine"

whether there has been a material breach. The resolution also does not stipulate that an express mandate from the Security Council is required for resolution 1441 to be enforced.

I listened carefully to the speeches by my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell), my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), and my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman), who argued that any military action, whether carried out or just threatened, must be within international law. That is our position and it is also the commitment that the Government constantly give—we will hold them to that commitment.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In the Opposition's view, who should determine what is a serious breach? Who defines that?

Mr. Jenkin: It is perfectly clear from the resolution that that is entirely a matter for the weapons inspection team and Hans Blix. It puts a huge and onerous responsibility on him, and it is incumbent on all of us to give him our absolute trust and backing. He has the trust of Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, the United States and our own Government, and we should trust his judgment.

The Liberal Democrat amendment tempts the House to exercise power over the Government by insisting on a further substantive vote. Again, the House should take

[Mr. Jenkin]

comfort from the Foreign Secretary, who assured us of his best efforts in that regard, but we should also bear in mind the difficulties that such a stricture could create. The amendment surely raises much wider constitutional issues than the one that we are debating this evening. It is certainly an important issue, which the House should discuss, but such an innovation should not be introduced in the heat of the moment. I invite the Liberal Democrats to withdraw their amendment.

Mr. Keetch: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the policy was not produced by my party in the heat of the moment. We have argued the same thing in the past. May I ask the hon. Gentleman a specific question? The Foreign Secretary said that our amendment might in some way put British troops in harm's way. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not agree with that. If he did, he would have automatically assumed that President Bush and the Senate were putting US troops in harm's way by their constitutional procedure. The amendment sets out a sensible procedure for getting all sides of the House behind such a resolution.

Mr. Jenkin: I am afraid that I do not agree. The hon. Gentleman is changing the rules of the game half way through the game. If we had a system whereby it was mandatory for the Government to get express backing from the House before military action, I expect that the Government would long ago have come to the House of Commons, in the same way as the President has gone to the United States Congress, and got a blank cheque to take whatever military action was necessary.

That is not the constitutional position in this country. *[Interruption.]* I hear the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) say that it ought to be. Let him change the law, rather than trying to rush through an instant change in the heat of the moment. I point out to him that passing a resolution of the House would not alter the Crown prerogative. If he wants to change the Crown prerogative he needs to bring a Bill before the House. I suggest that he does that, so that we can have a proper debate about the issue, which he clearly thinks is important.

Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not mistrust the Government—*[Laughter.]*—on the matter. I accept the Foreign Secretary's assurances that he will do his utmost to consult the House on any future military action, and that he would convene the House as soon as possible after any military action if it became necessary to take such military action before the House had been able to meet.

I move on to the military affairs that arise from the debate. Last week the Secretary of State for Defence—*[Interruption.]* I shall quote the Secretary of State, so he might listen to the point—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman says that he is busy. That is what he is here for—to be busy. He told a now-famous press conference last week:

"We have had a request for forces from the United States, but no decision has been taken on that and it does seem to me appropriate that I should set out in more detail our thinking on Monday in the parliamentary debate".

Much of the debate has been about the right of the House to be consulted on the decision to initiate military action. The people of this country have a right to know what is being committed in their name, and in his comments last week the Secretary of State seemed to recognise that. So far in the debate the House has not had the slightest indication what kind of military commitment the Government may be contemplating, despite the fact that there have been numerous indications in the press and media that the Government have quite a clear idea.

Last week, the *Washington Post* reported:

"British officials have said they expect at least two British units, the 1st Armoured Division and a light helicopter-borne air assault regiment, to take part in any offensive in Iraq".

Can the Secretary of State make any formal comment on that announcement? The approaching deadlines contained in UN Security Council resolution 1441 make it all the more extraordinary that the Government have not just failed to make any announcement, but have failed to give any warning orders to the Army units that might be required. All that is in the context of the comments made last week by the Chief of the Defence Staff. Those remarks deserve to go on the official record. When asked about the effect of the fire strikes on the armed forces, he said that he was "extremely concerned" for two reasons.

With the permission of the House, I shall quote further. The Chief of the Defence Staff said:

"First I am concerned on the military effectiveness of our armed forces and secondly I am concerned at the impact on our individuals who are helping out in the firefighting situation. Clearly we don't have a box of 19,000 people standing by to be called upon to do firefighting. They must be drawn from operational units . . . and they have now been standing by since September when we started training for the duties, they are not doing their tasks of training for whatever eventuality may come in the future."

He went on to say:

"There is also the problem . . . of impact on individuals because a lot of people have come straight off deployment from, say, Bosnia or Afghanistan and gone straight on to these duties without the benefit of any home time. That leaves a morale problem to be addressed as well."

He pointed out that Navy ships are tied up in port, RAF stations are not operating at full efficiency and soldiers are being withdrawn from battalions training in Germany. He explained that

"we are trying to husband some operational capability, but clearly we can't perform at the fullest end of our operational capability."

That bears out the warning that he gave to the Select Committee on Defence on 6 November:

"If there were a medium-sized operation, we would have great difficulty in coping with that."

That is a savage indictment of Labour's five years in office.

The strategic defence review, which everyone broadly supported—*[Interruption.]* Yes, that includes, broadly, the Opposition. The review envisaged that the UK would have the military capacity to sustain at any one time one major military operation, equivalent to the 1991 Gulf war, one minor operation, such as peacekeeping in the Balkans, and continued operations in Northern Ireland, Cyprus and so on. Is it not now abundantly clear that the armed forces do not begin to have the capacity to manage that level of commitment? Are we not now paying the price for a Government who have continued to spend less on defence in every year since the Conservatives left office? *[Interruption.]*

The Secretary of State says that that is rubbish. I would bandy figures from the Library with him, but I do not think that the House wants to waste time on that.

The Government have left Britain totally unprepared for the unexpected. Despite the indications given by the Secretary of State last week, given the state of our armed forces, I doubt whether he is in a position to say much tonight that will add anything to the sum total of our knowledge. What military commitment has the US asked for and what are we likely to agree? If he cannot tell the House now, when will he be able to tell us? How long will it take to get our military commitment deployed and ready for carrying out military operations against Iraqi forces? Given that it takes eight to 12 weeks to get from the issuing of a warning order to deployment to move an armoured brigade into position, do not the Government intend to take very little risk at the outset of military action, because the main British force simply will not be there, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) pointed out?

Given the cuts in stocks and spares in the Ministry of Defence, what measures is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that UK military action will be sustainable for anything more than a few weeks? When will reservists be called up, how many will he call up and what warning will they get? What protection will British forces have against chemical and biological weapons, and particularly the VX nerve agent, to which the Foreign Secretary referred in his opening remarks? What preparations are the Government taking to deal with the humanitarian crisis that would be likely to follow military action if it becomes necessary—a point raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous)?

We are supporting the Government's motion, but that should not stifle our criticism of their defence policy. The nation is braced for the possibility of terrorist attack.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I am just finishing; the right hon. Gentleman will have plenty of opportunity.

At the same time, the Prime Minister is saying that we must be prepared to pay what he rather chillingly calls the "blood price" of military action against Saddam. As the firemen start their strikes, we finally have it confirmed—the armed forces have been running on empty. There is nothing left in reserve.

The Government have taken on far more military commitments than they are prepared to fund. Overstretch has become a byword for the Government's defence policy. Our armed forces remain a benchmark of excellence; they are the finest in the world. The Government have let them down.

9.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I regret the fact that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) is not prepared to give way during a speech that criticises Her Majesty's armed forces and their consistent success. He cannot give a single example of failure by the armed forces in the five years since the Government took office. In a fairly typical contribution, the hon. Gentleman simply criticised and carped. He did not give any inkling of the official Opposition's policy, and he did not advocate an approach different from that of the Government. If he wants to criticise the way in which the armed forces operate, he should set out alternatives. He singularly failed to do that. Everyone, especially members of the armed forces, will note the Opposition's lack of a constructive contribution.

History should have taught us the dangers of not dealing effectively with ruthless dictators. We have no quarrel with the Iraqi people, but Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction must be destroyed to restore Iraq to its proper place in the international community. Today's debate has reinforced a straightforward position and demonstrated why the Government's approach to Iraq is right.

We have heard a great deal about the threat that Saddam Hussein poses to the international community and about his appalling human rights record. There will always be a range of sincerely held opinions on any international political issue. However, hon. Members are united on the necessity for Saddam Hussein to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, as my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) made clear. The Government are fully committed to that goal, as expressed in United Nations Security Council resolution 1441. With the United States and other members of the Security Council, we devoted many weeks of diplomatic effort to its negotiation. That is the answer to the various points that my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) made. The unanimous adoption of the resolution is a significant diplomatic achievement. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) will reflect on the fact that Syria voted for it. It is crucial to ensure that the resolution is implemented in full.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The Secretary of State mentioned history. Does not history show that although it is possible to kill individuals in a movement, that often serves to reinforce the group? The right hon. Gentleman implies that global terrorism and Saddam Hussein are connected. What is his response to those who believe that war could exacerbate the terrorist threat?

Mr. Hoon: As I shall explain shortly, the point of securing the unanimous Security Council resolution is to give the Iraqi regime a last opportunity to rid the country of weapons of mass destruction. The Security Council agreed unanimously on that, and it is consistent with the main Liberal Democrat proposition. However, if the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) believes that there are no circumstances in which the Security Council resolution should be supported through resort to force, he should say that more clearly.

Mr. George Howarth: It has been argued that the Government's approach could result in destabilising the middle east. How did that bypass the Syrians' calculations?

Mr. Hoon: I pointed out that Syria voted for the resolution. The recent history of the middle east is also relevant. Attacks on Iran and the invasion of Kuwait

[Mr. Hoon]

were hardly conducive to stabilisation in the middle east, but that is the sort of regime with which we must deal.

I emphasise that our approach is based on Iraq's disarmament, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) underlined. Neither Britain nor the United States is looking for a pretext for military action, which is always a grave step, and which will certainly be a last resort. No member of the Government will risk British lives unnecessarily.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): In 1967, Israel occupied Palestinian land. In that same year, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 242 unanimously, demanding that Israel withdraw its armed forces from the occupied territories. Any proposal to implement that resolution was vetoed by the United States of America. Israel has defied 32 United Nations resolutions. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, without bringing peaceful resolution to the middle east conflict, there can be no peace?

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary dealt with those issues at some length in his opening speech, and I do not intend to repeat all that he said. I want to make it clear, however, that the Government want to see the implementation of United Nations resolutions. We are not discriminating between different resolutions. Those to which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) refers should indeed be enforced. We want to see them enforced—involving, as they do, obligations on a number of different states.

We expect Saddam Hussein to have the survival instinct, at any rate, to co-operate with UNMOVIC and to comply with resolution 1441, but we cannot exclude the possibility that he will fail to do so. Let us not delude ourselves. All our experience shows that Saddam Hussein has only ever complied with the will of the international community when diplomacy has been backed by a credible threat of force. That point was made extremely well by my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George).

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): My right hon. Friend is rightly outlining the Saddam paradox, in which the more unambiguous the international community becomes in threatening the use of force, the less likely that might be to have to take place. The Foreign Secretary also mentioned that. May I put to my right hon. Friend what I might call the Rumsfeld paradox? That is that the more unambiguous the international community becomes, the greater will be the danger of creating an ambiguity about how far the United Nations should be part of the process. Will he tell the House how that paradox can be resolved?

Mr. Hoon: Like a good lawyer, I am tempted to ask for further and better particulars on that question. The whole point of our approach is to give Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime one last opportunity to accept the will of the international community, as unanimously expressed in the Security Council resolution. That will be far more effective if it is backed up by the use of force.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hoon: I really need to make progress. I cannot take interventions on my replies to interventions at this stage. I will, however, give way to my hon. Friend in a second.

Our only responsible course is to continue with the prudent preparations and planning necessary for military action. This does not mean a commitment to undertake such action in any circumstances, but it does mean that we will continue to take appropriate steps to ensure that British forces are ready, and that they have the training, equipment and support that they need to be able to undertake military action, should it prove necessary. Large numbers of troops are, of course, currently engaged in providing emergency fire cover, and that represents a considerable commitment for our armed forces. They have responded with their customary professionalism and flexibility, but we all hope that the firefighters' dispute will be quickly resolved.

I visited troops providing emergency fire cover on Saturday morning, and I was struck by their enthusiasm for taking part and helping the British people here at home. Having routinely served Britain overseas, they were clearly delighted to play their part in the United Kingdom. But, to deal with one of the questions raised by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), it is important to put this commitment in context. There are 19,000 service men and women, out of a total of some 190,000, committed to firefighting duties. Around 6,000 of their colleagues are currently on overseas deployments, such as those in Afghanistan and the Balkans, and 13,500 are in Northern Ireland. In June 1999, at the height of the Kosovo campaign, 44 per cent. of the Army was committed to operations. In October this year, it was 27 per cent. Now that we are committed to providing firefighting cover, the figure has risen to 35 per cent. I do not underestimate the extent of our commitments at home and world wide. The armed forces are certainly very busy, but they have been busier. I can give the House this assurance: our troops are ready to undertake any task that their country may ask of them.

Mr. John Smith: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, and he has indeed moved on a little. Does he agree that resolution 1441 gives the Iraqis every opportunity, not least because the time that they have to disclose the existence of weapons of mass destruction has been doubled compared with that provided for in any previous UN resolution?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As a number of Members have said, this is a thorough resolution unanimously agreed by the Security Council, and it gives Iraq and the regime there every opportunity to accept the international community's terms.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): The Secretary of State referred to troops whom he visited on Saturday.

Were they troops whose exercise has been cancelled, such as the Scots Guards who should be out in Kenya training on an exercise for which they have been preparing for over 12 months? Were those troops supposed to be elsewhere on duties that they are trained to perform, or were they simply waiting to perform the duties of the fire service?

Mr. Hoon: No one has ever sought to disguise the fact that those 19,000 members of the armed forces should be doing something other than providing emergency fire cover. I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman thinks that he has asked a devastating question in pointing that out. It has been clearly stated by Ministers and, of course, by the Chief of the Defence Staff. Those troops should be exercising or training. Many—let us make it clear—should be on leave, but they are providing the cover that the country needs.

One disappointment about the speech made from the Conservative Front Bench is that it failed to recognise that as an issue which the Opposition, just as much as the Government, must grapple with. Responsible political parties have to think through such issues and not simply set out a series of criticisms. We are dealing with those issues and setting out the course that a responsible Government have to take. Frankly, the Opposition and the hon. Gentleman coming to the House with such a cynical view does not, I am afraid, say a great deal about how they are preparing themselves.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hoon: No, I will not.

The Opposition are preparing themselves for opposition; there is no sign whatever of them preparing for government.

A number of Members raised the issue of what would constitute a material breach of the UN Security Council resolution and how that might lead to military action.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hoon: Sit down.

Others have linked that issue to the position of coalition patrols of the Iraqi no-fly zones. The coalition patrols in the no-fly zones are in support of UN Security Council resolution 688. As participants in the coalition, our aircrew face daily attacks from Iraqi anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles. I pay tribute to the service men and women who are and who have been deployed in the region, carrying out that difficult and dangerous humanitarian task.

Coalition patrols are justified under international law. As Members will recall, they were set up in response to an overwhelming humanitarian necessity. Let me be clear about this: Iraqi action against our aircraft is contrary to international law, but the focus of resolution 1441 is disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and UNMOVIC provides a mechanism to take that forward. It is for UNMOVIC to verify the accuracy and completeness of Iraq's declaration.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) raised the question of a nil or trivial declaration from Iraq. It would clearly not be difficult for UNMOVIC to disprove such a declaration and report it to the Security Council. It is clear that the first step on receipt of such a report or a report of Iraqi non-co-operation would be for the Security Council to meet. Equally, I draw Members' attention to the final part of paragraph 3 of the UN Security Council resolution, which refers to the fact that

"as well as all other chemical, biological, and nuclear programmes"

Iraq has an obligation to include

"any which it claims are for purposes not related to weapon production or material".

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) asked how well prepared UNMOVIC is. There are two important points to make. First, UNMOVIC is backed by a tougher inspection regime, as set out in resolution 1441, than was its predecessor, UNSCOM. For example, the so-called presidential and other sensitive sites no longer provide Saddam with havens for his weapons of mass destruction.

Secondly, the international community is more determined than ever to support UNMOVIC and see an end to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Her Majesty's Government are fully committed to the provision of the necessary support to UNMOVIC and we are in direct discussions with the UN on how best we can assist if it finds that it needs further help.

Let me now deal with the request for support by the United States. As Members will know, the United States has approached a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, seeking support in the event that military action proves necessary. Although no decision has been made to commit UK forces to military action, discussions with the US will continue so that an appropriate British contribution can be identified should it prove necessary.

It is important to put the request in its proper context. There is no inevitability about military action. The US is clear about the fact that the issue is Iraqi disarmament—a process that will benefit the whole international community, including the Iraqi people themselves, not simply the United States. As President Bush said at the Prague summit last week,

"Our first choice is not to use the military option. Our first choice is for Saddam Hussein to disarm".

Those who have accused the US of unilateralism should consider carefully. The US Government have followed an impeccably multilateral approach, first in building unanimous Security Council support for resolution 1441 and now in seeking to build broad-based support for military action should it be required. Achieving the resolution's aims is our goal, but we must recognise that the process will break down if Iraq fails to co-operate. None of us can predict whether, how or when that might happen; but within the limits imposed by these uncertainties, we have been considering the contribution we might be able to make if military action ultimately becomes necessary.

At this stage it would be inappropriate to go into details of the size and shape of forces that might be involved, for two specific reasons. First, as events unfold and time passes, plans will inevitably evolve. It would be misleading to describe specific force packages today as if they had some permanent and definitive status. I am sure that even the hon. Member for North Essex

[Mr. Hoon]

(Mr. Jenkin) is able to understand that. Secondly, as I am sure the House appreciates, I have no intention of assisting Saddam Hussein's contingency planning.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way—although my sitting down five minutes early gave him a good deal of extra time.

It is fair to ask what the right hon. Gentleman intends to have ready. He will presumably have to tell the forces concerned what he will have ready. The fact that he has nothing ready yet suggests that we will not be in the theatre of potential conflict until long after many of the UN deadlines have passed.

Mr. Hoon: I am willing to arrange for the hon. Gentleman to be given a comprehensive briefing in the Ministry of Defence on the kinds of forces that the UK routinely has ready. It is, in fact, a question of readiness. As I have said, I will not describe the full range of equipment and personnel that could be made available. As I have also said, we cannot assist Saddam Hussein's contingency planning by giving information such as that for which the hon. Gentleman has asked. If he thought about it for a few more minutes, he would probably realise that giving such information would not be sensible.

The same answer can be given to the various points made by the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Tweeddale. I am sorry; I cannot remember the rest of his constituency. [HON. MEMBERS: "Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale".] Yes, the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore).

It is not possible to give that kind of detail. I think the hon. Gentleman's speech left many Labour Members rather puzzled. Having put his name to an amendment that is to be voted on, he barely addressed the reasons for that amendment—which, I am afraid, left many believing that this might be an example of the sort of opportunism about which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister complained earlier today. It was surprising that the hon. Gentleman devoted much of his speech to anything other than the Liberal Democrat amendment.

The right hon. Member for Devizes asked for details of military preparations. I know that the House will understand my reasons—which I have given—for not wishing to be drawn on all the details of our contingency planning, but it may be helpful if I say a word about reserve forces—about which a number of Members have asked questions in recent weeks—and military equipment.

Let me make it clear that we have not called out any reservists for possible military action against Iraq, and have no immediate plans to do so. As the House is well aware, however, any substantial military operation would require a contribution from the reserves. As part of our contingency planning, therefore, we are clarifying the requirement for such a contribution in support of any military operations in Iraq. We will be doing exploratory work initially, within the chain of command and more widely with other Departments. In due course, however, it may become necessary, on an informal basis, to sound out members of reservist formed units or individual reservists, and their employers, as to their circumstances and hence their availability for operations, in advance of a formal call-out. That will not involve reservists entering into any formal commitments. I have no doubt that, as soon as we begin such soundings, that will be misinterpreted and misrepresented as mobilisation by stealth, but I emphasise that at this stage I have only authorised planning activity.

I can also assure the House that when we judge that we need to call out reservists in preparation for potential military action, there will be a formal call-out order under the Reserve Forces Act 1996, and any decision to make such a call-out will, of course, be announced first to the House; but the House should be clear: we are not yet at that point. Nor do we need to be at that point.

Similarly, as part of the planning and preparation processes, we have been considering potential additional military equipment capability requirements. The Government are committed to equipping the armed forces for a range of contingencies, but specific operational environments and scenarios often require special priority to be given to particular capabilities. That is why we have been taking action to meet certain capability requirements as quickly as possible. In many cases, that involves accelerating existing programmes; in other cases, it involves new procurements against short time scales.

For example, we are bringing forward the purchase of further temporary deployable accommodation, and we are enhancing our medical support through improved hygiene facilities in deployed field hospitals and improvements to our ambulances. We will further improve the ability of our forces to handle and to exploit secure communications.

Mr. George Osborne: What steps is the Secretary of State taking to deal with the shortcomings identified by the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office in the desert warfare capability of the Army as shown in the Saif Sareea exercise in Oman?

Mr. Hoon: A number of lessons have been identified based on equipment performance in Exercise Saif Sareea 2, particularly with regard to the performance of the Challenger 2 tank, the AS 90 and desert clothing and boots. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman and the House are aware, problems with Challenger 2 were mainly related to the ingestion of large quantities of sand. The filters were dealing with in the order of 25 kg of dust each hour. The AS 90 performed reliably for much of Saif Sareea 2 but suffered certain difficulties owing to extreme operating temperatures.

Those matters have been addressed. The MOD is working to ensure that the necessary modifications are made to improve the performance of Challenger 2 and the AS 90 in desert conditions. I can assure the House that United Kingdom forces will be fully prepared in good time for any future operations. I doubt that the House would expect me to go into precise detail as to all

the modifications, but I can assure right hon. and hon. Members that the equipment will perform as necessary in those particular conditions.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): When will that be?

Mr. Hoon: The contract, for example, for Challenger 2 has now been let, and the work will be proceeding in order to ensure that those lessons are learned. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] There is no point in hon. Members shouting out "When?", because the answer to that question—[*Interruption.*] Again, Opposition Members should think about it calmly and sensibly. I am not going to give the answer because that would give away a significant aspect of what we are preparing for. Any sort of careful thought on the matter would give Opposition Members the opportunity to realise that.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary—

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 85, Noes 452.

Division No. 006] **[9:59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Best, Harold
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lepper, David
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke and Mr. David Heath

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boswell, Tim
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, rh David
Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*

Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Follett, Barbara
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, hon. Edward
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Harrison, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Redwood, rh John
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, rh Sir John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*

Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlotte Atkins and
Mr. Fraser Kemp

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House supports UNSCR 1441 as unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council; agrees that the Government of Iraq must comply fully with all provisions of the Resolution; and agrees that, if it fails to do so, the Security Council should meet in order to consider the situation and the need for full compliance.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Northern Ireland

That the draft Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Designation of Public Authorities) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 24th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together motions 4 and 5.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Customs And Excise

That the Excise Duties (Personal Reliefs) (Revocation) Order 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 2691), dated 28th October, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

Prisons

That the draft Release of Short-Term Prisoners on Licence (Amendment of Requisite Period) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 29th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 18(1)(a)(Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

Regulatory Reform

That the draft Regulatory Reform (Removal of 20 Member Limit in Partnerships etc.) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 24th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees),

Enlargement And Reports On Progress By Applicant Countries

That this House takes note of European Union document No. 12839/02, the Commission Strategy Paper and Report on progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries with Addenda 1 to 13, the 2002 Regular Reports on progress by individual candidate countries; welcomes the Government's continuing commitment to European Union enlargement; and supports the Government's aim that the European Union complete negotiations with 10 candidates by the end of this year, so that they can participate in the European Parliament elections in 2004 As Member States.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

Gibraltar

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I am delighted to have been granted this debate today, for it is Parliament's first opportunity to reflect on the momentous referendum held in Gibraltar on 7 November. As official observers of that referendum, I and 10 other colleagues from the House were able to witness at first hand the open, fair and democratic manner in which the Government of Gibraltar conducted the entire exercise. From the preparations in the weeks leading up to polling day and the conduct and organisation of the polling stations to the speedy delivery of the result in the early hours of Friday 8 November, the referendum was one that any democratic society could be proud of.

Of course, as we all know, the referendum was not the first of its kind to be held in British territory during the past few years. On 11 September 1997, the people of Scotland voted democratically to establish their own Parliament, with 74 per cent. of them in support. On 18 September of that year, the people of Wales decided democratically to create an Assembly for the Principality, even though by a much closer margin of just over 50 per cent. On 7 May 1998, the people of London voted democratically for a Mayor and an Assembly, with 72 per cent. support. On 22 May 1998, the people of Northern Ireland also chose democratically to create their own Assembly, with 71 per cent. of the vote.

Now, the British people of Gibraltar have conducted their own democratic referendum on a constitutional question: the principle of sharing sovereignty with the Kingdom of Spain. With 99 per cent. of Gibraltarians voting against joint sovereignty, it was by far the most convincing of all the referendums so far.

I am sure that I speak for most Members of Parliament, and for most citizens of this country, in welcoming the Gibraltarians' overwhelming vote to remain British. On an 87 per cent. turnout, 99 per cent. of the vote in favour rejecting joint sovereignty with a foreign power is probably more than one could expect from any town within the United Kingdom—with the possible exception of the patriotic market town of Romford.

Before continuing, I would like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome the Minister to his new portfolio. It is with genuine relief that I and many other hon. Members here today greet that change on the Treasury Bench. In Gibraltar, there is great hope that the Minister will prove to be a true friend to the people of the rock.

In the past year, Gibraltarians have, understandably, felt bruised, let down and betrayed, but now, with a clear result in the referendum and a new Minister in office, I sincerely hope that a line can be drawn under a sad episode in relations between the Government of the United Kingdom and the people of Gibraltar. I urge the Minister to examine the issue carefully especially as we move into a new era of the debate. We must now enter a period of reflection to determine how the policy on Gibraltar will progress.

I hope that in view of the near unanimous vote, the Minister will acknowledge that the referendum result has, once and for all, exploded any claim that Gibraltar's situation resembles that of a divided society. Northern Ireland is a wholly false comparison. I hope also that he will agree that the referendum reflects the freely expressed will of a united community to retain its sovereignty and identity, and that, just like the referendums held in Scotland, Wales, London and Northern Ireland, the wishes of the Gibraltarian people should be respected, accepted and upheld.

I call on all Members of Parliament to recognise that now, in the light of the referendum result, Gibraltar's sovereignty, like the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, must be regarded as a settled matter. In particular, the Brussels process should be abandoned immediately and the issue of sovereignty firmly removed from that or any other Anglo-Spanish agenda.

Some argue that it does no harm to keep Gibraltar's sovereignty on the agenda in a merely nominal fashion—the Spanish could raise the issue, but we British would have nothing to say on the subject. I utterly reject that dangerous argument. Retaining sovereignty as an agenda item, however nominal, offers hope to Madrid that one day, a British Government will give way. "Sit tight and wait for more favourable circumstances," our opposite numbers in Madrid will think. Their hope will be that one day, whether on the 50th or 250th time of asking, a British Foreign Secretary will give way.

Allowing claimants against British interests to foster the hope of securing their prize has been a bane of our foreign policy for nearly a century. While the device has, no doubt, helped relations in the short term, it has stored up trouble in the longer term. The trouble comes when we must either dash the nurtured hopes of a claimant state such as Argentina, or concede under the weight of their expectations.

If retaining sovereignty as a nominal agenda item is mistaken, locking the issue into a so-called process is doubly mistaken. Locked into a process, the issue is passed down from Government to Government—some more steadfast than others—until one day, almost inevitably, one Government, probably under pressure from the European Union, decide to concede Gibraltar's sovereignty. The people of Gibraltar deserve better treatment than to live under this permanent cloud of uncertainty.

However, on one point, I must congratulate Her Majesty's Government—on now honouring their pledge to enfranchise the people of Gibraltar in time for the European parliamentary elections in 2004. That is not before time. I understand that the Electoral Commission will be looking into which constituency Gibraltar will join. The incorporation of Gibraltar in a United Kingdom constituency for the European Parliament is a welcome development.

I express the hope that the Government will now also examine the case for another form of integration and allow Gibraltar to elect a Member to this Parliament. It is intolerable that the people of Gibraltar still have no elected voice on a whole range of issues that directly affect them. Why should they not be treated more directly as British subjects by having a place in our sovereign Parliament? I refer not just to foreign affairs

and to defence matters, which remain the responsibility of the British Government, but to health care, higher education and many other vital services for which Gibraltarians must come to the United Kingdom. The Minister will be aware that a precedent exists for parliamentary constituencies with small populations—the Western Isles, for example. Granting the people of Gibraltar their own Member of Parliament would not only bridge the democratic deficit that I have outlined, but would send out the unambiguous message that Gibraltar is and will remain British.

The Minister will also be aware that every other European country has long since incorporated its overseas territories. We, however, retain our overseas territories in colonial limbo, a status that has been given a limited shelf life by the United Nations, that disadvantages those who live under it and encourages the hope among claimant states that they will eventually inherit after decolonisation. Of course, only the people of Gibraltar must decide their future constitutional status, but it is my sincerely held belief that devolved integration offers a remedy to all those defects and more. One thing that it would certainly do is slam the door firmly shut in the face of claimant states. Such action, although resented in the short term, prevents the far more awkward problems that I referred to earlier over nurtured expectations.

Integration also allows territories varying degrees of autonomy to suit the culture and the circumstances of themselves and their mother country. Although the French overseas territories are administered largely from Paris, the Dutch Antilles and Aruba, for example, have considerably more autonomy yet remain part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Equally, the Faroe Islands and Greenland have their own elected Governments while sending Members of Parliament to the Danish Folketing in Copenhagen. European membership and tax status are also no barriers to integration. Spain's Moroccan enclaves, the sovereignty of which she wisely refuses to discuss, both levy no VAT yet remain integral to Spain and inside the European Union. As the Minister must acknowledge, even within the United Kingdom, varying constitutional arrangements are present and are being extended, so why not apply the same logic to Gibraltar?

Never again must the Gibraltarians be forced to hold a referendum to tell their own UK Government what most Britons take for granted—that they want both themselves and their territory to remain British. They want it to remain British not just for this Parliament, not just until a future UK Government decide to reheat the Brussels process and not just until the Spanish Government decide to put pressure on British Ministers in the course of EU negotiations. They want a Gibraltar that is British in its entirety and in perpetuity.

10.29 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) on securing the debate. I also welcome my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe to his new position.

The hon. Member for Romford is right. It is important that we calmly reflect on what has happened. No one can forget the 98 per cent. "No" vote in Gibraltar. That was listened to in London and it must be listened to in Madrid; the Spanish Government have to reflect on the vote.

It is right to pay tribute to the people of Gibraltar. They used their democratic vote to express their democratic wish. It was good to see the Government and Opposition in Gibraltar coming together, along with Albert Poggio, Gibraltar's representative in London, who played an integral part in ensuring a fair and democratic vote. They and all the people of Gibraltar deserve our congratulations.

Surely we are at a new beginning. The vote should mark the end of the Brussels agreement. We need new discussions with Spain on border queues and the rights and security of air travel for the people of Europe and Gibraltar. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take up the mantle and rise to the challenge. It lies with him to ensure that the aspirations of the people of Gibraltar are realised so that they get proper representation and an end to the wrongs done against them.

It is important that a clear message go out to Europe and Madrid: let us stop the bully-boy tactics. Surely Madrid realises that people do not expect to be hit with a stick. What people will say is, "No, we don't want more of this", and they will stand up for themselves. What better way of ensuring that the small population of Gibraltar—it has 30,000 people—has its agenda known throughout the world than by those people fighting for their democratic rights? We must ensure that the House respects that, as I am sure hon. Members will, and we must move on to a better Gibraltar.

The people of Gibraltar should have the right to consider integrating with the United Kingdom or having a new constitution so that they can move away from the old colonial governor with the feathers who walks up and down Main street. There is a new hope and a new challenge, and the people of Gibraltar deserve that. It is a new beginning for them. We should ensure that the House listens to and respects their voice.

We need to move on. I know that the Minister will take up the new challenge. The hopes of many people rest on his shoulders and he will not shy away from that responsibility. I am sure that he will rightly say that he will meet the Government of Gibraltar as soon as possible and listen to their views, which are important. The sooner the meeting takes place, the better it will be. It is important that we put the people of Gibraltar first, and we look to the Minister to give them comfort.

10.34 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): This has been the most remarkable Adjournment debate that I have experienced at this time of night in my short life as an MP and my even shorter life as a Minister. I congratulate the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) on his powerful speech. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on his contribution. I hope that, at the end of this debate, hon. Members will agree that I am a friend of Gibraltar—

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Who speaks slowly.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend the Deputy Chief Whip told me to choose my words with care and said,

[Mr. MacShane]

"It's Denis against 40 Conservative MPs"—[HON. MEMBERS: "And some Labour MPs."] Indeed, but they are all my friends—we are at one on this issue.

There are not quite as many people in the Chamber as the 18,000 who voted in the referendum in Gibraltar a couple of weeks ago, but there are remarkably more Conservative Back Benchers present now than there were for the debate on Iraq. I had prepared part of my speech on the assumption that in the six days of debate on the Queen's Speech Opposition Front Benchers would call a debate on foreign policy, and would raise their deep concerns about Gibraltar. Instead, the subject has been put before the House late at night in an Adjournment debate. That is certainly a tribute to the hon. Member for Romford, but whether it provides a true analysis of the interest that Conservative Front Benchers take in the issue I leave to the judgment of the people of Gibraltar.

The presence in the Chamber of hon. Members from nearly all parties is a clear sign of their genuine concern for the people of Gibraltar and their future. We all share the concern that there should be a better future for the people of Gibraltar. It is precisely that desire—[*Laughter.*] The Opposition are laughing with me. I can take them when they are laughing at me; I can take them when they are jeering or shouting me down. However, I ask the assembled ranks of the Opposition to calm down and let me make my own speech—

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): In my own time.

Mr. MacShane: Indeed. The desire to secure a stable and prosperous future for the people of Gibraltar continues to drive the Government's policy, but the current situation, with the continuation of the 300-year-old dispute, does not yet offer hope of that better future. The hon. Member for Romford, in his powerful and eloquent speech, said that the Gibraltarians were British in perpetuity. If he reads the treaty of Utrecht, whether in the original Latin or Spanish, he will find that the Spanish ceded Gibraltar in perpetuity to the British Crown, so that is not an issue. We want to see what the House can do to try to improve the quality of life for all Gibraltarians—the people who voted in the referendum—who deserve a future free of the worries that they have had throughout my lifetime about border delays, restrictions on air services, telecommunications and so on. The assumption that the House can at a stroke remove those problems may not be justified. We need to shape an opportunity that will promote better economic development for Gibraltar and the surrounding region to enable Gibraltar fully to realise its potential. With that process in mind, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary decided to relaunch the Brussels process talks in July last year.

I am very happy so far in my new job as Minister for Europe. I should like to stay in it. I want to do right by the people of Gibraltar. I seek no promotion to the Cabinet.

In taking their decision to relaunch the Brussels talks in July last year, my right hon. Friends were recognising, as Margaret Thatcher did almost 18 years ago to this day, that the only way to secure a more prosperous future for Gibraltar was through a negotiated resolution of the dispute with Spain on all issues, including sovereignty. That was the position of the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher. The hon. Member for Romford seemed to think that we should bury the former Prime Minister and drive a stake through the Brussels process, which was her initiative. I am not confident enough, and I do not have the mandate at the Dispatch Box, to be so cruel or unkind to the former Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher.

From the start, we have been absolutely clear that this Government would stick by the pledge given by the Labour Government of Harold Wilson in 1969—that there would be no change in sovereignty without the consent of the people of Gibraltar. Let me say it again: no change in sovereignty without the consent of the people of Gibraltar. Hence, if we could reach agreement with Spain—please notice the two conditionals, "if" and "could"—on a comprehensive settlement, the whole package would be put to the people of Gibraltar in a referendum and they would decide. That is a cast-iron assurance to the people of Gibraltar, and I do not know how I can make it any plainer to my hon. Friends or to the hon. Gentleman.

We were also clear from the start that we wanted the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Peter Caruana, to be involved in the process so that the Gibraltarians could help shape it. That invitation remains open. As hon. Members are aware, three Brussels process meetings took place—in July 2001, November 2001 and February 2002—and were fully reported to the House. A further meeting was due to take place in July this year, but, due to Cabinet changes in Spain, it did not take place. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, conscious of his undertaking to keep Members informed of progress at every stage, therefore made a statement to the House on 12 July in which he reported on where we had got to in the talks and on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Gibraltar.

As hon. Members will, I hope, recall, that statement set out a number of principles that we believe should underpin a lasting settlement, on which we had reached broad agreement with Spain. Those included the principle of joint sovereignty, which has been the focus of so much attention since, as this debate has shown. Other principles were included, too—that Gibraltar should have more internal self-government; that it should retain its British traditions, its customs and its way of life; that Gibraltarians should retain their right to British nationality; that Gibraltar should be free to retain its institutions; and that Gibraltar could—again, the conditional—choose to participate fully in the EU single market and other arrangements.

The statement also set out some important "red lines" on the need for a permanent settlement, and on the need for current arrangements for the British military facilities to continue. It made clear again that any agreement must be acceptable to the people of Gibraltar in a referendum. It was absolutely clear throughout the statement that no agreement had actually been reached, and that there would be no such agreement unless Spain met the conditions—the "red lines", as we would call them—in full. There were therefore no proposals to put to the people of Gibraltar, and that remains the position. That statement is a matter of public record.

The hon. Member for Romford attended the Gibraltar referendum on 7 November and saw it at first hand. He made a powerful speech about it, but I want to tackle the suggestion that we sought to dismiss the idea of the referendum out of hand or ignore it. I do not ignore any expression of the people's will, whether it is made in a Countryside Alliance march or any other mass mobilisation, demonstration or referendum.

The principle of the consent of the people of Gibraltar is central to our approach. Our commitment is firm that if we reach agreement on a comprehensive settlement the whole package will be put to the people of Gibraltar in a referendum and they will decide on it. I again give that cast-iron pledge from the Dispatch Box. No proposals were on the table on 7 November and even the most pro-Gibraltarian Member would agree that the result of the referendum was what we expected.

However, we are not deaf or stupid, and we have listened to the views expressed by Gibraltarians on 7 November and in the run-up to the referendum, just as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary listened when he visited the Rock in May. We shall also reflect on the report published by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which has not been mentioned. I hope that before long those on the Opposition Front Bench will table a substantive motion or give up a whole Opposition day to foreign affairs policy, so that the whole House can debate this issue and the other great issues that divide it.

On Gibraltar, my cast-iron assurance is there: there will be no change in sovereignty without a referendum of the people of Gibraltar.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 26 November 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Scottish Parliament

1. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): When she will publish the results of her consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament. [81439]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I hope to be able to make a decision before the end of the year.

Mr. Baron: I thank the Secretary of State for that response, but given that at present there are 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament, each representing on average 25,000 constituents, whereas, on average, the figure south of the border is closer to 70,000, and given that politicians can often be the problem rather than the solution, does the right hon. Lady agree that the pleas of most MSPs should be ignored and that the interests of the Scottish people would be better served by a smaller, more effective and less expensive Parliament, as envisaged by the Scotland Act 1998?

Mrs. Liddell: I really wish that when Members pick up hand-out questions from the Tory Whips they would do a wee bit of homework before they come into the Chamber. There are 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament, 73 of whom are elected under the first-past-the-post system and the rest of whom are elected under the list system. Indeed, it is the list system that has allowed the Scottish Conservatives some life after death in Scotland.

There has been a lengthy consultation exercise and people who have a genuine interest in the success of devolution have given a range of responses to it. I shall take those responses fully into account, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have reached this stage because of a consensus built up across civic Scotland, of which the Scottish Conservative party is not a part. I shall seek a conclusion that builds on that consensus.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): As someone who was involved in the project from day one, I never saw the Conservatives express any interest whatever. All they did was to tell us how useless it would be and that the Scottish people would reject it. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Scottish Conservatives have refused to make the—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State cannot answer for the Conservative party. That is not what she is here for.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Has the Secretary of State had time to consider our proposals for a leaner, fitter, more focused Parliament, with fewer MSPs, which would go a long way towards restoring public confidence in the Parliament as a whole? Given that the Deputy Minister for Justice in Scotland was reported as calling firefighters "fascists", does she agree that far too many MSPs and far too many Ministers in Scotland are undeserving of public support?

Mrs. Liddell: I take this opportunity to welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities on the Front Bench. It is an historic day to see at the Dispatch Box an elected Conservative representing a Scottish constituency, and I wish him well in his deliberations.

On the Government Benches, we know that the Scottish Conservative party does not wish the Scottish Parliament well. The 18 years of Conservative Government helped to focus people's attention on the need for a Scottish Parliament. I shall take into account all the representations made to me, including those from the Scottish Conservative party. They will be taken into account when I make my decision, which will, I hope, be shortly.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Given that the Secretary of State is the only person to have seen the consultation document, she will have had plenty of time to come to a view about the future size of the Scottish Parliament. Does she agree with the unholy alliance of Labour Back Benchers and Conservatives who believe that the numbers must be reduced, or does she agree with me, the rest of the Scottish National party and the overwhelming majority of MSPs that 129 should be retained? The question is straightforward and simple: does the Secretary of State believe that 129 should be retained? Yes or no?

Mrs. Liddell: I have to respect the traditions of the House. I entered into a consultation exercise, and I am not the only person who has seen the consultation document: 800 copies have been distributed, 1,300 hits have been made on the Scotland Office website, and there have been 230 replies. I shall deliberate on them. I have to point out to the hon. Gentleman that the reason that there is a Scottish Tory at the Dispatch Box is the failure of the Scottish National party in Galloway.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): It ill behoves the SNP to make any comment about the size of the Scottish Parliament, given that neither the SNP nor the Conservative party were part of the process in the first place.

Will my right hon. Friend reassure us that her response to the document will be based on the constitutional convention consensus, and that it will take everyone's views on board?

Mrs. Liddell: I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and I congratulate her on the work that she did in the Scottish constitutional convention. There has been a wide range of responses from people, and I have asked for some additional work to be done on those responses because I am anxious to reach a conclusion that meets the needs of the broad spectrum of people who have responded to the consultation exercise.

Scottish Fishing Industry

2. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): What assessment she has made of prospects for employment in the Scottish fishing industry. [81440]

4. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): What assessment she has made of employment prospects in the Scottish fishing industry. [81442]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): Future employment in the Scottish fishing industry will depend on the size of fish stocks and on the regulation of fish catches. The Government and the Scottish Executive are examining those issues with a view to securing a sustainable future for the industry.

Chris Grayling: I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that all of us in the United Kingdom will be losers if jobs and hence the communities in the remote parts of Scotland that depend on fishing are weakened and disappear. She will also be aware that the North sea suffers badly from industrial effluent from northern Europe and factory fishing from Denmark, which have as much of an effect on fish stocks as over-fishing. What can she and the Government do about those problems?

Mrs. Liddell: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman about how serious the issue is, particularly for the fishing communities around the coast of Scotland. We are now fully engaged in discussions with the Commission and, indeed, our colleagues in the Scottish Executive. It is our intention to have a common fisheries policy that not only delivers value for money, protects fish stocks and secures a future for the industry, but takes into account environmental issues. This is a time for cool heads, and we should all work together to secure the livelihoods of fishermen and their families in Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Andrew Selous: Given that haddock stocks are at their highest level since 1971, why is Scotland contemplating the end of fishing for that fish? Does the Secretary of State agree that fishing will return to its long-term viable status only when the communities are able to manage the fish stocks on which their employment depends?

Mrs. Liddell: Again, I return to the issue of people doing their homework; Scotland is not contemplating the end of fishing. Indeed, Scotland is determined to fight for the continuation of fishing, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that haddock and whiting stocks are being caught in the trap of the depletion in cod stocks in the North sea and that the by-catch is the difficulty for us. We would welcome the hon. Gentleman's support in ensuring sustainability for the fishing communities around Scotland. These are serious issues, and they require serious consideration.

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles): Does the Secretary of State agree that there are several different kinds of fishing industry in Scotland, some of which are hitting very serious problems while others are very successful? In particular, the west coast fishing industry, which largely catches shellfish, has had one of its best years for two decades. Will she join me in commending those fishermen on the responsible way in which they have conducted their fishery and seek to ensure that the Commission's fishing policy fully takes into account the different needs of the various industries in Scotland?

Mrs. Liddell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on that question. Indeed, I congratulate the fishermen in his community and elsewhere on their work. The nephrops fishery is an interesting case because by-catches of cod from the nephrops stock was an issue. There has been some success in relation to that, but fishing communities throughout Scotland must bear in mind that we are in very difficult times, and we need to co-operate to find a way forward. As I said earlier, this is a time for very cool heads in a very serious situation.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Can my right hon. Friend assure us that the Government will sign up to an agreement in Europe only if they are convinced that it is based on accurate scientific evidence and provides a solution that will sustain fishing stocks and the long-term future of our fishing industry in both its elements—catching and processing?

Mrs. Liddell: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. He and I were present during the fisheries debate last Thursday when the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), made that point. I understand that, as recently as this morning, representatives from fishing communities met scientists from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and I hope that that meeting was useful. There

is no doubt that the science issue has to be taken into account seriously, but we also have to question in great detail the conclusions reached as a result of analysing the science. We have to take into account the measures that have been previously introduced to preserve cod stocks in the North sea in reaching our final conclusions.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I welcome what the Secretary of State has just said about taking into account the substantial reductions in fishing effort over the last year. When haddock stocks biomass figures are the highest that they have been in the North sea for 30 years, when saith is at its highest for 20 years, and when whiting is at its highest for 10 years—and even cod, which is at very low levels, is improving—why on earth are we talking about a management plan for next year that might involve the loss of thousands of jobs around the coastline of Scotland? What personal involvement has she had in securing those jobs and the livelihoods of thousands of people in the communities of Scotland?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman asks an important question, and I agree with him about the inequity of haddock and other stocks being caught in this trap. He asks about my personal involvement. I have taken a considerable interest in this matter, and yesterday I met the Scottish Minister for Environment and Rural Affairs who has responsibility for fisheries. I am going to Brussels this afternoon, and I hope to meet representatives of the UK permanent representation to get a handle from them on how the discussions are likely to go. Like him, however, I am determined to see a future for the Scottish fishing industry.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I am sure that the Secretary of State is well aware of the grave concern for the Scottish fishing fleet on both sides of the House. Given the considerable concern regarding the interpretation of the science that the Commission has produced, will she, in her meetings, impress on the Commission and her colleagues the real contribution that the Scottish fishing fleet made to reduce effort last year, particularly with regard to increasing mesh sizes and other measures?

Mrs. Liddell: I shall certainly make those points, and the hon. Gentleman does well to draw them to the attention of the House. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary pointed out on Thursday night, these are areas in which we have strength on our side in challenging the conclusions of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, and in taking on the position of the Fisheries Commissioner, who seems to think that closing down the fishing industry in Scotland would be a price worth paying. It is not a price worth paying for this Government.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I hope that at the forthcoming European Fisheries Council my right hon. Friend will give an undertaking that the Government will argue strongly for maximum possible protection for Scotland's fishing industry. Does she agree, however, that it is vital that effective enforcement measures apply consistently across each and every member state?

Mrs. Liddell: That is an important point with which I agree. It is difficult to have unregulated fishing and excessive factory fishing as well as sustainable fishing stocks. Indeed, we signed up to the international plan of action in Rome in 1991, which is a good way forward. It is vital that we constantly take into account the whole issue of sustainability. However, some of the issues concerned with sustainability are difficult. We must engage across the House in a proper debate on these matters, along with those who know most about it, the fishing industry, so that we ensure the future of the industry, not just for those who are in the industry today, but for those in the industry in the future.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): As hon. Members have referred to nearly 44,000 jobs in Scotland in the fishing industry being at potential risk, will the right hon. Lady tell us who in her team is going to Brussels this afternoon, what subjects they plan to discuss and what outcomes she expects?

Mrs. Liddell: I am going to Brussels this afternoon. I have other engagements, but part of my visit is to give me an opportunity to talk to the UK permanent representation about the nature of the negotiations going on in relation to this matter. These are critical times, as the run-up to the Fisheries Council is, in many respects, even more important than the Fisheries Council itself. I know that the Scottish Fisheries Minister will be in Brussels at the end of this week, and we must work together across the House and with the Scottish Parliament to ensure that a balanced case is put, and that we have a sound and coherent argument that sustains the fishing industry for the future.

Mrs. Lait: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for that information, and I am glad that she is taking unilateral action on the fishing industry. From her website, nobody in the Scotland Office appears to be doing anything much. As the Prime Minister, last Wednesday, tacitly accepted the European Commission's questionable science, and condemned, in effect, the Scots fishing boats to tie up, can she tell us what action she is preparing to support the industry by the use of structural funds? What thought has she given to the long-term future of those communities, given that the funds will run out in 2006?

Mrs. Liddell: I get the impression that the hon. Lady is selling out the fishing industry already. We have a way to go in the negotiations and a coherent case will be significant. Last week, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred to the science. The science is important and we have to come to a mutually agreed decision about the robustness of the science, because the future and sustainability of the fishing industry are important. If the Government whom she supported had taken action in the 18 years that they were in power, we might not face these difficulties now.

Recycling

5. **Miss Anne Begg** (Aberdeen, South): What discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive about encouraging more recycling in Scotland. [81443]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Anne McGuire): My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with the Scottish Executive on a wide range of issues. The recycling of waste, however, is a devolved area of responsibility.

Miss Begg: My constituents are concerned about a proposal to build a very large incinerator in Aberdeen, South. If that proposal is turned down because it does not receive planning permission or if it turns out to be much smaller than planned, it will be crucial to lessen through recycling or waste minimisation the amount of waste that we produce. This Parliament has responsibility for incentives that promote waste minimisation, that encourage business to use recycled materials and that help to create markets for such materials. Will my hon. Friend hold discussions with the Treasury to help to ensure that it is gives as many incentives as it can to encourage recycling and to make sure that we have less waste to deal with?

Mrs. McGuire: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as he prepares his pre-Budget consultation, will have heard my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does my hon. Friend agree that not all recycling is to be applauded? Will she deplore the recycling of soiled, used and defeated candidates in first-past-the-post elections for the Scottish Parliament? As this is an issue for which—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was a waste of the House's time.

Inward Investment

6. **Mrs. Eleanor Laing** (Epping Forest): When she last met the Scottish Executive to discuss inward investment in Scotland. [81445]

8. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): When she last met the Scottish Executive to discuss inward investment in Scotland. [81447]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Anne McGuire): My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the Scottish Executive on a range of matters affecting the Scottish economy, including inward investment.

Mrs. Laing: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is she aware that a recent report from Ernst and Young has shown that inward investment in Scotland has fallen by almost two thirds in the first half of this year? I find that extremely worrying, recognising, as I do, how important inward investment is to Scotland. Given the wealth of experience in business that the Secretary of State has had both personally and as a Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry, is it not frustrating that Labour and Liberal—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is enough. The Minister will answer the hon. Lady's point.

Mrs. McGuire: The hon. Lady may have failed to notice that we are living in a very difficult global market. However, I reassure her that the United Kingdom is second only to the United States as the most popular place for inward investment. Scotland still holds its place within the United Kingdom. Perhaps she will consider some of the good new stories on inward investment, such as those involving the French whisky firms that have relocated their businesses to Livingston, AEA Technology, Excell Biotech and Pentland Ferries.

Mr. Gray: The Minister is bullish about the prospects for inward investment in Scotland, but how does she explain the fact that, in the first half of this year, only seven new projects were recorded compared with 18 in the previous six months? Will she comment on the fact that five of those projects came from the United States?

Mrs. McGuire: We have close relations with the United States, so I am not at all surprised that some of that inward investment has come from there. As I said in my answer to the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing), we are living in a difficult market, but significant trends have shown that we have cause for optimism. We should stop talking the Scottish economy down and start talking it up.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Will my hon. Friend and her colleagues in government continue, as they have been doing, to focus on the importance of inward investment, particularly in the light of the economy that we inherited? Will she pay particular regard to the future of Gartcosh, which is crucial to my constituency and to the rest of Lanarkshire?

Mrs. McGuire: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on highlighting the importance of Gartcosh. We all agree that it is vital to the regeneration of Lanarkshire. However, I want to alert the House to the fact that, as we speak, 252 inward investment projects are safeguarding or creating 40,000 jobs in the Scottish economy.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Does my hon. Friend agree that we live in a difficult recession-ridden international climate and that Britain's macro-economic stability enables us to continue to attract inward investment when other countries, trying a lot harder than they did, are unsuccessful? That is because of the great assets of our labour force, our flexible labour market and, as I said, the general macro-economic stability of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. McGuire: My hon. Friend has a wealth of experience in those matters and I can do nothing other than agree with him.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Human Rights

26. **Ann McKechin** (Glasgow, Maryhill): What assessment she has made of the change in the way in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is applied in Scotland since devolution. [81430]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): There have been significant changes. I have noted that alleged breaches of the convention can now be raised much more quickly and effectively in domestic courts. In some areas of procedural uncertainty, I have attempted to obtain clarification of the law.

Ann McKechin: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for her reply. I agree about the success of the implementation of the Human Rights Act, especially in greatly speeding up the process of pursuing cases in the courts. What examples can she give of recent attempts to clarify the law in that regard?

The Advocate-General: My hon. Friend will appreciate that some of the matters are technical. There was a problem after the Human Rights Act came into force because some litigants thought that they no longer had to use the devolution minute procedure but could rely instead on the Act. I took a test point in the case of Mills which confirmed that the Scotland Act 1998 is the correct route to follow if a party litigant wants to allege that a Scottish Minister, including the Lord Advocate, is in breach of the convention. There have been other examples of that, too.

Devolution

27. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent devolutionary issues she has considered. [81431]

The Advocate-General: I consider all devolution issues intimated to me. Of those intimated recently, all have concerned the criminal sphere, with the majority relating to the right to a fair trial.

Miss McIntosh: May I seek the Advocate-General's advice on one devolution issue? If a Scottish airport seeks expansion, who will have the final decision—the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Scottish Executive or the Secretary of State for Transport in England?

The Advocate-General: No such devolution issue has been intimated to me. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid not. There is a procedure under the Scotland Act 1998. Such devolution issues are not raised in Parliament. On the general point, each matter has to be considered within its context. It would be necessary to consider the particular proposals, both the relevant reservations under the Scotland Act and the particular devolution aspects. That is why, for example, I have to consider legislative proposals within the context of the Scotland Act. We cannot answer such questions in broad terms; they have to be considered in the specific context.

28. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What devolution issues have been raised since 23 October under the Scotland Act 1998. [81432]

29. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): What devolution issues she has considered since 22 October. [81433]

The Advocate-General: Since 22 October, 26 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me, all relating to the criminal law. A substantial number concerned undue delay in criminal proceedings, while the rest related variously to the right not to self-incriminate, to whether shameless indecency at common law is a sufficiently defined offence for the purposes of the convention, to reversal of burdens of proof and to the determination of the punishment part of life sentences.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the Advocate-General for her answer. She will be aware that she has intervened in 24 devolution cases out of a total of 1,575 since the inception of her office. That is about 1 per cent. of cases. Will she clarify whether there is a formal ceiling that limits the number of times she can intervene in devolution cases?

The Advocate-General: There is no formal ceiling. Many devolution cases are intimated to me at the first level, in the lower courts, and I never have to deal with them again because they are resolved. Many of them, approximately 700, have dealt with questions of delay, and because they raised a number of difficult legal points, I took steps to tackle them in a recent test case in the Privy Council. It would be ludicrous to intervene in 700 cases, so I try to identify cases in which the law may, for various reasons, need clarification, or in which there are pressing reasons, for the UK, for me to intervene. It may be considered to be a mark of the success of the devolution settlement that I have had to intervene in so few cases.

Mr. Carmichael: Does the Advocate-General consider it appropriate in 2002 that the commissioners of the Northern Lighthouse Board should still be drawn from the Lord Advocate, the Solicitor-General and sheriff principals? Will she consider the human rights aspects of the matter and give the appropriate advice for reform to the Department for Transport?

The Advocate-General: On the face of it I am not sure that there are any human rights issues, but I am happy to listen to any that are brought to my attention. This is a devolved matter, and I am sure that the Lord Advocate—*[Interruption.]* Well, I shall look into the matter and write to the hon. Gentleman.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Personal Immunity

35. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What the Lord Chancellor's policy is on the personal immunity of the Sovereign in relation to actions in court. [81465]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): The policy that the sovereign has personal immunity in relation to actions in court remains unchanged.

Dr. Cable: Does the Minister agree that the recent application of that principle of immunity has caused considerable embarrassment to the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts and, not least, the monarchy? Will she therefore contemplate reviewing those arrangements, particularly bearing in mind the comment made yesterday by David Pannick QC that one person's liberty as a defendant should not take second place to someone else's status?

Ms Winterton: The hon. Gentleman clearly has strong views about the matter. However, on 4 November, at one of his regular press conferences, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in relation to the Paul Burrell case that he did not believe that the constitutional position should change.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Does not this case have wider implications for immunity in general terms and, in particular, for Crown immunity? Does my hon. Friend have a view on the implications for Crown immunity, and how can Members of the House have a say in what happens about that?

Ms Winterton: Consideration has been given to the quite different issue of the state's immunity in legal proceedings. For example, a recent consultation paper, "Revitalising Health and Safety", contains proposals for removing or modifying that immunity. In the light of the responses to that document, an interdepartmental working group is considering the implications, and advice will be given to Ministers about Crown immunity.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Has the Lord Chancellor formally inquired as to what law, procedure or judicial rule led the judge in the case of R *v.* Burrell to convene prosecuting counsel in private and exclude defence counsel, which is usually done only when a public interest immunity certificate is applied for? If not, why not, and will he do so?

Will the Minister confirm to the House that what the Attorney-General wrote to me on 6 November is the case, namely:

"No minister was asked to give a PII certificate or sign one, nor was a draft certificate ever prepared, or any consideration given by anyone to preparing such a certificate to place before the judge"?

Ms Winterton: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that he addressed those issues to the Attorney-General, who has replied to him. The Lord Chancellor played no part whatsoever in the Paul Burrell trial.

Magistrates

36. **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): If she will make a statement on the Government's plans for increasing the number of magistrates. [81466]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): The most recent figures show that there are 28,500 magistrates in England and Wales. Work is under way to assess what impact measures such as increased sentencing powers will have on the number of magistrates needed in future so that we can plan recruitment programmes accordingly.

Hugh Robertson: I should like to raise with the Minister the case of a constituent of mine, Mrs. Summers, who was removed from the Bench by the Lord Chancellor this summer. She has lived in this country for more than 30 years since her marriage, had been a magistrate for more than 10, but was removed this summer by the Lord Chancellor because she failed to meet the terms of the Act of Settlement 1701, which allows for magistrates who are United Kingdom nationals, Irish or members of a Commonwealth country. She is Dutch. The Lord Chancellor's Department wrote to me and promised to return her to the Bench as soon as possible. I have heard nothing further—what more is being done?

Yvette Cooper: I am not aware of the particular case that the hon. Gentleman raised, but he is right that a number of cases have been caught by the Act of Settlement and nationality requirements for magistrates. We have made it clear that we are keen for people who have been serving magistrates for a long time, often with great experience and having given a huge amount of time to their community and the justice system, to be returned to the Bench. We have been working on measures to support individuals to help them meet the requirements so that they can get back onto the Bench. We are also looking at legislative provisions in that area, and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with a detailed account of progress.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): If the Government expand the number of magistrates, as a member of the Magistrates' Association I believe that it is desirable to widen the sections of society from which appointments to the lay Bench are made. Will the Minister tell the House how the Government are tackling the chronic difficulty of making the Bench representative?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. An important principle in the justice system is that of being judged by one's peers. It is important that magistrates are drawn from the areas or constituencies on which they will judge. We are concerned to recruit more people who are in work, more people from ethnic minorities and younger people to the Bench. We have been working

with Operation Black Vote, particularly on recruitment from ethnic minority communities, and we are looking to do more through a national recruitment strategy.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): If we are to have a large lay magistracy, which is desirable, is it not important that the courts are kept local? In that context, may I emphasise the importance of keeping the magistrates court at Sleaford?

Yvette Cooper: I have heard the right hon. and learned Gentleman's representations on that court. Local access to justice is certainly important, which is why we have supported it across the country. We are also looking at closer working between magistrates courts and the civil and family courts, because that can often support access in areas where individual courts may be under pressure. That is also why decisions are made locally about the use of court houses and resources.

Court Witnesses

37. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): What research her Department has carried out into the reasons why some witnesses fail to testify in court. [81467]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): The Government have carried out considerable research on this issue, much of it led by the Home Office, although it is used across Departments involved in the criminal justice system. The Lord Chancellor's Department is currently looking at new research into why trials are ineffective and do not go ahead on the day, including the reasons why witnesses do not attend.

Hugh Bayley: York Women's Aid tells me that six of its clients in the past year have withdrawn witness statements that they have made to the police against men who use violence against them. The longer the wait between the man being charged and the case coming to court, the more likely a woman is to be harassed and intimidated into withdrawing her evidence. What are the Government going to do to bring domestic violence cases before the courts more speedily to avoid that problem, thus ensuring that women who have been subjected to violence get justice?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right to point to problems of delay and intimidation for witnesses. Those are both reasons why witnesses often do not give evidence in the end, and cases can fall apart as a result. There are particular problems in cases of domestic violence, given the relationship between the person who has suffered the violence and the perpetrator, which can make matters more difficult. That is why we are considering not simply reducing unacceptable delays across the board, but measures relating specifically to domestic violence, and why the Government are working on proposals for a White Paper in due course.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The Government are right to identify intimidation of and reprisals against witnesses as a serious matter. In the Government's preparations for legislation to deal with the problem, will the hon. Lady include research among local authorities and parliamentarians with experience of these matters? Can she say what the likely timetable is for the introduction of the victims and witnesses Bill, and whether the antisocial behaviour Bill will include procedural changes to free tenants and others who wish to lay information without threat of reprisal?

Yvette Cooper: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Criminal Justice Bill has already been published and includes improvements to support for witnesses. He is right to say that there is also a considerable amount of work going on in support of victims and witnesses across government and across the criminal justice system—for example, work in the courts includes equipment for those who are vulnerable and for intimidated witnesses to be able to give evidence through the Crown court. We are keen to include any representations from hon. Members across the House, and if the hon. Gentleman has particular views or examples, it would be helpful if he passed them to us and also to the Home Office.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): May I invite my hon. Friend to extend the current research that she mentioned to include an examination of a scheme at Stafford, where there is a support scheme for witnesses and antisocial behaviour cases? I have seen for myself that witnesses feel supported, they feel that they are mutually backing each other up, they obtain information about the cases, and they go to court believing that what they are doing is right and is valued. Will my hon. Friend consider whether such a scheme could be replicated across the country, with the beneficial effect of more witnesses turning up to give evidence?

Yvette Cooper: I certainly would be interested to see the example that my hon. Friend described. He may be aware that the Crown Prosecution Service estimates that 30,000 cases each year do not go ahead because victims or witnesses are not prepared to give evidence, so we would be interested in any measures that are helping to improve the position. At present, all sorts of support for victims and witnesses is provided by volunteers across the country, so anything that allows communities to provide support and witnesses to provide support for each other would be extremely interesting to look at.

Solicitors

38. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): How many complaints she has received about the operation of the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors in the past year; and if she will make a statement. [81468]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): The responsibility for handling complaints about the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors falls to the Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman. Information about specific numbers of referrals to the OLSO about the OSS is available in the ombudsman's most recent report, a copy of which is in the Library. However, concerns about the operation of the OSS have been raised in correspondence to the Lord Chancellor's Department, and the Lord Chancellor has warned that unless swift

and substantive improvements are made, he will not hesitate to implement his reserve powers and establish a legal services complaints commissioner.

Mr. Cameron: What would the Minister say to my constituent, Mr. Fraser of Chipping Norton, who wrote to me stating:

"Self-regulation only seemed to work when solicitors did not tout for business and there were fewer solicitors."

Now that the number of complaints is so large, as the Minister said in her answer, the backlog is so significant, and the level of dissatisfaction is getting so high, can she set a deadline for when she will make a decision about whether or nor the current system is working?

Ms Winterton: With regard to self-regulation, the Government have always started from the position that the legal profession should be independent and self-regulating. Solicitors should be able to represent their clients freely and without fear, potentially against the Government, if necessary. It is important that we accept that as the ideal position. However, we are keenly aware of the points that the hon. Gentleman makes about complaints, particularly about the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors. As I said, the Lord Chancellor would prefer the office to get itself in good working order. However, if that does not happen, he has taken reserve powers that will be reviewed frequently to ensure that improvements are being made. If not, other action will be taken.

Legislative Scrutiny

39. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): What her policy is on scrutiny of Bills sponsored by his Department. [81470]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): The Queen's Speech highlighted the importance that the Government place on pre-legislative scrutiny of Bills by Parliament. We are keen to see much greater use of pre-legislative scrutiny of Bills and legislation introduced by the Lord Chancellor's Department in future.

Mr. Allen: I congratulate my hon. Friend and the Government on their commitment in the Queen's Speech to ensuring more pre-legislative scrutiny, which will allow this place and the public outside to contribute to Bills. If her Department were to introduce a Bill on, say, courts or mental incapacity, would she look favourably on pre-legislative scrutiny in those areas? Looking further ahead, as Departments are now preparing Bills for next year's legislative programme, will she alert her Department—and I hope, with the President of the Council present, all other Departments in Whitehall—to ensure that time is now being built in for pre-legislative scrutiny, so that all Bills can be properly scrutnised by this House and the public?

Yvette Cooper: The points that my hon. Friend makes are extremely important. We will introduce a Bill on courts reform, as set out in the Queen's Speech. That will need to move relatively quickly into the House for discussion, so I understand that it will not be possible to conduct pre-legislative scrutiny on that Bill. However, we are looking to future areas of legislation, including issues relating to mental incapacity, which he mentioned. I certainly believe that such legislation would benefit from the scrutiny afforded by prior publication in draft, although he will understand that I can give no commitment about the timing of publication, nor can I give any commitment about parliamentary scrutiny. He will understand that as well as timing decisions taken by business managers, the final decision must rest with parliamentary Committees. We are keen for them to take the decision to conduct more pre-legislative scrutiny when the opportunity arises.

PRIVY COUNCIL

The President of the Council was asked—

House of Lords Reform

46. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on proposals for further reform of the House of Lords. [81510]

48. **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): What progress has been made with his preparation for reform of the House of Lords. [81512]

The President of the Council (Mr. Robin Cook): The Queen's Speech stated that the Government look forward to considering the interim report from the Joint Committee on options for the composition of the House of Lords. I understand that the Joint Committee may reach a view on its interim report before Christmas. The Government have already given a commitment to facilitate the House reaching a decision on the options on a free vote.

Dr. Lewis: Will the President resist the temptation to shelter entirely behind the Joint Committee schedule and now give a firm pledge to this House that House of Lords reform will be implemented by the end of this Parliament?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman waves temptation in front of me. I am happy to say that I am very able to resist the temptation to shelter behind the Joint Committee. I have said before and am happy to say again that I would like us to take forward House of Lords reform in this Parliament. I would like it to be enforced by the time we reach the end of this Parliament, but whether I can arrive there depends not only on me, but on 659 Members of Parliament, how we vote and whether there is a centre of gravity for reform. I would be very concerned if we fell into the same trap into which the House has fallen on previous occasions, when the inability among those who wanted reform to agree on it left the field to those who were opposed to any reform. We must not fall into that trap this time around.

Tony Wright: When the House discussed this matter six months ago, on 13 May, my right hon. Friend said:

"A vote before the summer recess is certainly possible if the Joint Committee gets down to work quickly, and presents us with the options in good time. It is difficult to see what new matter needs

to be examined, and I hope that the Joint Committee will co-operate with us in making that speed."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 2002; Vol. 388, c. 528.]

We are now approaching the Christmas recess. I understand that when the Joint Committee next meets, it will be five weeks since it last met, and that three meetings have been cancelled. Does that not suggest that the speech for which he calls has not been forthcoming?

Mr. Cook: I took the precaution of checking what I said before I came into the Chamber. I added that the summer recess was a tough deadline. It is important that I do not get pushed into the position of speaking on behalf of the Joint Committee and defending its timetable or decisions, which are matters for its members. I welcome the fact that the Chairman said that he intends to report by the winter solstice, and I am grateful to those who pointed out that that takes place on 21 December. That is compatible with being before Christmas.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Given the hilarity with which the Government's White Paper recommendation for electing only a fifth was received, will the Leader of the House give a firm commitment that Labour Back Benchers are under no obligation, and not even encouraged, to support the Government's proposal?

Mr. Cook: I assure the hon. Gentleman that Labour Members are under no obligation to support it. I do not imagine that it would make much difference if they were under such an obligation. There will be a genuine free vote on the options. It is important that we emerge from the process of division with a centre of gravity around one favoured option to create the momentum to take it forward.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): In his extensive research into comparing international second Chambers, has my right hon. Friend come across any other second Chamber that gives religious leaders ex-officio positions and the right to vote on legislation? Is not it time to join the rest of the world and get rid of the bishops from the House of Lords?

Mr. Cook: I do not pretend to be an expert student of comparative second Chambers around the world, and I cannot therefore give my hon. Friend a blunt, frank answer. However, the future of bishops in the second Chamber is contentious and delicate and reflects views in the Church of England and elsewhere.

The royal commission suggested that a reduced number of bishops should sit in the second Chamber. We must wait and see the Joint Committee's view on the matter.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Building on the helpful reply that the Leader of the House gave to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), does he perceive no genuine obstacle to resolving Lords reform in this House by next summer, and to resolving it legislatively by the end of the Parliament at the latest? Will he assure us that the Government will use their best endeavours to ensure that the matter progresses in an orderly fashion, and that he will work as closely as ever with the Lord Chancellor to make sure that the other place acts in the same way?

Mr. Cook: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Government will use their best endeavours to reach a conclusion on the matter. However, it is going a bit far to claim on the basis of my earlier reply that I perceive no obstacles. With only a moment's notice, I could produce 55 different obstacles that we might encounter. However, the House has to find a centre of gravity around a favoured method of reform. That is the prime issue. I hope that the process on which we have embarked through a Joint Committee and a free vote will enable us to reach that outcome.

We have rightly put Parliament in the driving seat to consider an issue of parliamentary reform. I hope that Parliament can rise to the occasion and establish an agreed method of achieving reform. If we can do that, I anticipate effecting it in the course of the Parliament.

Statutory Instruments

47. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): If he will ask the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to consider whether it would be appropriate to allow statutory instruments to be amendable. [81511]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): The Procedure Committee has already considered the amendability of statutory instruments and recommended against it. It is therefore unlikely that this matter would be re-examined by the Modernisation Committee, which co-ordinates its work programme closely with the Procedure Committee.

Norman Baker: That is a disappointing reply, although I understand why the Parliamentary Secretary made it. The following position can often arise: a member of a statutory instrument Committee tables an amendment that garners all-party support in Committee; the Minister has to choose between passing the SI unamended, against the Committee's wishes, or asking the hon. Member to withdraw it. The hon. Member refuses to do that. Is not that simply bad government?

Mr. Bradshaw: I do not agree. Accepting amendability would negate the point of SIs. I shall quote briefly from the Procedure Committee's report, which states:

"Permitting the amendment . . . would involve excessive complications. It would . . . overturn many decades of practice . . . and . . . frustrate the very purpose of which delegated powers were given."

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): If we are not to have amendable secondary legislation, could many more statutory instruments be debated in draft?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am told by my right hon. Friend that that would be very difficult, but, if the right hon. and learned Gentleman will allow me, I will write to him with a more expansive reply.

Computers

49. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will recommend to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons that it review the way hon. Members use laptop computers to assist them in carrying out their role of legislative scrutiny. [81513]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): My right hon. Friend will bring the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion to the attention of the Modernisation Committee. He accepts that information and communications technology has great potential for assisting the House in its work, and he is examining ways in which new technologies can be used to maximise Members' effectiveness.

Mr. Jack: I thank the Minister most sincerely for his positive response to my question, particularly at a time when the Liaison Committee has granted an experiment in the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee for the use of laptop equipment. I would be most grateful if he could keep the House informed as to the timetable of the recommendation that he has made.

Mr. Bradshaw: I would be very happy to do that, and I note the right hon. Gentleman's welcome for the advance made by the Liaison Committee in relation to the Select Committee to which he referred. I agree with him, to a certain extent; at a time when many Members have done away with paper altogether and use palm-tops, for example, for note taking, the compiling of contact addresses and so forth, the whole House will want to move in the same direction as he does, in the end.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Is not the continuing insistence on our not using laptop computers in Committee as ludicrous as it would be if we were still required to use quill pens? The rule is often breached by Members sending text messages and using palm-top computers surreptitiously. Does it not make a mockery of the system to allow that to continue? Will the Minister move quickly on this issue?

Mr. Bradshaw: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is perfectly possible physically to remove oneself from a Committee to make a telephone call or to pass notes to and fro. It is important, however, that we take the Chairmen's Panel with us on this matter.

Draft Legislation

50. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What steps he is taking to develop improved scrutiny of draft legislation. [81514]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The Queen's Speech for the first time highlighted the importance that the Government place on the pre-legislative scrutiny of Bills by Parliament. In due course, I would hope that most bills would be published in draft. For pre-legislative scrutiny to be a success, it will be necessary for departmental Select Committees to recognise it as part of their core tasks.

Helen Jackson: Is it not the case that, this week, we shall give a Second Reading to three Bills that have not, to my knowledge, been considered in draft? In particular, is not the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill causing considerable difficulties for local authorities around the country that feel that there has not been enough consultation on aspects of the legislation? Is not this an example of how draft legislation might have been extremely beneficial both to local authorities and to the Government in pursuing that programme?

Mr. Cook: In fairness to the Government, I should say that the matters that we are discussing this week have been around for some time. For instance, the Bill that we shall discuss today on the regional assemblies flows from a White Paper that has been extensively discussed. I do not disagree with my hon. Friend; of course it helps with the final text of a Bill if it has been through pre-legislative scrutiny. That is why we want to see more Bills published in draft. In practice, though, that means that these Bills would have needed to be published in draft in the last Session. What we must now focus on is how many Bills we can publish in draft in anticipation of the next Session.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Commons Chamber (Tourists)

51. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What assessment the Commission has made of the costs of making the Commons Chamber accessible to tour groups when the House is sitting. [81516]

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): The trial period will begin when the House returns in January and will end at the Easter recess. Tour groups will be able to view the Chamber from the area at the back of the Strangers Gallery. Glazing will be installed in the apertures behind the seats in the Gallery to provide soundproofing, and additional audio speakers will be installed in the viewing area. Full details of the cost of this work are not yet available, but it is not expected to be large and will be found from existing budgets.

Mr. Kidney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his answer, which has obviously caused some interest around the Chamber. Will he accept that when we move to the new sitting hours in January, there will be reduced opportunities for visitors to visit the Chamber when it is empty? Does he share my sense of urgency that we should have a permanent arrangement as soon as possible for visits to take place while we are sitting, as he has just described?

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman's interest in that subject as a member of the Modernisation Committee is

well known and noted. This is an experiment, and I hope that Members feed back their experience of that temporary arrangement between January and Easter. Once we have the benefit of that behind us, we shall look forward—in the not too distant future, I hope—to permanent arrangements being made.

PRIVY COUNCIL

The President of the Council was asked—

Pre-legislative Scrutiny

53. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward a schedule for pre-legislative scrutiny online for all Bills before the next Queen's Speech. [81518]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): Whether to conduct pre-legislative scrutiny online is a matter for decision by the Committee concerned, although we hope that it might become the usual practice, as circumstances allow.

Mr. Allen: Obviously, there are difficulties with giving all Bills pre-legislative scrutiny as the programme has been agreed, but there should be no such excuse for next year. Departments are considering Bills now for next year's programme. Will my hon. Friend ensure that the wage bill for Members of Parliament does not go up more than 4 per cent. before that essential modernisation takes place?

Mr. Bradshaw: As my hon. Friend is aware, the wages of Members of Parliament are subject to independent review by the Senior Salaries Review Body, but we certainly take on board his point about pre-legislative scrutiny online. I have had meetings with him and our correspondence is continuing. We are trying to do what we can to expedite the process.

Fire Dispute

3.31 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the fire service dispute. As you know, I was available to give a statement to the House yesterday in line with my undertaking to keep the House informed. *[Laughter.]* I would hope that the House always feels that Front Benchers should make themselves accountable. In the event—*[Interruption.]* I bowed to the wishes of Mr. Speaker, as we all must. In the event, the Prime Minister made a statement in response to an urgent question from the Leader of the Opposition, so I will not repeat what he said.

The Government have always made it clear that we want a modern, efficient and effective fire service. We want a fair deal for the firefighters, a fair deal for other public service employees and a fair deal for the public they serve. I am sure that the House will want to join me in thanking the armed forces, the police and other emergency services for the thoroughly professional job that they have done so far. Anyone looking at the pictures in some of our papers today of Wren Amy Stubbs rescuing a young child can see the professionalism and care that they are applying to their role, and I am sure the House would want me to thank them for it.

Since Friday morning, the armed forces have attended more than 5,000 incidents. Their remit is to give priority to category A life-threatening incidents. In fact, they are all coping well and the calls that they have attended have been from the less dangerous category C. There has been no reported instance of property being left to burn.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank the retained firefighters for their continuing work and to acknowledge that striking firefighters have left their own picket lines to deal with some emergency incidents, as they did in the case of the rescue by Amy Stubbs. I am sure the whole House will want to join me in thanking the public for their extra vigilance. However, although hoax calls have fallen from 11 per cent. on the first day of the first strike to 7 per cent. yesterday, that 7 per cent. is still too high.

Following the breakdown of negotiations on Friday morning, I held a discussion with Jeremy Beecham on the way forward. Sir Jeremy is the chairman of the Local Government Association, but he is not a member of the negotiating team. He agreed with me, and has made it public, that the document negotiated between the employers and the employees on Thursday night and Friday morning abandoned the essential link between pay and modernisation that has been the touchstone of the Government's approach to the dispute.

I met Sir Jeremy again last night. He was working to put together a new group on the employers' side, which will oversee the process of modernisation of the fire service, drawing on the work of the Bain review. *[Interruption.]* That involves members of each political party. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions will meet the employers tomorrow to discuss that further.

Officials from my Department met the employers yesterday and they are meeting officials again today to work on the costs and benefits of the modernisation proposals. We will continue to work with the employers to help them to come to a clear view about the process of modernisation and the costs of any pay deal for the firefighters.

There has been a great deal of speculation about how this fire strike could be brought to an end. It is very important to bear certain absolutely clear principles in mind. First, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, this Government cannot be asked to find additional money outside the agreed Government spending limits. To do so would risk fundamental and lasting damage to the economy. An inflationary pay rise for the firefighters would lead to inflationary pay rises elsewhere in the public sector, and that in turn would lead to job losses, inflation and mortgage rises. That, I think, is common ground—or it was until yesterday—between the Government and Opposition Members.

Secondly, any pay rise in addition to the 4 per cent. already on the table must be paid for by modernisation. That is the clear message that I have given in every meeting I have held with the employers and the FBU since the early summer. It is the same message that has been repeated by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and members of the Government ever since this dispute started. It is the reason why the Government set up the independent Bain review immediately after negotiations with the FBU and employers broke down in early September. It is also the reason why we asked Sir George Bain to bring forward his position paper on pay, which was published on 11 November.

Following the Prime Minister's press conference and Commons statement yesterday, a real debate has begun in the papers about the issues involved. The FBU found itself having to justify its opposition to the type of changes that other public services have faced up to and which, indeed, have been carried out by some individual fire brigades. The FBU even claimed that it was willing to discuss modernisation all along, so why did it boycott the independent Bain review in the first place?

The debate on modernisation is properly under way, and to help that debate I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of a principles paper submitted by the Government to the Bain review. The Government's evidence sets out a clear vision for the future of the fire service and the principles that we believe should form the foundations for modernisation. The fire service is a front-line service whose effective functioning is essential to the quality of life in this country. The Government's evidence states that the fire service is well regarded by the public and is effective in many aspects of its performance, but is in need of change and reform. It is a service that could make much better use of its existing resources; that has to consider new ways of working; that needs to forge better partnerships; and that needs to attract a more diverse work force that better reflects the community it serves.

The Government's principles paper sets out our general approach to public sector pay. It states our determination to maintain economic stability and meet our 2.5 per cent. inflation target. It emphasises the need to avoid unnecessarily high pay increases that divert money intended to improve public services, and it stresses the need to link pay to performance and reform, rather than to tenure and time served. The Government's evidence also sets out the five main drivers for change in the fire service, which are: first, a

better understanding of the management of risk and the importance of prevention; secondly, the need to reduce the number of fires that occur and the deaths, injuries, and economic and social costs that they cause; thirdly, the fire services' contribution to community safety and action on social exclusion; fourthly, the importance of partnership in the delivery of best value; and lastly, the broadening range of the fire service's work in response to emergencies other than fire, including the new threats posed by terrorism.

The position paper published by the Bain review on 11 November set out the considerations on pay and conditions that were needed to deliver this vision of a modernised fire service. His final, fuller report will be published in three weeks' time. The position paper set out a vision for a single, more broadly based and modernised service with multiple roles offering a wider range of services and expertise. It proposed a reward structure in which individuals would be valued for the contribution they made. It encouraged a more diverse work force with a wider range of career paths, responsibilities and skills, and made it clear that pay and modernisation had to go hand in hand and be consistent with the Government's public sector pay policy. The position paper recommended an increase in the pay bill of up to 11 per cent. over two years, subject to necessary and long-overdue modernisation.

As I told the House on 14 November, the Government remain convinced that the Bain review is the key to resolving this dispute and providing the basis for a modern fire service equipped to deal with modern demands. Let me be clear: that remains the Government's position, as I have said in every statement to the House and in every discussion with the employers and the FBU. We should also be clear that Sir George Bain is proposing a menu of modernisation that is familiar to public sector workers in every other walk of life. What he means by modernisation with regard specifically to working conditions is that full-time and part-time firefighters should man the same engine together; that there should be shift patterns better to match the daily ebb and flow in the number of fires that occur; that overtime should be worked when it is sensible and necessary; that firefighters should be trained to carry out some essential life-saving paramedic functions that could save hundreds of lives; and that there should be joint control rooms, where the fire service and other emergency services can work together. The House should bear in mind the fact that some of those practices are already being carried out in a number of brigade areas up and down the country.

Bain also set out a route map for achieving that vision. He proposed a four-strand approach to negotiations, under which discussions would begin on the whole package of reforms at the same time but would be completed according to different time scales. The first strand would be completed in four to eight weeks, the second in about six months and the third in about a year. That model involved a direct connection between staged payments and the implementation of modernisation. Sir George recommended that, in exchange, the firefighters should receive a 4 per cent. pay rise immediately and a 7 per cent. rise next November. Each rise would be linked to the implementation of modernisation. The fourth strand would depend on action to be taken in partnership with local authorities and central Government, and would take longer to complete.

Sir George said that the question of a longer-term uprating mechanism should depend on the implementation of the reform package, and that he would return to that in his final report—which, as I have said, will be produced in about three weeks.

As with any industrial dispute, there are lots of variables that can be combined in different ways to bring about a final agreement. Bain talks of 11 per cent.; the general secretary of the FBU confirmed today, at a press conference in the House of Commons, that the union's claim is for 40 per cent., and the same is being stated on picket lines up and down the country.

The way forward is for the employers and the union to sit down and discuss how quickly the service can be modernised, how much can be saved, and when the firefighters will get their extra pay. What is absolutely clear, however, is that this fire service strike will have no influence on that process. The Government are not willing to abandon the clear principles that I have set out in the face of industrial action.

I believe that the dispute will be settled only if people sit down at the table and try to reach an agreement. We must lift our eyes above the bile and recriminations of the current dispute, and focus on the long-term future of the fire service. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to introduce a radical change in order to provide a modern fire service for the 21st century. It is the interests of everyone—the public, the employers, the Government and the firefighters themselves—to achieve that vision.

The Bain review has proposed a way forward. That is the basis for discussion. The issue of modernisation must be addressed, and we will therefore go on trying to bring employers and union together to have a proper discussion of pay and modernisation. The two must go hand in hand. The sooner the FBU faces that, the sooner the two sides can begin meaningful negotiation that can bring the dispute to an end. Once again, I urge the firefighters to get back to talking and stop walking.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement. I agree that it is time for the firefighters to return to work and for all parties to return to the negotiating table. Let me also associate myself and the Opposition with the Deputy Prime Minister's remarks about the excellent work being done by the military personnel and, indeed, by the retained firefighters. Their hard work has ensured that this week's strike has not resulted in many more casualties. But it is not with their hard work that we have a problem; the problem is that they are needed at all. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, this strike should not have happened in the first place. That it happened is due in part to the chaos and confusion that we have witnessed at the heart of Government over the past two weeks.

The Deputy Prime Minister spoke at length about reorganisation. Some of that may be beneficial, but it will not work if it is not clear who is in charge. Yesterday the Prime Minister stepped in to try and introduce some clarity, but many questions remain unanswered. I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister can bring more clarity to some of those issues today.

[David Davis]

First, there is the issue of costs. On Friday, the Prime Minister's official spokesman described the draft agreement between the employers and the FBU as "uncosted" and "half-baked". The Deputy Prime Minister himself said, "nobody knows the costs". Can he confirm that a member of his Department, a senior civil servant, costed the deal in the early hours of Friday morning at some £240 million? If so, why did the Prime Minister say yesterday that the cost was nearer £500 million? Can the Deputy Prime Minister clear up that confusion and tell us which figure he believes: £240 million or £500 million?

This morning, the Prime Minister's official spokesman refused to rule out the possibility of job losses in the fire service. Given that employment-related costs make up more than 80 per cent. of the fire service's expenditure, it seems that they are extremely likely. Can the Deputy Prime Minister say whether he anticipates job losses? If the Prime Minister's figure of £500 million is correct, that will equate to no fewer than 15,000 job losses. Does the Deputy Prime Minister see those coming from a simple reduction in manpower or from the closure of fire stations? Most important, can he guarantee that there will be no worsening of cover or response times as a result of cost savings?

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said particularly clearly that there would be no central Government funding for anything over 4 per cent. However, the employers appear to be anticipating some form of transitional funding from the Government, and the Bain inquiry implied transitional funding of some £41 million. Can the Deputy Prime Minister finally put that issue to rest and tell us what the true position is? Do the Prime Minister's comments mean that there will be no transitional funding and does that represent a change of policy from the Deputy Prime Minister's original position?

The strike seems, sadly, set to go on for weeks or even months. Accordingly, the threat to public safety is even greater than we feared. What is the position on the safer red fire engines now? Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that they are available to the military if they ask for them. However, do the Government have control of all the 100-plus engines that they talked of last week, and are they being deployed?

Is the experience of the military in Northumberland typical? I have here a copy of an article from Newcastle's *The Journal* today, which says that they were given modern appliances on Saturday, the decision was reversed on Sunday and reversed again on Monday night. Is the indecision and chaos that have plagued the dispute from the beginning still endangering the lives of the public?

There is growing evidence that the threat of strike action is beginning to spread through the public sector. Even today, teachers and council workers in London are on strike. On Thursday, the RMT will send out ballot papers calling for strike action on the London underground, using the pretence of safety concerns. The Prime Minister sought to avoid that question yesterday, but should not the Government make clear before union members cast their votes what the legal consequences are? Will the Deputy Prime Minister make it clear that secondary action or the threat of secondary action is unlawful and that the Government will give their full support to anyone who takes legal action against any trade union engaging in it?

Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that the FBU has refused to sign up to TUC safety guidelines, which are, after all, designed to protect the public from unnecessary risk in the event of a strike? Is that not exactly the sort of circumstance that section 240 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Consolidation Act 1992 sought to deal with—a threat to the safety of the public? May I ask him again the question that he and the Prime Minister have avoided: will he go back to the Attorney-General and ask him to consider using that legislation to stop the strike action going on until Christmas?

I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister can provide clear and concise answers to those important questions and clear up some of the chaos that we have witnessed in the past few days and weeks. The strike has already gone on too long. It is time for all parties to return to the negotiating table and to find a settlement. The strike should never have been allowed to happen, and many in this country will find it sad that, as the strike goes on and with public safety increasingly at risk, the only person who appears to be sleeping easily in his bed is the Deputy Prime Minister himself.

The Deputy Prime Minister: That was a typical cheap contribution from the right hon. Gentleman. The Opposition should reflect on the fact that every day of this dispute causes a threat to our citizens and everything should be done to try—*[Interruption.]* I will reply, but it is important to create an atmosphere in which we can have a settlement and not inflame the dispute, which is what the Conservative Administration always did. It is a bit cheap for the Conservatives to talk about how many days have been lost in the dispute, when we recall the millions of days lost in disputes under their leadership, quite apart from the millions of days lost through unemployment.

Is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that I have to direct the Attorney-General? *[Interruption.]* I thought that he said that the Government should tell the Attorney-General that we do not want the strike. He should ask his own legal affairs spokesman. I am asked by the Attorney-General whether any action is taking place and what the state of the negotiations is, and I properly tell him that it is for him to make a judgment on the public interest and the safety of the community. I leave that judgment to him and it is not our job to direct him on such matters. If—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the Deputy Prime Minister answer.

The Deputy Prime Minister: On the question about whether the TUC has an agreement on the 1978 agreement, that is a matter for the TUC. It was a matter for me to seek to find an agreement, which I failed to do on the first occasion, on exceptional situations such as a train crash or an explosion on our transport system. We have an agreement, signed up to by the union and the authorities involved, to make the men and machines available when such problems arise, dealing with what is known as the gold command, with the fire people

controlling the fire equipment and the police controlling theirs. That is the normal structure under such circumstances, and I would have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would welcome the fact that we have an agreement to that effect, willingly entered into by the Fire Brigades Union, rather than shaking his head at it.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments about the emergency services, and I know that the whole House will agree.

When the estimates were made of the cost of £400 million or £500 million, that was a judgment on the total cost of the deal over three years. The Chancellor was talking about the public expenditure over the whole three-year period. Before considering how much could be paid for through modernisation and whether there would be any transitional payments, we would first have to agree to some modernisation proposals. Without such an agreement, we cannot make a proper judgment of what costs would be involved.

The George Bain judgment is that 11 per cent. could be paid in two years if the firefighters are prepared to modernise in the way that I have suggested here and the way that he set out in his report. He did not say 16 per cent., he said 11 per cent. The union and the employers were discussing 16 per cent., but we did not endorse any of their three agreements and made it clear that any deal had to be financed by modernisation. It was not a matter of how much modernisation—the union made it clear that it was not prepared to engage with any modernisation. In those circumstances, all three deals that were being discussed were unacceptable. The first deal had the details of how much modernisation there should be, but that was taken out of the next two documents. We did not endorse any of them. Bain recommended, and the employers originally agreed, that there should be staged payments along with staged implementation. That is where the judgments have to be made.

As the Prime Minister said, 100 red fire engines are available to the command centres if they want them, along with the 27 or 30 that are currently being used. The right hon. Gentleman referred to a problem in Newcastle, of which I am partly aware. The dispute was not about whether red goddesses should be used, but about where they should be sited. That was apparently what was under discussion by the authorities in the area—not doubts about the Prime Minister's statement. He said that if the machines were requested, we would be prepared to provide them. That commitment was met.

As regards the RMT and its decision, I recommend that the right hon. Gentleman talk to his party's legal spokesman. Perhaps I should let him into this secret: secondary picketing and action are unlawful. There is no doubt about that. I need say no more than that.

The Prime Minister made it clear that, during the first strike, 100 RMT members were involved in what some people called secondary action, although the RMT members said that it was due to safety fears. The company dealt with that and the number fell to one. I can tell the House that the number is now zero—there has been a 100 per cent. improvement.

We all have to recognise that the matter has to be settled around a table, and we should do everything that we can—

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): What about job losses?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I shall deal with that—it is an important point. The FBU is proud of its record in keeping people employed in the industry. However, as 20 per cent. of the industry's work force will be taking early retirement over the next few years—for some of them it will be extremely early, because 70 per cent. of such retirements are for medical reasons—there would seem to be ample opportunity to discuss a more efficient utilisation of labour without redundancies or sackings.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement and for continuing to keep the House informed. I join him in thanking our armed forces, our police and other emergency services for their work during the strike. He is right to point out that our thanks must go to the retained firefighters for their work. Not only do the Liberal Democrats wholly oppose the strike, but we also believe that the right hon. Gentleman was right on Friday morning to reject the request made by the employers and the FBU. That request was, in effect, for a blank cheque and for a deal that completely failed to guarantee real modernisation.

I join the Conservative spokesman, however, in pointing out that the Deputy Prime Minister, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have been giving mixed messages, especially on funding, and that has not helped negotiations. Even now, it is still not clear whether there could be transitional funding to bridge any time gap until savings from reform come through. Yesterday, the Prime Minister distinctly failed to answer a question on that point from my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy). And the Deputy Prime Minister failed to answer that question when it was put by the Conservative spokesman today.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister try to answer the question once and for all? Could transitional funding be found within, as he said in his statement, "agreed Government spending limits"? Have not the right hon. Gentleman and his ministerial colleagues hinted on many occasions during the past few weeks that transitional funding could be available? Could such funding not break the deadlock?

The Deputy Prime Minister has expressed frustration that he has not seen estimates of the savings that could be generated from reform. Will he explain why it is taking so long to obtain those figures? Why has his Department not produced them by now? Will he confirm that, a week ago, Ministers received a costings paper from the national joint council detailing estimated savings of £71 million from reform? If he can confirm that, will he tell the House whether Ministers accept that figure? Does he agree that the failure to draw up full and proper estimates of savings from modernisation is a major obstacle to finalising negotiations?

When exactly did the Government submit their principles paper to the Bain review? As that independent

[Mr. Edward Davey]

review is even more important than ever if we are to achieve sensible reform, is there any possibility that publication of the final report will be brought forward?

On an operational note, the Government say that they are putting public safety above all other considerations, so does the Deputy Prime Minister share my concern that in West Mercia it appears that the police and the Royal Air Force have been instructed to stop helping firefighters to put out fires? An e-mail from a senior fire office to his colleagues, headed "Police advice on striking firefighters attending incidents", states:

"Our police colleagues are understandably reluctant to release the advice they have received from their own headquarters, but the RAF have confirmed that they received similar advice a few days ago.

The basis of the advice is that: The fire fighters are travelling in unmarked cars and may cause a risk to other road users as they chase incidents. They are not insured when working whilst on strike, raising questions over legal liability if they did something that resulted in death or injury. Such 'humanitarian' responses are being used in their propaganda war and undermine the military position, suggesting they"—

the military—

"are unable to cope to cope without their expertise."

The senior firefighter's e-mail continues:

"You will appreciate that this has potentially very significant implications in several respects. The last bullet point is particular disturbing, suggesting that the advice could be politically rather than operationally motivated."

Will the Deputy Prime Minister tell the House whether he is aware of any such military or police advice? Will he guarantee to the House that Ministers and officials have had nothing to do with any such advice? Will he undertake to investigate that issue and make it clear now that the Government would not support any action by the police or RAF to stop firefighters from helping to save lives?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his supportive comments and come immediately to the more serious points that he makes. May I make it clear that I am not aware of any such incident, which the House would deplore? If he is prepared to give me the information, I will look into it immediately and ensure that it is corrected. Although I do not know of such an incident, I assure him that my Department would not be involved in it. However, I shall look into it and report back to him as soon as I can.

With regard to the mixed messages, we have been very clear that anything over and above 4 per cent. will have to be paid for by modernisation. Everyone has said that time and again, and that message is very clear. We were not involved in the negotiations, and hon. Members on both sides of the House will know that employers and employees always negotiate their own agreements. Everyone in government has recognised that, and we have not disputed it. All we have said is that there can be a settlement for three years and that there will be a certain amount of money for public pay. If the settlement is over and above that, it will have to be financed by modernisation. That is a clear position, and it is probably one that the Opposition might have pursued in government, but that will not be tested for an awfully long time.

We are making all those matters clear, and whether people can change, whether anything can be done about the savings and what will be the total costs are all issues that concern us. Let me deal with just one question that I inquired about. When I looked at one of the proposals to bring retained fireworkers' pay up to that of full-time fireworkers—especially with regard to part-timers as well—I asked why is there a difference in pay? One of the union's demands is to bring pay up to the same level. I asked whether we could have the figures—I thought that calculating the money involved seemed simple enough—but then discovered that people have to renegotiate all the allowances that are included. It is not easy to go away and find out the figures immediately.

I agree that it is risking a terrible situation when negotiations go on without that basic information. I understand that the same employers involved in negotiations with local authorities receive regular information, but if such negotiations have not gone on with the fire service for 25 years, people get into habits and do not look at the cost savings that are involved. I agree that that should have been done, and that is why we have set up a team to make sure that we have accurate information, instead of ideas just being put down on paper and people asking me to sign a blank cheque. That is totally unacceptable, and it is why the team has been put together to find out accurate information.

The hon. Gentleman asked about our paper on principles. We sent the paper to the Bain inquiry on 18 October, but we thought that it would be useful to publish it today—it had not been published by the Bain inquiry—to show what the Government's attitude to modernisation and pay was on 18 October. The principles are clearly set out in that paper.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Does the Deputy Prime Minister understand that all the firefighters in the three fire stations in my constituency are prepared to talk sensibly about some of the ways of working, but they are not prepared—nor am I—to see modernisation used as a form of cutback? In particular, will he assure the House that the fire service in London will not have fewer firemen and women on duty at night, given that Londoners—certainly the people in my constituency—think that that is the most dangerous time, when we need more firemen and women, not fewer?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is clear that one needs to have a proper risk assessment of where the danger is; it varies from station to station and, indeed, as the general secretary of the FBU has said, from time to time. He said that he was in a very busy station, but some stations receive fewer calls, so risk assessment is quite important. Judgments can be made about whether there should be full teams for the three eight-hour watches, but there have been fewer police on duty at night than during the day for a long time. I understand the arguments about that, but my point is why not sit down and negotiate?

How can my hon. Friend possibly know whether the number of firefighters will be reduced—the charge that she makes—without the required analysis and the discussions? It is easy to pick up a leaflet and repeat what might be said outside, but I have to do something much

more informed than that, and the Bain inquiry was about telling us facts, rather than taking things off a leaflet.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that it is the number of closed underground stations rather than the number of drivers at work that is the issue? Is he aware that the channel tunnel, when faced with closure, installed its own safety equipment to a standard that was acceptable to the Health and Safety Executive in Kent? As a result, the channel tunnel is open. Why cannot the same be done on the London underground to free the streets of London of the chaos that is becoming a daily occurrence?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We must accept that the London underground is working very well—*[Interruption.]* It has not closed down. Despite the statements made at the time—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it is working well. Let us look at how many trains are running and how many drivers are turning up for work. As I have already said, 100 drivers did not turn up during the previous strike, but that number went down to one yesterday, and it is now none. That should be welcomed. As for the closed stations, I understand the difficulties behind the Health and Safety Executive's judgment, which we must accept. Perhaps those factors can be taken into account in the modernisation of the underground.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): It is well known that the firemen have support around the country, and that people would like the dispute settled as lives are in danger, and that is what the Fire Brigades Union is all about—trying to save lives. Would not it be wise of my right hon. Friend to get a room in his office or somewhere else, put the negotiating team in there, and only feed them beer and sandwiches until he gets a result?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is more a case of wine and canapés at the moment. Anyway, I do not think that that is necessary. On the occasions when I have met the general secretary of the FBU, he wants neither a sandwich nor a beer nor tea. We have had meetings and discussions, however, and safety considerations are as important to him as to the ordinary fire workers on picket lines, who, when they see an incident, come off their picket lines and go to save lives. Every one of us must therefore make every kind of effort to get back round the negotiating table to get a good fire service working for us and for the safety of the community.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Given the Deputy Prime Minister's assurance that any settlement will be fully financed by modernisation, will he provide a further categorical assurance that no part of any settlement above 4 per cent. will fall to council tax payers to fund?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have made it precisely clear that anything over and above 4 per cent. will have to be paid for by modernisation. The only reference to council tax came not from the Government but from the leader of the Fire Brigades Union, who suggested putting 20p on council tax. What I found hard was that it seemed that the council tax payer could be asked to pay to overcome this difficulty, and the taxpayer could be asked to pay for it, but the Fire Brigades Union would make no changes. It should make changes.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Firefighters in my constituency still believe that they are worth £30,000 a year, and they believe that the Fire Brigades Union has evidence to justify that. They do not believe the Bain inquiry because of the fatal flaw in that the FBU did not submit any evidence to it. If the FBU asks the Deputy Prime Minister to set up an inquiry again, in which the FBU would participate, to make a judgment on the extent to which, since 1978, changes in the labour market and the fire service would justify a pay increase, would he be prepared to set up such an inquiry? At the moment, the firefighters still believe—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps this is an opportunity to say that questions must be brief.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me make it clear that there is no need for another inquiry. I have said very clearly to the general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union that if he has evidence to give, even at this stage, he should give it. I cannot accept criticism in relation to the worth of a firefighter if evidence is not given to the inquiry that is set up. That is the situation. I do not know all the facts, and it is clear that the employers do not know all of them either, so it is traditional in such circumstances, under all Governments in this country, to set up an independent inquiry as a fair way of obtaining the facts.

As for the judgment on whether a firefighter is worth £30,000, I refer to the one difference about firefighters with which everyone agrees. They walk into danger when most of us walk away from it. That is a special consideration. However, on the point about whether they are worth £30,000, I ask the House to consider what would happen if nurses walked out and deaths in wards resulted from their lack of attendance. We would be asking exactly the same question. We must try to find fairness within the balance that we have set out. I have done that today and the Bain inquiry has done that. Let us sit down and talk and produce whatever evidence one would like to give. However, we must make a decision at the end of the day that is fair to the firefighters, fair to other public sector workers and fair to the economy in its consequences.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I am reminded more and more that the Deputy Prime Minister is like Nero, only faffing rather than fiddling. Bearing in mind that soldiers are paid half what the FBU is asking for, is it not time that the right hon. Gentleman did the walking instead of the talking and resigned?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Clearly, that was not a serious question.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I very much admire the work that my right hon. Friend has undertaken in this dispute. I sincerely hope that the other parties involved do not regret the action that they have taken in removing him from the negotiations.

[Mr. Russell Brown]

Will my right hon. Friend clarify to the House and to the country at large some of the misinformation that is currently being bandied about? A perfect example is the 40 per cent. pay increase that each and every Member of the House is alleged to have had. Furthermore, can he tell us the salary increase that the firefighters have received over the past five years and say whether any modernisation has been tied to that? Has that modernisation been delivered?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Firefighters' wages have been determined by a formula produced in 1978 and they have been connected to the average rise in earnings. The formula has not required them to have any negotiations or tied pay to modernisation. That system operated for 25 years and everyone can welcome the fact that there had not been a strike in the industry for 25 years. The FBU now feels that the formula is not adequate and it wants to change it. That is the point of negotiation.

The 40 per cent. increase that has been mentioned was given only to the Prime Minister. Members received varying degrees of percentage increase, but I must make the point that the increase was determined by an independent inquiry and not by the House. I recommend such an approach to the FBU.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): In the statement, the Deputy Prime Minister asked us to lift our eyes above the bile and recrimination of the current dispute. May I therefore invite him to repudiate the bile spouted by Richard Simpson, Labour's Deputy Justice Minister in Scotland, who not only accused the firefighters of being fascists but then went on to question their parenthood? Does the Deputy Prime Minister think that someone using such inflammatory language in this dispute is fit to be a Minister?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am advised that Richard Simpson did not make such a comment. As the question came from such an obvious source, I will treat it with the contempt that it probably deserves.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement that the local government side of the negotiations will be freshened up. However, does he share my concern about the FBU's reluctance to engage in modernisation? I have spoken to firefighters on the picket lines and they are already engaged in modernisation. What they need is a clear package outlining what is asked of them and what they will receive in return. That will enable them to come to an informed judgment and that may or may not bring the dispute to an end.

The Deputy Prime Minister: On the proposals for modernisation, let us consider those for joint control rooms. They are working in certain brigades and, when I ask the FBU about that, it tells me that they operate because of a decision taken by the firemen in that area. That may be their decision but, because the FBU is negotiating national wages and national agreements, it is fair to ask it, at least, to start talking about them. At the moment, it has set its face against that, but that is just for the moment. We will have to return to the negotiating table, and we will insist on the need to discuss such proposals.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us whether or not one of his officials costed the deal on Thursday night at £240 million? Yes or no.

The Deputy Prime Minister: There was no cost given. Costs were bandied about—*[Interruption.]* Let me make this clear. I asked how much the deal would cost because it contained a section that said, "We do not believe that this will finance itself so we will have to go to the Government", or words to that effect. I was told, "We're signing the deal. We'll do the figure crunching later." I cannot sign deals on that basis.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Is not it the case that modernisation, as it is called, will mean fewer firefighters, as my right hon. Friend seems to imply? Is he aware that in all three commands in Greater London, firefighter jobs have been lost over a period of 20 years? In the last round of cuts three years ago, five more pumps were lost with a proportionate loss of jobs. How many firefighter jobs does he envisage will be lost as a result of the current process of so-called modernisation?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It appears from what my hon. Friend says that redundancies were already taking place under the existing system, although I do not have that information. All we are saying is let us have a modernised service by discussing the practices in the industry with the union. That is fair enough. Setting our face against discussion does not mean that we will prevent redundancies. As he says, they are already occurring. Let us have a properly manned service that is fair to the firefighters.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): The Deputy Prime Minister's tribute to the armed forces working in the dispute had a hollow ring to it because they still do not have the equipment that the Government said at the beginning of the dispute would be available. Of the 400 modern engines—perhaps he can respond to this when he has finished muttering to his hon. Friends—that were available at the beginning of the dispute, only 15 were deployed, and he has the nerve to tell us today that still only a quarter have been deployed. What exactly is the problem, other than the Deputy Prime Minister?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is quite wrong to say that 400 engines are available. The hon. Gentleman can get the information on that. There could be 400 vehicles, but some would be without engines or wheels. I do not know what he means. The Prime Minister and the Government have made it clear that 100 are available to be distributed at the request of the armed forces. They will be provided if requested. Indeed, they are being provided, as he can regularly see on the television.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Yesterday the Prime Minister said that firefighters should end their ban on overtime in the name of modernisation. Tonight ambulance staff in west Yorkshire go on a 24-hour work-to-rule, mainly because they are stressed out by

having to work routine overtime to provide cover. May I tell the Deputy Prime Minister that excessive hours are a 19th century practice, something that the Labour party was born to end? We should not be promoting excessive hours in our emergency services.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not know how many hours my hon. Friend works. It is certainly more than eight, but that is by choice, which is an important part of a democratic society. If someone wants to work overtime and get extra income, that is a choice for the individual worker. It is a common practice throughout industry. I know that it is sometimes said that we should work towards getting rid of overtime, but I do not think that she would include that in her manifesto at this stage. Let us get modern working practices in place. We need to work out the solution and provide a modern fire service that is flexible enough to meet all the demands placed on it.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Yesterday I met a taxi driver for whom being a regular fireman was a second job. Does the Deputy Prime Minister know of anyone else in similar circumstances?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I note the point. Many firefighters would say that they take a second job. Sometimes that is because they do not get enough basic salary, and perhaps we should consider that problem. In some cases, however, it is to get a second income. If they do not want overtime in the fire service, why take extra work in the form of a second job?

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Some of us who have experienced a national dispute in which the Government stand firm against a trade union have been here before. I am not comfortable with seeing a union in conflict with my Government. The Deputy Prime Minister knows that I hold him in high regard and he is right to say that it is better to talk than walk. However, there is something farcical about a situation in which the Government have a veto on negotiations between employers and the trade union. Is it not time that we considered face-to-face negotiations between the Government and the Fire Brigades Union to settle the dispute? It is not just a case of people talking to each another; they have to listen as well.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am not against face-to-face talks; indeed, I first met Andy Gilchrist and local authority representatives to try to find a way forward in August. I hope it is not proposed that the Government should negotiate with every public sector worker. In some cases, that is called an incomes policy, which always used to cause problems.

My hon. Friend refers to his own information about disputes with the Government. I found myself in conflict with the Government in 1966, following a dispute between seamen and ship owners, and our movement suffered another glorious defeat. I hope that Andy Gilchrist will not mind my giving him advice: he should be very careful not to get into a conflict with the Government about public pay. All Governments face those issues. My hon. Friend proposes that the Government should take over negotiations, but that would not be a good move, although they are responsible for taxpayers' money and entitled to ask whether any deal fits certain requirements.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The appointment of the Minister for Pensions, the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), shows that the Prime Minister has lost all confidence in the Deputy Prime Minister's handling of the issue. Will he now, for the third time of asking, tell the House how the Bain report can convert into increased pay for firefighters without immediate corresponding job losses, especially as it says nothing about overall manning levels?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, it does not; the report made it clear that firefighters should first go through the gate of modernisation. Bain said that in the first four weeks of that process he could take a number of measures that would not affect jobs; however, they would affect the atmosphere within which the discussions would take place.

Bain went on to set out a four-year framework. We have heard the argument for a 16 per cent. pay increase in two years. Bain was not in favour of that; he proposed a rise of 11 per cent. in two years. He based that judgment on the changes that could be made, which the hon. Gentleman will see in the appendices to the report. Bain's fuller report would spell out the detail of those proposals.

Bain went on to say that many more savings could be made in the third and fourth years. Looking over the longer term, the programme would not only meet the needs of pay through modernisation, but change the fire service. I agree with the union that it has been a Cinderella service that we have never properly funded. Legislative changes are needed, and there must be an overall approach to modernisation. We are prepared to do what Bain set out, and it is possible to go through the first stages of his framework without having to find extra money.

Phil Sawford (Kettering): I spoke to firemen in Kettering on Friday night and visited the fire station again on Monday morning. Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the firefighters do not want to be out on strike, that they want a decent living wage and recognition for the professional work that they do and that they are willing to modernise? Before positions get further entrenched, creating a legacy of bitterness and mistrust, will my right hon. Friend do everything that he can to resolve the dispute as quickly as possible in the best interests of the public and the firefighters?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have always had the public in mind. Every one of us has to bear it in mind that the dispute poses a threat to life, and I am sure that that is as true of the firefighters as it is of the Government.

I visited my fire station in Bransholme and had a chat with the firefighters, and I have no doubt that they do not want to be on strike. However, they are firmly convinced that they want changes to the industry and to their pay. They posed the question, "What is the worth of the firefighter?" We must address ourselves to precisely that question, but it has to be measured against all the other factors. This is not just about the firefighter.

[Phil Sawford]

We are recognising special conditions and we are saying that we will pay above the existing rate but firefighters have to modernise in return. We all know from visiting fire stations in our constituencies that firefighters are genuine guys who want to sort out the dispute and get on with their job. They like their job but they think that they need to be better rewarded and they want a modernised fire service. That should be uppermost in everybody's mind; I certainly intend to do all that I can to achieve it and I have set out the framework within which we all have to work.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Deputy Prime Minister will be aware that the Army is providing emergency cover in Northern Ireland during the firefighters' dispute. Is he aware also that the additional manpower back-up for the fire service is reducing troop numbers in Northern Ireland to a dangerously low level? That is due first, to the need for back-up for the low manpower in the Police Service of Northern Ireland and secondly, to low morale in the prison service caused by the release of personal security information to Sinn Fein-IRA through the spy ring in Stormont. Has the Deputy Prime Minister had any discussion with Northern Ireland Office Ministers about increasing troop levels?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we are in touch with our Northern Ireland colleagues about those matters. He has raised some important matters—I shall raise them with my colleagues and write him a letter to that effect. I am careful not to get involved in the politics of Northern Ireland, which make the situation very different from that in other parts of the United Kingdom, but I shall take up the hon. Gentleman's point and write to him.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I really want to stand up for professional firefighters in Staffordshire. We are at a crossroads and have reached an impasse. My right hon. Friend and the Fire Brigades Union have to find a way through.

In Staffordshire, we have embraced modernisation, and part-time and full-time firefighters work alongside one another. The bids with the best savings submitted by Staffordshire to the Government have been turned down. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House how, if we go down the modernisation route, extra money can be found within the agenda of joined-up government to make sure that we can fund the changes that everyone wants and that the public trust?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I think that I said in my statement that there are areas where we should begin discussions, and where it is likely that discussions can take place. I mentioned joint control rooms, but there are other areas. My hon. Friend said that full-time and part-time workers work together in firefighting. That is true when they arrive at a fire, but my understanding is that they cannot go in the same vehicle to that fire. It seems a bit odd that they cannot go in the same vehicle to a fire—that is the sort of thing that we want to talk about with the Fire Brigades Union and ask whether we can make an adjustment. If it can convince us that that is not right, we shall have to take that into account. If it convinces us that it could create safety problems, we would not want to countenance that. However, everyone must get into discussions. The FBU representatives cannot stay out of them and say, "We won't do it" or stay out for 40 per cent., no strings attached. That is unacceptable—start talking, not walking.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): May I draw the Deputy Prime Minister back to an earlier question about the likely impact of any settlement, even with efficiency savings, on council tax? His Department must have done some calculations, and he will accept that potentially there will be a major impact, certainly in the short term, on many county councils that are awaiting with trepidation the announcement of the local government finance formula in the next fortnight?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has raised a serious matter. That has never been part of any negotiations that I have seen—it was a comment by, I think, the general secretary of the FBU, who said that 20p would be put on council tax. Quotes and estimates have been given, but they have not been part of our negotiations. We have said that all pay claims above 4 per cent. must be covered by modernisation. Seeking the easy way out, passing the increase on to council tax, is no more acceptable than passing it on to the national taxpayer. As the hon. Gentleman knows, local authorities have the right to make judgments about what they buy with their council tax.

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife): My right hon. Friend made reference to the signed agreements reached with the FBU on the underground. Would he join me in welcoming the voluntary efforts of many FBU members throughout the country who, as is the case in my constituency, have turned up and supported other efforts to deal with emergency situations where lives were threatened? Does he agree that the current position is that every effort has been made but that further efforts must be made to resolve the issue, otherwise there will be no victors at the end of the day, only losers?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I very much agree. At the end of the day, however, we have to come to some agreement. I pay tribute to those firefighters—when faced with a decision where there is a threat to human life most of them will leave the picket line and go and help. There is a lot of evidence of that—it is the firefighters' nature. That is what they do—they do not have a conflict of conscience, and I think that the whole House would want to congratulate them on that. That kind of spirit, at the end of the day, will solve this. We have to sit down and find agreement between parties who respect one another and accept each other's negotiating position. It is called compromise, it is called negotiations, it is called talking. That is how we will settle this in the end.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): If the Attorney-General is proposing to apply to the court, it is inconceivable that he will not tell the Deputy Prime Minister, so will the Deputy Prime Minister tell us if he knows whether the Attorney-General is proposing to

apply to the court to invoke section 240 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 to declare that the strike is endangering public safety?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has a legal background—I suspect, from his bearing, that he probably does. He will know as well as I know that the Attorney-General does not have to tell me about any action that he could take. What he must do, and he has been to see me about it, is to make a judgment about the dispute—whether this dispute may end, as in the case of the 48-hour strike, and whether his intervention would inflame the situation and make the strike go on longer, with all the implications of that for public safety. He has to make that judgment, but he does not have to tell me or ask my position—properly so—about whether he takes an action.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he did not adequately answer the question from one of those Tory Back-Benchers, who asked him whether he knew any other group of people that had second jobs? The answer is loads of Tory MPs, including a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is making £100,000 a year selling fags to the third world. Will my right hon. Friend answer a question about a statutory incomes policy? Will he tell those people who are calling for public and Government intervention to be careful of their language? We all have the scars to prove what happened last time there was a statutory incomes policy. If he cannot get the money from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will he look into his Department to find the pump-priming money to get the modernisation proposals on their way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I agree with a great deal of what my hon. Friend says on these matters. We have campaigned long and hard for Members of Parliament to have only one job in the House, and that is what I have done for the past 30 years since I have been a Member. As my hon. Friend reminds us, all the way through the operation of an incomes policy, all those Members who had second jobs were always exempt from the strictures of an incomes policy. Those strictures only ever applied to the ordinary worker, who received the normal payments. As to whether we will find extra resources, until the firefighters sit down and talk about where the resources will come from and how much of the total cost will be covered by modernisation, I cannot answer my hon. Friend's question. Let me be clear: no extra above 4 per cent. will be paid unless we are on course for modernisation and implementing it.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): When I spoke to

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thought that statements were supposed to be for one hour.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Deputy Prime Minister has come to the House. I will decide who I call and who I do not call.

Mr. McLoughlin: When I spoke to firemen in Matlock, it was made clear to me that the last thing that they wanted to do was to go on strike. How can the Deputy Prime Minister, with all his vast experience in industrial relations, come to the House today and say, "This has got nothing to do with me"? He was the man who set up Bain. He is the man who is calling the tune. At the end of the day, whether the Deputy Prime Minister likes it or not, he and the Prime Minister are responsible.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I apologise for any insult or offence that I may have caused, Mr. Speaker, but you know that on the last occasion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I am entitled to make a point, even in a modernised House. You know, Mr. Speaker, that there was a requirement that statements would be one hour, and you said to the House that we went longer than that on the last occasion. *[Interruption.]* I am only repeating what the Speaker said. There was a statement yesterday. As you know, I recognise your judgment in the matter. You said on the last occasion that we had gone over the time allowed after modernisation, and since there was a statement yesterday, I was expressing the thought that we were going well over the hour now. I do exactly as you tell me. I do not challenge you in any way, but I think it fair to point out that I have a grievance about it, and I am entitled—

Mr. Speaker: Order. As a former trade union officer, perhaps I can address the right hon. Gentleman's grievance. I agree that that was a recommendation of the Modernisation Committee, but of course I have discretion in the matter. There were a great many Members standing, and that is why I tested the right hon. Gentleman's patience. There may be other occasions when I have to go beyond the recommendations of the Committee. If the Deputy Prime Minister is patient, perhaps I will let him and the House know that the last hon. Gentleman whom I intended to call was the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin).

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr. Speaker, you clearly reflect your trade union experience, to which I immediately bow and which I fully accept.

The hon. Gentleman's reference to the trade union experience seems appropriate at this time. Of course the Government have a responsibility in these matters. When they negotiate their provisions for local authorities and public services, there should be an element relating to public pay. What we have said on this occasion about paying above that amount we have also said to the local authority workers, who settled only a few months ago. We told them that there could be no more and they observed that decision. In some cases, trade union officials are now advocating the view that more can be paid. In those circumstances, and where such payments are made, we have made it clear that we will want to look at any such agreement.

That automatically brings me to what Andy Gilchrist told me in August, when I first met him. He asked whether we were interfering as a Government and I made it clear that we were not doing so, but I also said "If you want a 40 per cent. increase and it has to come from the taxpayer, I am bound to ask how you are financing it." That is my obligation in this job, whether

[Mr. Speaker]

I am a trade union representative or not, although in these circumstances, I happen to be an employer instead.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Speaker's Statement

4.36 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a statement to make in response to a previous point of order.

I have investigated the point of order raised with me yesterday by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). It appears that the Ministry of Defence released to the press a written ministerial statement of which prior notice had not been given to the House. The Minister for the Armed Forces has written to me to apologise for the incident, which he accepts was a serious oversight. He has assured me that it was a genuine administrative error and that no discourtesy to the House was intended.

I am satisfied that in this case a genuine mistake was made, and on behalf of the House, I accept the very proper apology that has been offered. No doubt, all Departments are still getting used to the new procedures for giving notice of written statements, but this occasion provides a useful opportunity for me again to reiterate that statements of Government policy should be made first to the House.

Points of Order

4.37 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that the House will accept the apology that was so promptly and graciously tendered by the Minister for the Armed Forces. May I also thank you for so readily and promptly investigating my complaint? I am sure that the whole House will be grateful to you for your robust response. It will reassure hon. Members on all Benches—save, possibly, the Treasury Bench—that you have again shown the robustness that you demonstrated a moment ago. The House will be grateful to you.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will no doubt be aware that two hours ago, the Government lost their case in the High Court on the challenge made with regard to consultation about airport capacity in the south-east. Have you been approached by a Minister seeking to make a statement today or tomorrow on that important matter? The decision may require the re-running of the whole consultation process, which is clearly significant for many hon. Members.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for not giving you more warning of this point of order; I was able to give you very short notice that we had learned that the Government had lost the court case.

The House will be aware that the consultation process on airport expansion in the foreseeable 30-year period is due to end on 30 November. In those circumstances, have you received a request from the Secretary of State for Transport with regard to his acceding to our earlier request, made on a number of occasions, that the consultation period be allowed a short extension of two months?

Mr. Speaker: No Minister has approached me. Of course, it is not a matter for the Chair, but I am sure that the appropriate Ministers will take note.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I know that you have an interest in protecting the House's reputation. It has been said inside and outside the House on several recent occasions that Members of Parliament received a 40 per cent. pay rise. Will you investigate the matter? If it is true, someone has their hand in my pay packet because I got only 6 per cent. That is true throughout the House. The 40 per cent. that is sometimes cited refers to the money that was provided for staffing Members' offices. It is right that we employ more people, not least because we have improved our working practices. However, the House's image is damaged when people wrongly claim that we received 40 per cent. increases. Ministers took a larger increase only because they had declined one for several years.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has put the matter on the record.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. All joking and banter aside, do you accept that many hon. Members would infinitely prefer it if you, rather than Ministers, determined the length of time for Ministers' statements?

Mr. Speaker: I believe that that point has been made.

Orders of the Day

Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.41 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

When the Government came to power in 1997, we had one of the most centralised systems of government in the western world. It had no regional democratic accountability and ignored the needs and aspirations of the regions, where "Whitehall knew best." The system was unsuited to a diverse and changing society, and ill equipped for our modern economy. It allowed divisions between and in the regions to widen.

In the past five years, we have achieved the most far-reaching and radical programme of constitutional change in living memory. We have handed power back to the people and transformed our system of government through devolution to Scotland and Wales, reform of the House of Lords and modernising local government. The Conservative party opposed all those changes and quietly adopted them later.

We have begun to reverse the years of neglect. We restored democratic city wide government to London and we have set up strong, business-led regional development agencies in the English regions. We have helped to create a network of eight voluntary regional chambers, and increased investment and employment in all regions to record levels. Our forthcoming planning Bill will strengthen regional planning.

Today, we published a local government Bill and announced a significant package of freedoms and flexibilities. That will help to improve people's quality of life and their experience of public services. It will allow more decisions to be made locally and reduce bureaucracy. It will also give local councils greater freedom to shape the services that they provide. However, there is a devolution deficit in England. It is a democratic deficit that the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill tries to tackle.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on introducing the Bill after many decades of campaigning. It is dear to his heart and to those of many Labour Members. If pre-legislative scrutiny is not possible for the Bill, will he consider allowing a period of such scrutiny for similar measures in future so that our colleagues in all the regions and all those with an interest in them can present their views and thus make the Bills even better?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I shall consider my hon. Friend's point, but he appreciates that the forthcoming measures on local government and on housing are in draft form. Presenting draft Bills to pre-scrutiny Committees means that the House is better informed. I shall bear his point in mind.

The Government gave the people of Scotland, Wales and London the chance to make more decisions for themselves, and the people of England and Wales the opportunity to have directly elected mayors. The forms of devolution and the structures are different, but they

[Mr. Graham Allen]

are based on handing power back to the people and letting them decide. The Bill offers, for the first time in our history, opportunities to the English regions similar to those offered to Scotland, Wales and London. That is not before time.

The Government believe in trusting people. We have no intention of forcing elected assemblies on any region, but we believe that, where people want it, regional government will make a difference. Nor did we force elected assemblies or their equivalent on the people of Scotland, Wales or London: all had a referendum.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The right hon. Gentleman said that the Bill offers the same opportunities to the English regions as were offered to Scotland and Wales. Given that the Scottish Parliament has tax-raising powers and a significant degree of devolution, has he amended the proposals in the White Paper to make those same powers available to the elected English regional assemblies?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I did not say that they were the same powers. The principle of decentralising decision making has found different forms of expression in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and London. Other parts of the country are not exactly the same as, for example, the London area. We have made a judgment about what powers should be available and what decentralisation should take place in the English regions, and that is what we are putting before the House. It will help us to provide better public services and better decision making.

Our White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", was published in May this year to set out our plans for elected regional assemblies in those regions in which people wish to have them. Elected assemblies will take functions down from central Government, not up to the local authorities. They will be fit and lean, with real powers to make a difference and form a strong partnership with both the public and private sectors. We want to bring democracy to the regions, to reduce bureaucracy rather than increase it, and, above all, to provide regional accountability.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I would like to return to the Deputy Prime Minister's comparisons between these proposals and the devolution in Scotland, Wales and London. Scotland, Wales and London have delineated boundaries. What will be the constituencies for the referendums to determine whether the people in a given region wish to have an elected assembly? In some cases, those regions correspond with people's sense of identity, but in others, such as the south-east, they certainly do not. It must worry the right hon. Gentleman, as a true democrat, that it will not be easy to take the feeling of the south-east, given that there is no real sense of identity in that region, either in terms of geography or of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The right hon. Lady must be more concise in her interventions.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady was in the Government who established the regional offices. They had no difficulty in determining the regional boundaries, which are the same as those designated in the Bill. We have done exactly the same. I do not see why she should feel differently in opposition from how she did in government. If we want to make progress on regional government, timetables are important. If we got into a debate about boundaries, it would take an awfully long time to make these decisions. That has been tried—we all know of debates about whether somewhere should be in the north-west or the north-east, for example. We intend to ensure that it is possible to introduce regional government, and to give the people in the regions the choice. We are not saying that they should have assemblies; we want to give them the choice. The measures will be based on the existing boundaries.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Is not that the key point of this debate? Do not the Deputy Prime Minister's proposals stand in stark contrast to what happened in the metropolitan areas—North Yorkshire, Humberside and Cleveland, for example—which the Conservatives imposed on the country without any real consultation, involvement or participation of the local people?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has highlighted the fact that, for the Conservatives, the rhetoric of opposition is entirely different to what they did in government, but we must take that as part of the political game. After all, they are the people who opposed the devolution of powers to London, Scotland and Wales, then quietly came round to accepting it later. I presume that that might happen in this case as well.

The Bill responds to the desires that many regions are already expressing.

Andrew George (St. Ives): On that point—

The Deputy Prime Minister: Hang on, I have not even got started on this section.

The Bill does not establish elected regional assemblies; that must come later. That was also the case for Scotland, Wales and London. It is not the case that people voting in a referendum will not know what they are voting for. The White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", sets out our proposals. The removal of one tier of local government is an integral part of the regional assembly package. We want government to remain streamlined, and once we have received the boundary committee's local government recommendations for a region, we will publish a statement that will be put to the electorate before any referendum. That statement will cover both the proposals for any local government reorganisation and a summary of what the assembly would do and how it would work.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I will not say which region I think Cumbria should be in, but the reality is that the area that I represent is crying out for single-tier local government, whether we get regional assemblies or not. Will the Deputy Prime Minister consider that proposal?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend well knows, the proposals in the Bill are for unitary

government. We believe that if any regions want regional government or want to take a step towards it, we should test opinion with a referendum. We will ensure that the boundary committee puts in the proposals for, on the one hand, regional government and, on the other, unitary government.

The proportion of people covered by unitary government varies from area to area—it is large in the north-west—but I will not get into the argument about whether Cumbria is in the north-west or the north-east. Both have high populations under unitary government, but my hon. Friend will find that the figure for the eastern region is low. We are making it clear that we do not want three tiers of government in a region. Under regional government, where the people choose it themselves, there will be a unitary local government structure.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Deputy Prime Minister consider the position that he has put my constituents in, although I speak as one who in principle favours the Bill that he is putting before the House? If the boundary committee decides to make local government more remote by providing single-tier county local government, people will be invited to vote against the local government system that they want to get the region that they want. To make matters worse, the decision will be taken by voters who are not affected by the proposals and who live in those parts of the region that already have single-tier government.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point, but we did not want people to be confused about what the local government structure should be. We could have a local government reorganisation recommending some kind of unitary authority and perhaps go on to a referendum on regions, but we have said that we will have the regions and that the boundary committee will take into account how the unitary structure is to work.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct: people might vote against the regions if they do not like all that and if they do not like the local government structure, but they will have the choice. That is what we are providing. We have made our decision, and we did not want to leave any doubt as to whether there would be three-tier government. The House can imagine what this lot opposite would say if we agreed that the county structure was there—*[Interruption.]* Yes, this lot—that will do. The House can image what they would say about the county structure, so we have chosen to strike a balance in this way.

Andrew George: I approve of the principle, and the Deputy Prime Minister's saying that he wants to challenge the "Whitehall knows best" philosophy reassures me, but he also said that the regions would be set up where people want them. On 16 October, I received an answer to a parliamentary question that states that more people from Cornwall showed support for a regional assembly than did the rest of the country put together. Surely, if he wants to deliver, he should respond to that demand now.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows that we are doing our best to take account of the Cornish interest and we recognised the Cornish language, which he welcomed. I have a long interest in regional development and I have visited the south-west many times. I must tell him that I expected considerable division there, because it always seemed to me that Cornwall hated Devon, they both hated Bristol and they all hated London. I did not think that they would get together to this extent, but, as he knows, the assemblies that they have set up—the chambers, as they are called in the south-west—have worked together. That includes Devon, Cornwall and the whole region. I am comforted by that, and I think that those areas are beginning to see themselves as the south-west region. From what I have seen in the polls, there is considerable demand for regional government, with or without the Cornish assembly.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have given way enough. I want to make progress.

Mr. Curry: Will the Deputy Prime Minister give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has had one go.

It might help the House if I set out the timetable that we envisage for the first referendum. Subject to parliamentary approval, we will decide whether the region or regions should undergo a local government review without delay. The relevant provisions of the Bill will be commenced on Royal Assent to allow that. We will then direct the boundary committee to conduct a review of the local government arrangements in the selected region or regions. Those reviews will take about a year to complete. We will lay an order for a referendum or referendums as soon as possible after that.

I turn to the detail of the Bill. Part 1 enables referendums to be held, including setting out what the referendum question should be. As the House is aware, the Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to comment on the intelligibility of any referendum question. This is the first time that it has been asked to do this, and I am pleased to say that it announced yesterday that the referendum question set out in the Bill meets its guidelines. The commission made some small but constructive suggestions for the wording of the preamble. We shall consider them carefully and respond in due course.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Deputy Prime Minister will know that the average turnout on referendums for directly elected mayors was 29.2 per cent. If the first region to have a referendum votes for regional government with a turnout of 29 or 30 per cent., is that a legitimate vote to change the constitution of this country?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is a little more than what the Tory party gets at the polls, is it not? I cannot avoid making that point, because it is a nice one to make. The votes on directly elected mayors have varied. Some have been higher than those for council elections, and some have been lower. It is right to quote the average, but some have been well over 50 per cent.,

[Mr. Gary Streeter]

which is higher than is achieved for council elections. The polls in Scotland, Wales and London were high, so there was a strong endorsement for those measures. We should wait until the debate in the communities has started, and see how people respond to it. I have to take this matter into account when I agree on whether a referendum should take place in a region. All the signs are that demand and support for regional government are a lot higher than most people predicted many years ago.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I agree with the Deputy Prime Minister on referendums. He is aware that any Minister who brings legislation to the House must have credibility. Would he care to reflect on the fact that the Minister in the Scottish Parliament whom the Deputy Prime Minister said was innocent of attacking the firefighters has resigned in the past few minutes? In the light of that, would the Deputy Prime Minister, for his own credibility, rephrase and rework his comment that the attack on firefighters was never said?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Not in the context of this debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice).

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I am struggling to find the right page, but I think that the Library brief reminds us that the percentage turnout for the referendum in London was in the mid-30s. I do not think that that is a ringing endorsement. The turnout in the Welsh referendum was just over 50 per cent., and the yes vote was won by 0.6 per cent. That was when the Government were actively campaigning for a yes vote. Why will not the Government put the neutrality to which I referred earlier to one side and actively campaign for a yes vote on the English regions?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am not neutral. I am campaigning for this Bill.

Part 2 provides a power to direct the boundary committee for England before any referendum to review the structure of the existing two-tier local authority areas in a region—that is, areas that have country and district councils. We intend to implement its recommendations if people vote for a regional assembly.

Part 3 allows the Electoral Commission to give advice on the electoral areas for regional assemblies. Part 4 provides a power to make grants in respect of the activities of existing voluntary regional chambers. Part 5 covers general provisions, such as commencement and expenditure.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I support the concept of regional assemblies. If existing unitary authorities have a strong view that they would like to be part of a new wider authority, such as Blackburn wanting to be part of East Lancashire under the regional concept, would my right hon. Friend allow that to be considered during this process?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would be wise not to comment on any boundary changes between council and local authorities.

Mr. Pike: But does my right hon. Friend want to?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would still be wise not to comment at this stage.

Before a referendum is held in a region, the independent boundary committee must have conducted a review of local government in that region and made its recommendations. That is what part 2 is about. Regional assemblies would add a third tier of elected government below the national level in areas that currently have both county and district councils. We believe that that is one tier too many. It is proposed that, if people want a regional assembly, we will move to a wholly unitary local government structure.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am having difficulty getting on with my speech and answering questions. I shall give way in a few minutes, but I must make progress.

Our proposal will ensure that government remains streamlined. As I said earlier, this is about bringing democracy to the regions and reducing bureaucracy, not increasing it. The review will recommend changes only to those parts of the region that currently have both a county and district council. Existing unitary authorities will not face any structural or boundary changes.

I know that some Members are worried about the fate of counties. Let me emphasise that, contrary to some ill-founded speculation, we have no agenda for abolishing the counties—or, for that matter, the districts. It will be for the independent boundary committee to recommend the best wholly unitary local government structure for the regions.

The Government will issue guidance to the boundary committee on the local government reviews. We will publish it in draft for consultation shortly. Proposals for local government changes will be published before any referendum. Voters will know the full implications for local government when they vote. We do not intend to go ahead with the proposed reorganisation if a region rejects the idea of an elected assembly.

Matthew Green: The Deputy Prime Minister may or may not know that in Shropshire there is a growing demand, not just from Labour and the Liberal Democrats but from the Conservative party, for a single unitary authority. However, we do not want to have to wait for some referendum. There is quite a lot of opposition in Shropshire to becoming part of the West Midlands regional assembly. The Deputy Prime Minister may well find that people vote against an outcome that they actually want. Why can he not decouple the two processes?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We have made a judgment, as I mentioned earlier. The boundary committee will make the decision. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman gives the committee his views.

Which regions will go first? That is an important question. It is about choice: no region will be forced to have an elected regional assembly, or indeed a referendum. This will be the choice of the people. They will make the decision; I will merely provide the circumstances in which they can make it.

We will sound out the level of public interest in a referendum in each region while the Bill is before Parliament. We want to hear the views of people in the regions. We also want to hear from existing regional chambers, local authorities, local MPs and MEPs and others. We look forward to the consultation. In some regions, the level of interest may be inconclusive—not high enough to clearly justify holding a referendum, but not low enough to rule it out definitely. Alternatively, so many regions may show a high level of interest that we may need to consider whether to ration the number of reviews conducted simultaneously. In such instances, we may want to take account of other factors, such as the effects on local government of conducting a review.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for giving way at last. He said earlier that the county councils were not under threat from his proposals, or at least not under threat from the Government. I noticed that he had difficulty in keeping a straight face while he said it. What is his response to the leader of Hampshire county council, Councillor Ken Thornber, who has pointed out that eight of the 10 powers listed in the White Paper for regional government would overlap with existing county council powers? Does that not show that, far from powers being drawn down from central Government towards the people, they will be taken away from the people when they are removed from the counties which, no doubt, will then be abolished?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not agree. *[Laughter.]* That is my right.

The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind exactly what he did when his party was in power. He supported an Administration who abolished the Greater London council, Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands, West Yorkshire and Merseyside. There was no referendum. There was no consultation. They just abolished those councils. It is a cheek for him to stand up today and talk about what we might be doing. We have made it clear that the issue of regional government will be decided by the people in the regions. They will know what kind of local government structure they want: it will be their choice. That is why the White Paper is called "Your Region, Your Choice".

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I think that I have given way enough for now.

Before I sum up, I want to say something about part 4, which creates a new power for the funding of the eight existing regional chambers. We helped to set up those chambers to contribute to the preparation of regional economic strategies by the regional development agencies. The chambers are made up of local representatives and key stakeholders—in some cases with a majority of Tory councillors, but we will leave that aside—from the social, economic and environmental sectors in the regions. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) is laughing. He knows that one of his party's chairmen is a member of an assembly. He has not heard that the party in London is against it.

The chambers have been a success story. I take this opportunity to thank all those involved, from all political parties, for the hard work that they have put into getting the chambers up and running and working together for the benefit of their regions. They have taken on an increasingly significant role. All chambers now scrutinise the work of the RDAs, and many are involved in the production of regional sustainable development frameworks and the preparation of regional planning guidance.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): Before my right hon. Friend sums up, may I ask him not to undersell this measure? He may remember that in 1945, Clement Attlee said that the referendum was a device alien to all our traditions. It has now become central to them. We used to make them up as we went along. Surely the importance of the Bill is that we now run referendums coherently and fairly. Is that not a great advance?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is. That is an important point. Knowing this to be a controversial measure on which people had strong views, I thought that it was right to have a referendum. It was in our manifesto. We have introduced the Bill to let the people make the choice. I personally would like to see regional government throughout the UK but I am prepared to let the people make the choice. I must advocate our case—I will in those circumstances—make clear what I believe is the best way forward, and then the decision will be made in a referendum.

Five of the eight chambers have taken on the role of the regional planning body. In light of the positive responses that we have received to our planning Green Paper, we now believe that it is right for all eight regional chambers to carry out that role in the absence of an elected regional assembly.

At present, the chambers get most of their funding from local authorities. As the role of the chambers expands, in particular on planning, a more general funding mechanism is needed. That is why the funding power provided by part 4 is required.

The Bill is at the heart of our programme to modernise our constitution, to decentralise power and to deliver better public services. It is a crucial step towards establishing a democratic voice for the English regions—a voice that has been denied them for far too long. We want to give the people of our regions the right to choose—the ability to decide what is best for them. The Conservative party's amendment would deny the people in the regions that choice. It would deny them the opportunity for change.

The Conservative party does not like devolution but it eventually comes on board. Remember that it opposed on Second Reading the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill in May 1997, but later changed its mind. It opposed on Second Reading the Greater London Authority (Referendum) Bill in November 1997, but later changed its mind. It opposed

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

on Second Reading the Government of Wales Bill in December 1997, but later changed its mind. It opposed on Second Reading the Scotland Bill in January 1998, but later changed its mind, and it opposed on Second Reading the Greater London Authority Bill in December 1998, but later changed its mind. At least it is consistent in its opposition. First it opposes and then it changes its mind. I am sure, bearing in mind that track record, that it will not be too long before it has another rethink. I ask the House to reject the amendment and to support the Bill, which I commend to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I remind hon. Members that there will be a 12- minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

5.8 pm

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill because it is a centralising measure that will have the effect of undermining local democracy; it places too much power in the hands of the Secretary of State to determine the timing of each referendum in each region; it fails to protect the right of individual communities to determine the local government structure that suits them best; the arrangements for referenda are inadequate and insufficiently defined; it fails to recognise that unitary authorities are not an appropriate solution in all parts of the country; it fails to recognise the needs of rural areas; and it is incapable of protecting long-established county councils.

The Deputy Prime Minister advances three main arguments for regional government. He claims that there are economic benefits, that people want to feel part of a region and that he is introducing democracy to existing regional bureaucracies. I will examine each of those claims in turn and pass by some of the constitutional theories that he seemed to invent during his speech.

What are the economic benefits of regional government? The Deputy Prime Minister said in his White Paper:

"Elected regional assemblies will develop a strategic vision"

and that they will

"improve economic performance".

All available evidence suggests exactly the opposite. Let us consider what is happening abroad. Many European countries, generally those that are much larger than England, have existing layers of regional government, but it is striking that in those countries disparities between the regions are getting larger, not smaller.

Let us consider what is happening here. In the past few years, existing regional quangos have lobbied for more taxpayers' money for their area—understandably—and since the quangos have been established, disparities have grown larger, not smaller, just as they have in Europe. Furthermore, the subsidies have largely funded inter-regional competition, rather than specialisation to the areas competitive advantage.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned Germany. Of course, we must differentiate between regions in the former East Germany and those in the west. Does he accept that there is far less variation in the old federal republic than we experience in this country? There is enormously less variation, and it is a much fairer system.

Mr. Davis: I was talking about the trend in the difference between the regions. I am not comparing old East German regions with old West German ones. I am following the CBI, which said that the differences are getting worse.

The same is true in Britain: where we have regional government things are getting worse. The Government's own preferred measure of unemployment, the labour force survey, reveals that the highest unemployment rate in the country is 7 per cent. Where? In London, where there is a new tier of government. The second highest rate is 6.5 per cent. Where? In Scotland, where there is a new tier of government.

Let me offer a quotation:

"Business is disappointed that the government is pushing ahead with Regional Assemblies. English regions do need to help improve economic development, but this is not the right way to do it. They will simply add complications to the decision-making process and undermine the efforts of the Regional Development Agencies."

Those are not my words, but those of the CBI's deputy director general, Mr. John Cridland, who also said:

"The Government needs to take action to improve economic performance and leadership skills in all regions rather than concentrating on establishing expensive talking shops in just a few areas."

Perhaps the Deputy Prime Minister believes that there is more support from business for regional government in the north-east. That is probably his best target.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned London and Scotland in support of his preposterous theory. I note that he did not mention Wales. Is that because the figures do not back up his case? Given that he is not now opposing the devolution settlement in Scotland, Wales and London, is he not for once tempted to get ahead of the game and accept the principle of devolution, rather than having to play catch-up with public opinion?

Mr. Davis: I will return to the constitutional aspects of what the right hon. Lady said, because the Deputy Prime Minister was disingenuous in his comparison between these regional proposals and the arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For now, I am simply talking about the economic arguments, which do not support her case. She is a north-east Member, and business people in the north-east are worried that the proposals will hinder rather than help them and will over-politicise the RDAs regeneration work. That was said in *The Economist* not that long ago, quoting Stephen Rankin, director of the CBI in the north-east.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): The right hon. Gentleman has said first, that the new bodies have done untold economic damage, and secondly, that they are expensive talking shops. Either they are institutions that do damage, or they are talking shops—they cannot really be both.

Mr. Davis: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that talking shops can do damage: over-regulation is one of

the most damaging things in Britain today, and it largely arises from talking shops. He seems to think that hyperbole will make his argument. The onus of proof is with the Government—they are the ones who say that the Bill is justified by the significant changes in productivity that will be wrought by it, which is sheer unmitigated nonsense. I am demonstrating that it has not worked before.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): The right hon. Gentleman has obviously been trawling the evidence, so would he like to comment on that produced by the Work Foundation, formerly the Industrial Society, on the contribution that decentralised Government structures can make to economic performance by boosting productivity and in the development of industrial clusters? If he has not seen that evidence, may I refer him to the foundation's submission to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry a few months ago?

David Davis: I should be happy to see the evidence, as I used to be a director of the Industrial Society. However, all the major business organisations are against the hon. Gentleman's argument. The business clusters to which he refers do not require regional assemblies of any sort.

What will be the next aspect of the economic impact of regional assemblies? How much will they cost? They will cost the taxpayer billions of pounds. In his speech, the Deputy Prime Minister tried to dance around the proposed abolition of county councils, but that will entail sizeable, one-off local government reorganisation costs. He of all people should remember the abolition of Humberside county council, as both his constituency and mine are within the area that it used to cover. The one-off cost for the abolition of that council was £53 million. The council left behind relatively impoverished public services, as the right hon. Gentleman will know because we both suffer from them. The former Humberside police force had few assets, for example, so that £53 million represented only the visible cost. If the costs of regional government are in the same league, the abolition of the remaining 34 county councils could cost up to £1.8 billion in 1999 figures. The current equivalent would be about £2 billion.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): Could there not be efficiency savings? At present, for example, one authority might be responsible for roads while another is responsible for road calming; or one authority might be responsible for pavements, while another is responsible for shrubbery and trees. Would not unitary authorities be able to make savings?

David Davis: The hon. Gentleman confuses agencies with local authorities, but, in any event, such economies of scale do not work well in government. What matters more is that there should be a reflection of local opinion and local democracy.

In London, the Greater London Authority spends £34 million a year on administration. Based on its per capita cost, regional assemblies in England outside London would cost more than £300 million a year. That excludes programme expenditure, which would involve additional waste.

The total long-term cost of the lease of the GLA building is £120 million. The Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly buildings are both over budget and it is estimated that they will cost about £210 million and £50 million respectively—although no doubt the final amounts will be much more.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister assure us today that if the north-east or the south-west took the regional option, they would not want new assembly buildings, just like those in Wales or Scotland? Of course he cannot, because it is certain that they will want those buildings—at massive extra cost to the taxpayer.

The Deputy Prime Minister will remember the following pledge from Labour's 1997 manifesto. He may even have been its author. The manifesto stated that regional assemblies would be established only following

"confirmation by an independent auditor that no additional public expenditure overall would be involved".

However, many regions will believe that they would receive more money from the Treasury to fund regional government, so can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm to the House that the pledge still stands? I shall allow him to intervene if he wants to do so—obviously he does not. There is no economic reason to introduce regional government.

Matthew Green: In Shropshire, the Conservative party supports the unitary principle, which would involve the abolition of five district councils and setting up a unitary Shropshire authority. That would make savings such as those described by the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda). Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that the Conservatives are wrong to support a unitary authority in Shropshire?

David Davis: That decision is for Shropshire, not for this place. The hon. Gentleman made the same point 20 minutes ago and it carries no more weight now than it did then.

Let us move on to the Deputy Prime Minister's next point. He claims that people want to feel part of a region, but regional government will do nothing to give power to local people; instead, it will take it further away. Decisions currently made by county councils, which are close to local communities, will be transferred to regional assemblies, which are further from local communities. A body of about 35 to 40 people will take decisions that have huge ramifications for thousands of people, and what is right for one part of the region may not necessarily be right for another part. Regions will be unable to square the circle of interests between urban and rural areas.

The Deputy Prime Minister's plans threaten to set region against region—each one fighting for economic advantage over the other. The most successful regions could do well, just as in Europe, but the less successful will lose the young and the ambitious to the more successful. At the same time, regional government will force the abolition of the one unit with which people identify—the county. Under the proposals, planning decisions now made in Hereford will be taken 60 miles away in Birmingham. Decisions now made in Kendal

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will be taken 75 miles away in Manchester, and those now made in Truro will be taken 90 miles away in Exeter. Why?

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the removal of decision making from county councils to regional bodies will be accompanied by a dilution of democratic accountability? I have calculated that in the east of England, whereas 6,000 or 7,000 electors are represented by each county councillor in my constituency, about 160,000 electors would be represented by each of the directly elected members of a regional assembly. The electors would never see those people or know anything about them.

David Davis: My hon. Friend hits the point exactly. The areas involved would be at least three times the size of parliamentary constituencies.

The Deputy Prime Minister has talked about the democratic deficit, but why does he want to introduce the proposals? Could it be because the counties tend to vote Conservative, so they will be gerrymandered into what the Government hope will be Labour-run regions instead?

Our counties have legitimacy because they are organic communities, established by tradition, history and custom. Regions will be nothing more than lines on a map drawn by the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen. They will have no legitimacy whatever, especially if they are imposed on counties against the will of those who live in them.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): What legitimacy does the county of Lancashire have since being denuded of Blackpool and Blackburn under the previous Conservative Government's legislation?

David Davis: I should think that the county of Lancashire has much more legitimacy in the eyes of those who live in it than the new north-western region will have if it ever comes into being.

The Deputy Prime Minister: This is all about choice.

David Davis: Let us deal with the major problem with the Bill. The Deputy Prime Minister says the Bill will bring about more democracy, but, in a democracy, voters have to know what they are voting for. They need to know what the choice is, to use his own word. For that to happen, the proposition has to come before the vote, but with the Bill, it will be vote first, proposition afterwards. The Bill proposes that referendums should be held without voters knowing the structure or powers of the assemblies for which they are asked to vote. Even the Deputy Prime Minister would have a hard job to convince anyone that that is democratic. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but the exchanges across the Chamber are not helping the debate.

David Davis: There is a proper role for referendums in constitutional change, but only if done properly. If it is not done properly, it can be a dangerous tool. The Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, who is no longer in the Chamber, said that Clement Attlee—who is, I think, one of the Deputy Prime Minister's heroes—famously described the referendum as the device of demagogues and dictators. We may not always go as far as he did, but what is certain is that pre-legislative referendums of the type the Deputy Prime Minister is proposing are the worst type of all.

Referendums should be held when the electorate are in the best possible position to make a judgment. They should be held when people can view all the arguments for and against and when those arguments have been rigorously tested. In short, referendums should be held when people know exactly what they are getting. So legislation should be debated by Members of Parliament on the Floor of the House, and then put to the electorate for the voters to judge.

We should not ask people to vote on a blank sheet of paper and tell them to trust us to fill in the details afterwards. For referendums to be fair and compatible with our parliamentary process, we need the electors to be as well informed as possible and to know exactly what they are voting for. Referendums need to be treated as an addition to the parliamentary process, not as a substitute for it.

Richard Burden: The right hon. Gentleman has described the importance of Members of Parliament debating matters so that electors can make a choice. Is not it more important in this context that people in the regions are able to debate the issue, think about the kind of institutions that they want to create and be able to vote on that? Is not that precisely what is being suggested, not just in the referendum proposal but in the proposal for regional chambers and other initiatives?

David Davis: That would apply only if people could create their own regions in the way that their argument leads them to do. What is being said to them, however, is "You vote, and we'll decide what sort of region you will have."

As it stands, the Bill is an affront to those principles. It asks people to vote for proposals that are unspecified, untried and untested. I would have relished the opportunity to debate the details of regional assemblies, but, clearly, the Deputy Prime Minister is not ready to have that debate. It is simply wrong for the Government to come to the House and act in this way. If they do, how can we trust them when it comes to the referendum? Major constitutional changes justify the use of referendums because the constitutional rights of our citizens are owned by the people and not by politicians. However, it is important that referendums are not misused simply as a snapshot of volatile changes of opinion, perhaps as a result of pressure of Government propaganda. That is why Donald Dewar and John Smith used to talk about the settled will of the population.

The concept of settled will is that of an idea that has taken root in the minds of the people, has resonance in their daily lives and is a stable part of the way in which they think the country should be run. Because

referendums are supposed to reflect the settled will of the people, we need to have thresholds below which they do not carry the day.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): As I follow the right hon. Gentleman's argument, he claims so little legitimacy for what the Government suggest in the Bill that I imagine that he would want to abolish any regional assemblies created by the procedure as soon as a Conservative Government, were one to be elected, came to power. Would he abolish any regional assemblies elected by this method? What would he do with the money that had been transferred from the unelected sphere to the elected sphere? Would he set up new patronage bodies to administer that money?

David Davis: The hon. Gentleman has clearly not been listening even to the last few words that I said. I have been describing the grounds on which a referendum provides an acceptable and democratic outcome. Our view is that a reasonable level for the threshold that determines a settled will is that at least half the people vote, and a majority are in favour of the change proposed. That is a reasonable measure of the popular will. If the proposal receives the support of at least 25 per cent. of the total electorate, it should carry the day. That is pretty reasonable. Let us consider the result of the Scottish referendum. That exceeded the 25 per cent. threshold by 49 per cent. The Welsh referendum—

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): What my right hon. Friend is saying is that, on a free election, if only 25 per cent., or one in four people, supported the proposal, and 75 per cent. of the population does not come out to vote for it, that is an authority by which one proceeds with profound constitutional change. That has never been so in our history previously, until we had new Labour and its contorted and distorted referendums rejigging our constitution. Will not he accept that for our party to have accepted the Welsh outcome, in which 75 per cent. of a free people in a free election did not support an assembly, is an extraordinary turnabout?

David Davis: My hon. Friend deserves a proper answer and I shall endeavour to give it. I know that he views these matters with a passion that is probably unequalled anywhere in this Chamber. We live in a time when referendums are used for constitutional amendment. I take the view that that is correct for the reason that I gave earlier. The constitutional rights of the people belong to the people and not to the politicians whom they temporarily elect. Therefore, we must determine at what level of support a referendum becomes valid.

I do not want to set the threshold too high as that could rightly be dressed up as a bogus argument. I want to make an argument that is appropriate to the level of constitutional change. If this issue carried as much force as the proposals for the Scottish Parliament, I would set the threshold a little higher, but I grant my hon. Friend that it is a matter of judgment. We are now talking about bodies that will hold the powers partly of central Government but mostly those currently held by county councils. On that basis, the level that I have suggested is acceptable. I take his point that it is a fine judgment to determine what makes a referendum an acceptable basis for a decision.

Mr. Dhanda *rose*—

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton) *rose*—

David Davis: I will not give way as I am coming to the end of my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) made the point that the figure of 25.2 per cent., which was the one obtained in the Welsh referendum, would have just passed the test. However, there was a great deal of controversy about whether the referendum was appropriate, and I accept that. However, the point that I want to make is that there is no threshold in the Bill. It should not be passed. It contains too many unanswered questions, and the Government have used up their quota of trust.

We reject regional assemblies not because we oppose devolution, but because we support it. We reject them not because we oppose economic development, but because we support it. We reject this Bill not because we oppose democracy, but because we support it. Any Member of the House who claims to support democracy will reject the Bill.

5.31 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): The speech of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) was a thin attempt to belittle what many Labour Members consider to be one of the most exciting proposals for change that we will see in our political lifetimes. I know that some Labour Members and some from my region of the north-west disagree with me, but I have believed passionately in regional government for many years. Although my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has been accused of being too bold, many of us know that he has had to strike a compromise that he himself recognises as too timid. Nevertheless, I congratulate him from the bottom of my political heart on what he has already achieved in the regions.

This country is probably the most centralised in western Europe, but we have had regional government for all my political lifetime. The problem with that regional government is that it has been government for the south-east by a system of governance that favours that region. That shows up in every facet of our national life. It is shown in the increasing concentration over the years of resources in the south-east, and it is shown in the way in which decisions are taken centrally. In recent times, when there have been degrees of decentralisation, the process has been more equivalent to the system of colonial governors in the former British empire than to the type of modern democratic structure that we would expect. The case for the redistribution of power is overwhelming. We are debating how we democratise the huge numbers of decisions taken by government on a daily basis.

There are different estimates of the resources spent by quangos or non-departmental governmental bodies in the north-west. A low estimate is that the figure is about £1 billion, but massively higher estimates suggest that the spending of as much as £7 billion is determined by

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bodies that operate regionally but that are not accountable to local people. Everyone must face up to a profound democratic challenge if we are to take control of that layer of decision-making. Although it suits the Opposition to oppose the measure as an attack on the power structure of local government, the rationalisation of local government in unitary authorities, which we have had in urban areas for a political generation, makes a great deal of sense. The creation of a regional dimension at last allows the people of our regions, not those outside them, to decide how to allocate their resources.

Mr. George Osborne: The hon. Gentleman knows that I, too, am from the north-west. The democratic challenge is that although Manchester, which he represents, might want the regional assembly, Cheshire might not. If every person in Cheshire votes against it, it can still be imposed on us and we will lose our county council, which is not what we want.

Mr. Lloyd: Cheshire is certainly part of the north-west regional identity. That phenomenon goes beyond the boundaries of local government institutions. I do not cease to be a Lancastrian because the county of Lancashire did not have a role in the city of Manchester during my lifetime. Lancashire has not even been the administrative unit for parts of Greater Manchester for more than a generation. That does not stop me, my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) or my hon. Friends from other parts of the north-west being proud to be profoundly Lancastrian as part of our birthright. We are talking not about inventing emotion for a county identity, but about the efficiency and accountability of structures of governance.

I have a criticism that is relevant to all Governments. Manufacturing is much more important in the north-east, the north-west, Yorkshire and Humberside than elsewhere. That industry has suffered disproportionately in the system of governance of modern Britain. Decisions on the British economy have tended to favour the service economy, not manufacturing, and have a differential impact on the north. The House of Commons has allowed successive Governments to get away with failing to reflect different regional interests. It is vital that the regions have another layer of interest and influence. They need to be able to tell the Government that they must reflect the increasingly different interests of the regions. Scotland, Wales and Greater London have that ability. It is time for the influence and interests of the northern regions and elsewhere to catch up.

My region has been disadvantaged in many ways. Hon. Members will remember the fairly recent debate on the Daresbury site. It seems to me that a decision on that was made on the advice of people with a south-eastern, or near south-eastern, outlook. They could not understand that it was possible to have world-class science in the north-west of England.

One of the major decisions for the Government will be on the merger of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology—UMIST—and Manchester university. I hope that the merger takes place because it will create a university that offers world-class science. That process would be more straightforward, however, if the new university were supported by a region that recognised the essential nature of the science-base to its long-term future.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the synchrotron investment. The Government, whom he supports, chose to give a £500 million investment to Oxfordshire, not the north-west, which was patently the wrong decision. However, I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that a north-west regional assembly would have had a greater influence on the decision by railing against it. The decision was always going to be made by central Government. It was the task of the House and hon. Members to stand up for our region.

Mr. Lloyd: As the hon. Gentleman knows, north-west MPs, certainly on the Labour Benches, fought a long campaign, but alas we lost. I recognise the action taken by the Department of Trade and Industry to make that pill less bitter; nevertheless it was still a bitter pill for the north-west to swallow. North-west MPs, supported by a strong regional assembly speaking with a coherent and consistent voice for the north-west, would be massively emboldened in breaking the stranglehold of the southern thinking which has dominated this country for as long as I can remember.

There is very little to fear from the Bill in the north-west. I say to the doubters among Conservative Members that the beauty of the Bill is that it offers choice. It will allow people to campaign, as I will do strongly, for regional government for the north-west, and it will allow those who oppose it to campaign against it. That is exactly how things should be in a democracy. The advantage of the Bill is that it will give the choice to the people who will be affected rather than to bureaucrats in central Government, or even, at that point, to the House of Commons. This House will give the people of the regions the opportunity to choose. If other regions do not want to do as I hope mine will, that is their choice, although I think that regions throughout England will be making a mistake if they do not opt for regional government.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Does the hon. Gentleman feel that regions that do not want to follow his line should be compensated for not choosing regional government, which would result in extremely costly local government reorganisation and the establishment of regional assemblies?

Mr. Lloyd: Applying the same logic, if it is demonstrated that, by choosing regional government and establishing efficient unitary authorities and a regional assembly, my region saves money, will the hon. Gentleman be prepared to say to his voters that on the basis of those savings, money should be transferred to the north-west from other regions? If we are prepared to look at the total deal, his point may be interesting.

The issue here is that the choice will be made by the people of the different regions, and the hon. Gentleman tempts me to turn to important regional matters. Over the years, the northern regions have suffered in the allocation of local government funding, which has advantaged the south-east and, in particular, London. That would have to be considered in the context of a new constitutional formula.

Even more importantly, the Barnett formula will inevitably raise its head. It will do so whether or not we choose regional government, but if we are to examine the viability of new regions in the north-west and north-east, parity of funding will become important. Looking at all the indicators, we see that the north-west has many advantages, and I have enormous confidence that, liberated from its present constraints, it will be able to fast-forward to a better future. However, it is undeniable that many areas of the region have been as profoundly affected by poverty, deprivation and de-industrialisation as Scotland, where the Barnett formula is applied advantageously.

I know that this will be an uncomfortable issue for the Government, but I want to state that although setting up a north-west region is important, we will want to consider parity and fairness of funding within any new regional settlement. In the final analysis, we will want a successful north-west region to make further constitutional reforms so that its powers grow as it demonstrates its ability to use them.

5.44 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) made a passionate and powerful case for regional government and elected regional assemblies. He will not be surprised to hear that Liberal Democrat Members agree with him. My party and our predecessor parties going back to Gladstone have long argued for devolution, and in manifesto after manifesto we have argued for elected regional assemblies, so we will support the Bill tonight. It is right that Britain's existing form of regional government is made accountable to the people.

Our vision of regional government is very different from the Deputy Prime Minister's, however. We have two main criticisms of the Bill, which we shall make tonight and as the Bill proceeds through the House. First, we need more regional devolution than is on offer in the Bill and the White Paper linked to it. Secondly, the Bill does not offer the best way of making preparations for regional assemblies, and I am afraid that it may turn out to kill the idea of regional assemblies. Too often, we see No. 10's hand imprint on the Bill. It is not keen on elected regional assemblies. The Deputy Prime Minister has fought long and hard for his achievements, but I know that he believes in his heart of hearts that this measure should go much further.

Regional democracy, for which the Deputy Prime Minister has made a case, is the reason why we shall vote for the Bill. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) did not spend much time talking about democracy, which is at the heart of the Bill and its proposals, but it is a key argument. In both this and the last Parliament we have advocated constitutional reform, in which there has been a great experiment—not least in the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and so on. The Bill is linked to that experiment, and tries to get decisions closer to the people, which we support.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden failed to say whether or not the Conservatives are happy with the current state of regional government. We have far too much regional government. If one starts to add up all the quangos, one loses count very soon. It is difficult to keep track of all the different Government offices and quangos in the regions. I have looked for myself, and tried to read the Government document. It is difficult to keep track of numbers. Some national quangos, such as the Environment Agency, have regional offices. There are regional quangos such as regional development agencies. Some central Government agencies, such as the Highways Agency, have regional offices. Some central Government programmes have local or regional aspects, and some local organisations have regional aspects. It is a complete maze, and the key thing is that it is not democratic.

Those organisations, quangos and Government offices are non-elected bodies and exercise wide-ranging powers in policy areas including education, health, economic development, the environment, transport, culture and sport. Why are the Conservatives against giving democracy to our regional government? If you start trying to count those quangos, a key problem is trying to define a quango and what fits neatly into elected regional government—one person's quango is another person's ministerial fiefdom. Often, boundaries are not coterminous, so it is difficult to offer precise definitions. I am grateful to Councillor Chris Foote-Wood, who tried to count the quangos in north-east England. Earlier this year, he published a pamphlet called "Land of the 100 Quangos". He used evidence published by the Deputy Prime Minister in November 2001, which found 12 regional strategies in the north-east and 70 regional and sub-regional quangos. Councillor Foote-Wood has managed to find a few more. The Deputy Prime Minister may be interested in them.

Councillor Foote-Wood entitled his pamphlet "Land of the 100 Quangos", but he found 172 regional and sub-regional quangos. I am tempted to list every single one, but I am sure that you would rule me out of order if I did, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Departments that operate quangos in the north-east include the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which has the north-east regional office of the Community Fund and Culture North East. There are six health authorities in the north-east region and 17 NHS trusts. The former Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions had the north rent assessment panel and the north-eastern traffic area authority. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has 71 Government office north-east partnerships, including the "Don't Choke Britain" north-east planning group and the north-east centre for change steering group—I am not quite sure what that does—the northern arts advisers panel, the regional foresight steering committee, the regional round table on sustainable development and so on. Those bodies are not democratic.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): And nor will they be.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman says that under the Government's proposals, those bodies will not become democratic. That is part of the problem with the proposals: the Government need to go much further to reduce the quango state. But the hon. Gentleman should be careful—it was his part / that set up large tracts of the

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quango state. It was disappointing that we did not hear the Conservative spokesman arguing the case for democracy.

There is another key argument in principle for elected regional assemblies, and it concerns efficiency. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden argued that if the new organisations were set up, they would create more bureaucracy. If one starts looking at the quango state, one sees bureaucracy writ large. The quangos are chaotic, having been up by Government after Government and Minister after Minister, with no co-ordination among them at all. The quangos duplicate each other's bureaucracies and are ineffective because there are so many of them. When one adds up the expense of setting them up, their offices, their management boards, their non-executive directors, their staff, their pension funds and so on, the cost is huge. There can be no doubt that democratising and rationalising the position under regional assemblies makes huge financial sense.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): The hon. Gentleman knows that even if we have regional assemblies, there will still be a tier of quangos, which will simply report to Bristol or Exeter rather than London. That will not improve the situation.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. Many of those organisations could become part of the regional assembly, just as Government Departments and agencies are answerable to the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State is answerable to the House. We can de-quangoise Britain's polity through the process.

The Conservatives often speak—rightly—about accountability. The point of elected regional assemblies is to make those bodies accountable and to use accountability to drive through value for money. I have been disappointed by some of the ways in which the House tries to hold the Government to account on financial matters. We have almost no ex-ante scrutiny of the Budget. We have three days on the estimates, during which we do not actually debate them—something I have always found rather odd. We do better on ex-post scrutiny, but even our audit processes in the House leave a lot to be desired.

Part of the problem is that across the whole United Kingdom the public sector is too large for Whitehall and Parliament to get to grips with it. If we make sure that elected regional assemblies and the members who serve in them have real powers to scrutinise the way in which the money is spent and to make sure that there is proper audit and accountability, we can get much better value for money for the taxpayer.

There is another way in which elected regional assemblies could promote efficiency. In their fullest form, they are about better policy delivery. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches see the assemblies as key to deep, meaningful reform of the public services. At our recent conference we passed a document that envisaged many aspects of the public services being run and funded by regional assemblies. I shall come to that in due course.

The Government's proposals for the key policy area for elected regional assemblies relate to economic development. Although I have some problems with their proposals, the Government are right to see assemblies as key to promoting economic development in the regions. I say that as a London MP. One of our problems is that the capital is overheating. In Scotland and Wales, devolution has acted as an economic spur. It has led to development, and to organisations getting better advice and working more closely together. Devolution to the English regions could be part of the solution to London's overheating problem—obviously, only part of it, but hopefully it could ensure that there is more managed economic development across the country.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would clarify what he just said. Is he proposing that there should be a recession in London? I am sure that that would go down well with his electorate and others. What is happening with the London assembly and Ken Livingstone is that he is damaging London, not helping it.

Mr. Davey: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about Mr. Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London. I am no supporter of his strategies. However, if people reread my remarks, they will not take from them the meaning that the hon. Gentleman took. We have a huge problem in London. The population forecasts, even adjusted for the latest census figures, will pose a huge challenge for public sector investment in our infrastructure and our public services. I hope that as the London economy goes from strength to strength, it will be able to meet some of that. We must rise to the challenge. I believe that Londoners support the idea of spreading economic prosperity across the country. Let us not forget that many Londoners come from the regions and the nations of the British Isles, and they support devolution and economic prosperity in their home regions.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): With regard to Scottish devolution, does the hon. Gentleman accept that Edinburgh is becoming overheated? The real issue for regional government in England and devolution in Scotland is the decentralisation of the civil service, to allow the refocusing of the civil service from London and Edinburgh to the regions of England and the various areas of Scotland.

Mr. Davey: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. He made my point rather more eloquently than I managed to.

Although we agree with elected regional assemblies and will support the Bill, I want to make it clear to the Deputy Prime Minister that his version of elected regional assemblies is rather weak and timid. For a start, the Government's vision is far too centralist. They want to keep far too much power for Whitehall and Westminster. They are giving away far too few powers and dismantling far too few quangos. They are putting planning up to regional chambers, even before those regional chambers are accountable to anyone or are elected. That is a bizarre way of going on. As power is given away, it is already gradually being brought back: the Government are proposing centrally imposed targets—public service agreement regimes and so on. That is not devolution. If they intend to trust the people, they should not trust them a little; they should trust them fully. I do not understand why the Government are so timid.

When we examine the details of the White Paper and the powers that regional assemblies will have, we begin to see how the Government sometimes speak with forked tongue. On page 39 of the White Paper, in the section on economic development, under the heading "Training and skills", the Government proudly state:

"Developing the skills of the workforce plays a vital role in economic development. So improving the skills base and equipping people to take up the opportunities being created in a region will be an important component of delivering an elected assembly's objectives."

From such a ringing declaration, we think that we are about to see numerous powers relating to training and skills being devolved to regional assemblies—but no. Further down, we read:

"Specifically this will mean that . . . the national LSC"—

that is, Learning and Skills Council—

"will be under a statutory duty to consult assemblies on its guidance to the local LSCs"

and that

"local LSCs will be obliged to have regard to assembly strategies".

There is no control over learning and skills councils or over the policy that is going to elected regional assemblies. It is all right for them to be consulted, but that is froth. It is meaningless. They ought to have control. The national Learning and Skills Council should be abolished and real power over an important aspect of economic development given to the regional assemblies.

A similar problem arises in respect of transport. The White Paper proudly states:

"Good transport is essential for sustainable economic success . . . To achieve this, transport needs to be integrated with policy on economic development, planning and housing.

Elected regional assemblies will be responsible for a regional transport strategy".

What does that mean? It means responsibility for advising central Government on the allocation of funds. We in the House and people outside advise the Government about the spending of money, so elected regional assemblies do not seem to have many responsibilities in that regard.

Mr. Beith: I can give my hon. Friend a vivid illustration. On the Scottish side of the border, the Scottish Executive can decide whether to concentrate resources on dualling the A1. On the English side of the border, London is still answerable for that decision and it will not be in the region's power to make it. Surely, that is one of the ways in which the regional institution needs to be strengthened.

Mr. Davey: That is a very vivid example. I know that my right hon. Friend has campaigned on that issue for some time and must be very disappointed about the lack of powers specified in the Government's proposals.

Mr. Lansley: We must not understate the Government's proposals. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has noticed that page 45 of the White Paper sets out an indicative expenditure budget for the regional assembly in the north-east. It has a transport budget in the form of £1 million for the rail passenger partnership. Given the importance of transport in regional economic development for the north-east, that is an indication of how little influence an assembly would have over the major issues.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point very well. The problem that the Government will have when people are being asked to vote on the regional assemblies is that when they read the White Paper, they will see the lack of powers that are being given to them. Many people who would usually be huge advocates of regional devolution will say, "This is not what we wanted or asked for." They might vote no and some will certainly abstain. The Government are shooting themselves in the foot.

That returns me to one of my original remarks. It may be a little unfair to the Deputy Prime Minister to say so, but I think that he has lost the argument in the Cabinet and that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have overruled real devolution because they are scared of it. We have therefore been given paper tiger elected regional assemblies. Yes, we may be able to build on them in future, but they are not impressive and certainly do not live up to the rhetoric

Norman Baker (Lewes): Does my hon. Friend accept that, if assemblies are to work, as I hope they will, people must feel affinity with the regions in which they are placed? The south-east is a huge economic engine encircling London. Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a case for splitting it into two so that people feel affinity with their areas? People in Lewes feel no affinity with Milton Keynes.

Mr. Davey: There is a very strong argument for such an approach, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I shall deal later with the fact that one of the problems of the Government's proposals is that they have taken the boundaries from the Office for National Statistics and indeed from the Conservatives, and set them in stone for no obvious reason.

The Liberal Democrats believe that one of the biggest holes in the plethora of powers that are not going to the regional assemblies is the fact that national health service responsibilities are not being devolved. Looking around the regions, it is the NHS that has the largest number of quangos and bodies without any regional representation. At a time when we are having so many problems in trying to run the NHS from the centre and to micro-manage an organisation with so many employees and other organisations inside it, surely we should start learning from experience in other countries. Countries such as Canada and countries as small as Denmark have devolved their health services to their regions and below, trusting the people so that those in the lower tiers of government run their whole health systems. Unsurprisingly, places such as Canada and Denmark have much better health systems as a result and people are far more satisfied with them than with the NHS.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: If the NHS were to be balkanised in that way, would there not be regional differences in the standard of health care? Would the Liberal Democrats embrace such differences?

Mr. Davey: I am very interested in the hon. Gentleman's comment. He clearly thinks that, after

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almost 60 years of the NHS, complete uniformity has been achieved and everyone gets exactly the same service. Of course, they do not get such a service and that is a nonsensical argument.

The importance of devolution is that it would allow local people choice to set their own priorities in their regions. As we believe that tax-raising powers should accompany devolution of powers over the NHS, we also think that people should decide how much they want to spend on it. That is a major hole in the provisions and a major difference between our approach to regional devolution and the Government's.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman confirms that the Liberal Democrats want regional government to be able to raise taxes. Does he see that as unlimited tax-raising power or would he cap it?

Mr. Davey: In the early stages of elected regional assemblies, there would be limits on that power. However, we believe that in due course—the hon. Gentleman will like this answer—they should be free to raise taxes as they choose, although they will be accountable to the people and the decision will be a democratic one taken by the people in the area. Again, I wonder why the Tories are so against democracy.

I should like to turn now to the details of the Bill and deal with why it is flawed and why the Liberal Democrats will table many amendments in Committee. Besides the powers outlined in the White Paper, no details on powers have been published for people to see before the first referendum, so they will be asked to answer a question without knowing all the full facts. That cannot be sensible. Okay, the Minister may say that that happened in Wales and Scotland, but it created many problems for those campaigning for devolution. The Welsh vote was almost lost. I am not saying that that was due only to the factor that I have mentioned, but I am sure that it had some impact. The Government are shooting themselves in the foot by not being clearer about the powers before the first referendum takes place.

Will the Minister for Local Government and the Regions and the Deputy Prime Minister publish a draft Bill? If the Government are not prepared to legislate before the first referendum, why do they not put a draft Bill before the House? We could then at least give the measures some pre-legislative scrutiny and the voters in the referendum would have a clearer idea of exactly what powers the Government were talking about.

Possibly the worst aspect of the Bill is the fact that the Government are confusing voting for an elected regional assembly with local government reform. I do not understand—I do not think the voters will either—why the Government have put those two issues together. They should be decoupled. If the Government are right and this is a case of "Your Region, Your Choice," surely it could also be a case of "Your council, your choice." People should be given a chance to vote on the issue, but the Government are not making such a proposal. The reason why they are not doing so is that they are running scared—the Deputy Prime Minister almost admitted it—of criticism that there might be more than three tiers of government. In many other countries, there are more than three tiers of government and that means that there is a bit more democracy. Perhaps if people were given the chance to vote against that and to vote for unitary structures that were separate from regional assemblies, they would choose to do so. That is their right, but surely such an approach is the more democratic and grown-up way of going about it. I should be interested to know whether, in trying to find out whether there is any great interest in holding a referendum for an elected regional assembly, the Minister will bother to find out whether there is any interest in local government restructuring.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): The hon. Gentleman spoke earlier about efficiency, but he is now talking about maintaining district councils and county councils while allowing the establishment of regional assemblies. Where does efficiency come in?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman will also remember that I spoke about democracy, which is very important. There is always a trade-off between democracy and efficiency. I am sure that a country could have a very efficient form of government under a dictatorship. I am sure that Pinochet thought that his civil service was working terribly well when he centralised all the powers. There is a trade-off and I find it odd that the hon. Gentleman does not want to give his constituents or voters in various other regions the chance to vote on that issue.

Mr. Dhanda: It is interesting that the Liberal Democrats are talking about introducing some form of local income tax and a tax-raising power for the regional assemblies. Are they also talking about introducing a third income tax if people do not opt for a unitary structure but choose a district, county and regional structure—a sort of Lib Dem triple whammy?

Mr. Davey: As the hon. Gentleman ought to know, council tax already does that. He fails to understand that the issue is about democratic choice. I think that cutting national taxes and giving power to raise them at a local and regional level is a sensible way forward.

One of the other problems with the Bill is that no boundary review was conducted before its introduction. As I said in response to an earlier intervention, we have inherited the regional boundaries from the Conservatives. I do not think that it is to the Government's credit that they have merely said, "Me too," in respect of the boundaries. They could have instituted a one-year, one-off review to find out what people in the regions felt were the right boundaries. It is a great shame that they have not done so.

Matthew Green: There is time.

Mr. Davey: Indeed, there is time if the Government get their act together. I wanted to raise one or two issues that we shall doubtless debate in detail in Committee, but I shall focus on only one before I conclude my remarks. I want to consider the ballot paper and the question. The Electoral Commission ruled that the preamble was not sufficiently clear, and the Deputy Prime Minister said that that would be taken into account.

When we debated the Greater London Authority Bill, the Minister for Local Government and the Regions said that the relevant question had been determined through focus group research. What research has been conducted into the question for which the Bill provides? Have people in the focus groups told the Government whether they understand that the proposed question implicitly refers to local government reform? I am surprised that the Electoral Commission did not rule that the question was unintelligible. Although it did not, hon. Members should complain about it because it is unclear and does not tell people for what they are voting.

We welcome the Bill. Regional government and democracy should have been introduced many years ago. We have wasted years and millions of pounds on the quango state. The Government are therefore right to introduce the Bill.

Dr. Pugh: My hon. Friend eloquently described the Bill as a paper tiger. Liberal Democrats can support the Bill only on the assumption that it will turn out to be a Trojan horse and lead to something more.

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend is right that we shall try to strengthen the Government's proposals in the Bill and in the accompanying enabling legislation. I am looking forward to debating with the Minister. We spent three months in Committee on the Greater London Authority Bill, which we amended more times than the India Act. I warn him that we shall table many amendments.

6.12 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) made a long speech. I can present my position more crisply—I shall not need 12 minutes.

I do not believe that regional assemblies will happen. We will not persuade people in the regions that another tier of government will deliver measurable improvements to their lives. I am therefore a sceptic. I believe that the Government are introducing the Bill because we have always had an asymmetrical constitution and some people want to make the United Kingdom symmetrical. In Northern Ireland, we have a devolved institution with specific legislative powers. In Wales, we created a halfway house hybrid, which has no primary legislative powers. In Scotland, we have a new devolved Administration. For reasons of symmetry, we need to impose regional devolution in England.

The proposal constitutes a halfway house. If the Labour party believes in a symmetrical constitution, it should go the whole hog and federalise the United Kingdom. That is the canoe that the Liberal Democrats, who are great federalists, paddle. However, my Government claim that we can satisfy aspirations by introducing the regional devolution for which the Bill provides.

I oppose such devolution. As I said in an earlier intervention about the national health service, I believe in a strong central state that irons out imbalances between the regions, considers their needs and contributes resources to the neediest areas. I do not support a fractured, dismembered United Kingdom, where regional differences are magnified. Liberal Democrats would celebrate such differences, even in the crucial matter of health. They said that there would no longer be a national health service but a regional service, with regional postcode lotteries. What a ridiculous idea.

Matthew Green: The hon. Gentleman may have noticed that the closure of the accident and emergency department at Kidderminster hospital was a big issue in the midlands during the last election campaign. It resulted in the domination of Wyre Forest district council by a party called Health Concern, which also holds the balance of power on Worcestershire county council. It was instrumental in the election of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor), who has one of the biggest majorities in the House, and it is probably one of the reasons for my presence here. However, none of that could change a decision that was made in London. There was no local accountability. How does the hon. Gentleman propose to make any such changes without regional government?

Mr. Prentice: I understand the point. A national health service should mean simply that. Perhaps that is an aspiration, but I hold to it and so should the Labour party. I support common standards in so far as they are possible throughout the United Kingdom.

Matthew Green: Tell that to the people of Wyre Forest. They have no accident and emergency department.

Mr. Prentice: The hon. Gentleman should discuss the matter with the district council. I have made the point as clearly as I can.

The White Paper includes innumerable references to regional assemblies "planning", "drawing up strategies" and "targets". People in north-east Lancashire are not interested in that. We have the worst housing in the United Kingdom and we do not need a new assembly to tell us to plan and form strategies to deal with it. We need money from a central Labour Government to knock down crummy, crumbling housing. That would do more to transform the lives of my constituents in Pendle than setting up a regional assembly in, for example, Lancaster or Wigan.

I have pressed the Deputy Prime Minister on several occasions about why the Government will not come off the fence. If they believe that regionalising England is a good idea, why do not they advocate regional assemblies positively? They did that for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and in London. It is as plain as a pikestaff that the Government are not telling Labour Members of Parliament and members of the party outside the House that we must campaign for English regional devolution, because the Prime Minister does not believe in it. I shall tell him that when I meet him tomorrow. I have never heard him publicly advocating English regional devolution. However, the Deputy Prime Minister has been wedded to it for his whole political life. We are therefore in our current position.

Many phoney claims have been made for regional assemblies. A colleague in my area said that a regional assembly would mean no more problems with the west coast main line. That is like saying that a south-east

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regional assembly on its own could finance a channel tunnel rail link. That is ludicrous. People are making claims that regional assemblies cannot effect without extra help from central Government, but it is not forthcoming. How do I know that? Page 45 of the White Paper makes it clear that regions that do not opt for an assembly would not be disadvantaged. People who believe that voting for a regional assembly in the north-west or the north-east will mean barrels of money are dreaming.

We must be honest with people and not dress up the proposal as something that it is not.

Mr. Beith: I am just a bit worried that the hon. Gentleman will go to his meeting with the Prime Minister tomorrow in ignorance of the Prime Minister's words on the opening page of the very White Paper that he is quoting from. The Prime Minister says that the Government's proposal

"builds on the success of devolution elsewhere in the UK—offering people more accountable, more streamlined, and more joined-up government."

Mr. Prentice: The Prime Minister did not write that, as the right hon. Gentleman well knows.

Mr. Beith: He has signed it.

Mr. Prentice: The right hon. Gentleman has been around for a long time. To imagine that the Prime Minister's own hand signs off all these documents—what fantasy! What a Liberal Democrat statement that was!

In the few moments that are left to me, I want to draw the attention of the House to one or two other things that have been troubling me. *[Interruption.]* Yes, there are many such things, but it is great to be able to unburden myself of them. It is very therapeutic. On the cost of the proposals, we have just gone through a major local government reorganisation, and we were promised that it would save—no pun intended—an arm and a leg. It has not. Our whole experience of local government reorganisation tells us that it always costs much more than people imagine.

The Library paper, which has been very helpful, tells us that the Heseltine review of local government in the early 1990s cost £669 million, and that involved only a partial reform. Looking at the legislation proposed by my own Government, I shiver when I think about all the residuary bodies and staffing commissions that will have to be set up. It is going to cost an absolute fortune. The police authorities might have to be reconfigured as well, because they are linked to the counties. The cost could spiral out of control. The Library paper also talks about the cost of devolution to Scotland, Wales and London, which is now estimated to have been between 25 and 40 per cent. higher than anticipated. Case made.

Mr. Dawson: My hon. Friend has been one of the most trenchant critics of Lancashire county council over its recent policy on services for older people. Is it not therefore absolutely essential, and in the best interest of his constituents, that we get a much more devolved form of local government that is able to integrate fully with health and social care, and with private and voluntary sector providers?

Mr. Prentice: It would not be much of a local government if we got rid of the county tiers in the north-west and brought in a new assembly with a membership of between 25 and 35. Even if we take the upper figure, each assembly person would have a constituency of something like 240,000 people. That is not very local. In so far as there are problems with Lancashire county council, those problems have been identified by the voters. The voters therefore have the remedy in their own hands, if they wish to use it.

On resources, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) spoke earlier about the injustices and inequities of the Barnett formula. But we have had a Labour Government for six years. If the Barnett formula is so iniquitous—and I think it is—why do not my own Government do something about it? They could do something about it tomorrow—literally. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer comes to the House, he could announce a review of the formula that could put resources into regions such as mine which have lost out over the years.

A lot of the people campaigning in my area keep banging on about European funds. A regional assembly in the north-west would have access to such funds. To put this into perspective, however, £200 million of European structural funding goes into the north-west, but the total Government spending in the north-west is £33.7 billion. So we are talking about something that is de minimis.

Perhaps the answer is to strengthen our existing system of local government and to give MPs like me the opportunity to serve on a regional Select Committee. At present, we have a Regional Affairs Committee, which is supposed to have oversight of all the English regions. Why can we not introduce a system of regional Select Committees, so that MPs like me could meet in Lancaster, Wigan or Manchester—in public and televised—to bring the quangos that we keep hearing about to account? That is a question not for this Minister but for the Leader of the House and others.

I shall vote for the Bill this evening. *[Laughter.]* I shall do so because I am seeing the Prime Minister tomorrow. He will know my views, and he will appreciate my candour in expressing them.

6.25 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): I suppose that it is ironic that we have just heard two speeches from people who have said what a ghastly Bill this is, and then declared that they are going to vote for it. I, too, am going to say that it is a pretty ghastly Bill, but I am going to vote against it. In that sense, I shall be consistent and, perhaps, break with my recent seditious tradition as far as my relationship with my party is concerned.

I would like to begin on a seditious note. There is actually a case for regional devolution, and it is silly to pretend that that case does not exist. There are two arguments in favour of regional devolution. One is that there is a serious problem with representative democracy in Britain today. We have passed power out of the hands of people who are accountable. To some

extent, we have passed it upwards to international organisations, most of which I support. We have also passed it down, sometimes into the hands of the citizen—the school board member, the school governor—for very good reasons. We have also passed it down to a whole series of quangos, the most recent of which are the patient care trusts, which are very large organisations indeed. All the people to whom we have passed down that power have a responsibility to look after the members of their own organisation, but they are not enjoined by any accountability to the wider community. That is what I mean by a problem of representative democracy. The first test is: does the Bill deal with that problem?

The second argument for regional devolution is that, at some stage, we have to address the problem of the government of England. I happen to be passionately opposed to the idea of an English Government. I can think of nothing more destructive for the United Kingdom than a wholly imbalanced power centred in an English Government, faced with the powers of the much smaller nationalities in the United Kingdom. Devolution to regions of the United Kingdom can provide an answer to this problem. Does the Bill fulfil that purpose?

When I stack up this measure against those two possible needs, I have to ask myself: is this the answer—this mewling, puking, piddling, miserable little milk-and-water Bill? This is the sort of Bill that comes from people who put water in their red wine. It is barely worth having at all. If it is supposed to be a Trojan horse—made, I think, out of papier-mâché, if the analogy of the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) is going to be correct—I have to say that it is going to take an awfully long time to disgorge its hidden contents.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The right hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct to say that this is a puny Bill, compared with what is necessary, but many forms of life start out mewling and puking. Even he did! Sometimes they grow up to be Conservative MPs. Why should not we give the Bill the right to live, to see how it develops?

Mr. Curry: Because I had no choice but to begin life in that microscopic form. The Government do, however, have a choice about whether to begin with something more important. There is a choice in front of us, whereas my parents had no choice. There was only one way of begetting me. We may evolve in due course, but, for the moment, I am afraid that that is a restriction that is enjoined on both the hon. Gentleman and on me.

What claims are made for the Bill? The first is that it will help with economic regeneration. I recall the debate on Second Reading of the Bill that introduced regional development agencies, when the Minister in charge, who is now, improbably, Minister for Sport, said that the Government would have failed if the measure did not narrow the differential among the regions. As those differentials are widening rapidly, I wait for them to draw that particular conclusion.

Secondly, it is claimed that the Bill will help with accountability. Let us consider the problem of economic regeneration. I support economic regeneration and, perhaps unusually, I think that the Yorkshire Forward RDA has not done a bad job in Yorkshire and Humberside, but we should compare what it has with public spending in the region. Incidentally, part of the constituency of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) used to be in North Yorkshire and a reunification movement aims to get it back, because, understandably, being in Lancashire is a bit of a comedown after being in Yorkshire. If we are to take such figures as an indicator, the funds available are puny.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) is no longer here, but he said that there is an enormous black hole at the heart of the Government's proposals—that is, there is no proposal whatever to redress the balance of public expenditure among the regions. So the dear old north-east of England, which is alleged to be the region that most wants regional government, will go in to bat against the Scots. The rationale, of course, is that it has to compete with the gravitational field of Edinburgh with puny per capita public expenditure compared with what the Scots enjoy.

The Barnett formula has been mentioned, and it is inescapable that the regions will want more power and more money if we introduce regional devolution. I look forward to seeing the Minister for Local Government and the Regions sorting that one out. Indeed, I am tempted to campaign throughout the south-west in favour of devolution just to see him handle the local government reorganisation that would necessarily ensue if devolution were introduced there.

Lawrie Quinn: On the point about more power and more money, is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that Yorkshire would not want either of those?

Mr. Curry: All I am saying is that we will not get them; people are not being offered that choice. Of course, anybody would want more power and more money. If we get a devolved assembly, the first thing it will do is engage in competition for public funds. That, inevitably, will happen.

I always enjoy listening to the Deputy Prime Minister, as it is like having presented to one for Christmas a brand new thesaurus containing all sorts of meanings of words that one never dreamed existed. He said that the Bill will give the regions opportunities similar to those in Scotland and Wales, but either the word "similar" has entirely changed its meaning or there is a curious elasticity in the language, which is no doubt particular. That is a reflection either on new Labour as a philosophy or on the hon. Gentleman as a grammarian. Perhaps a combination of those problems is involved.

Let us consider what is being proposed on the question of accountability, and let me make my local point. North Yorkshire is the only part of Yorkshire and Humberside that does not have a unitary authority. If there is a vote on a regional assembly for Yorkshire and Humberside, 86 per cent. of those who determine local government reform in North Yorkshire will have nothing at stake as regards the change of structure.

If we get regional government, I shall not be afraid of three tiers. I see no reason for North Yorkshire not to be given the choice, should it wish to keep the regional and county tiers, although it should not be able to retain all

[Mr. Curry]

the others as well. That is a fallacy of logic in the Government's argument—the search for such uniformity is wholly unnecessary and I hope that the Minister backs off in Committee or we shall be overwhelmed.

The assemblies are a terrible charade, and we should consider the electoral system and the size of the constituencies. The proposal is to abolish one tier of government—it may be good, bad or indifferent, but it at least represents a limited number of people—and to replace it with another that will represent over 250,000 people, topped up by proportional representation. If turnout in the European elections is an indicator of the success of that system of government, I must say that the Government are in for some rapid disillusionment.

We should consider the powers in the Bill. I refer to the *Local Government Chronicle*—an estimable journal that pays me a modest sum to write for it each month. George Jones, professor of government at the London school of economics, and John Stewart, professor of local government at Birmingham university's Inlogov, have a regular column in which they have disembowelled the Bill. Under the headline "Toothless Wonder", they point out all the issues on which a regional assembly will be able to

"advise . . . make proposals . . . request . . . support".

The only thing they will not be able to do is decide. The assemblies will be able to decide nothing. There will be nothing on which they can draw up a strategy and execute it. They will spend their time importuning others to do things. If that is a recipe for achieving a good turnout, I am astonished.

When people go to the polls, they ask themselves, "What is at stake?" If the answer is nothing, they will not vote. The new system in London has not necessarily given us such astonishing confidence in the transformation of the quality of our public life—says he, having just applied for his congestion charge licence—that we should be confident about its roll-out, to use a word that the Government love, to the rest of the country.

We must also consider the trigger: what will decide that there is to be a referendum? Are we to test the crowd as they come out of St. James's Park, the Stadium of Light or Tesco, or will the usual clutch of councillors, parsons and academics get together to say that the proposals are a good wheeze? In Committee, we need to be told on what basis that test will be undertaken, as it is important. The powers will rest entirely with the Secretary of State. It is all very well saying that the people will decide, but they will not decide whether they want a referendum. There will be lobbies, and the groups that bay the loudest will get the referendums, because, increasingly, that is how our society works.

I am obliged to conclude, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If this is a new dawn, it is a misty, clammy, foggy, chilly November dawn with extremely limited visibility, not merely on the motorways, but on the side roads. The Bill seeks to address a genuine problem—the lack of representative accountability—but the way to do that, which, across the Chamber, we have been reluctant to use, is to give powers back to existing local government, consider the funding, trust people and give them a stake in their local government. We should see whether that will bring a renaissance in the process of accountability and representative democracy in Britain, which we have all conspired to remove and to which the Bill will bring no improvement whatever.

6.37 pm

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): Everybody on the Labour Benches recognises that this country is massively over-centralised. That over-centralisation gives some cause and effect to the wealth, income and health disparities between the regions and the south-east and among the regions. Those problems should be solved, but we will not find the solution in the Bill, which, as previous speakers have said, is quite weak.

I shall come to what should happen, but I must say first that I think the Government believe that the Bill is quite weak. They would be much stronger advocates for it if they were more open about the subjective tests that the Deputy Prime Minister will go through in deciding whether there is to be a referendum, and the Bill would be much clearer if it contained a definite threshold on democratic support. It would also be clearer, and may well get more support, if we were not on such a one-way street, as we often are with referendums. We are not told of the powers that will exist. Quite simply, the Government look shifty in making their case, as they will not tell us those things, or what is in the Deputy Prime Minister's mind or what support they consider appropriate to determining whether there should be a referendum on establishing a regional assembly.

Elected regional assemblies and regional government are not the solution because they run counter to the grain of the history of this country, which is distinguished from its European counterparts by its demography, the history of its local government and its urban areas, towns and shire counties. We should be supporting those cities and making them work.

It is always interesting to hear Conservative Members talk about how much power should be in the hands of local government, as they spent 18 years taking powers from it. They should be returned.

Mr. Dawson: If we truly went with the grain of history, Manchester would be part of the county of Lancashire, whose county town is Lancaster.

Mr. Stringer: Three hundred years ago, Manchester was a small market town, but I am talking about its post-industrial position. Manchester has had local government for 150 years, so that is going with the grain.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Will my hon. Friend reflect on the Commonwealth games that were held in the City of Manchester stadium this summer? Many of us in the north-west outside Manchester felt that it was a regional event in that a sense of regional pride was very much evident. Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a sense of regional pride in the rest of the north-west outside Manchester?

Mr. Stringer: I viewed the Commonwealth games as a national event. It had a lot of support throughout the country. There was a great deal of support locally, and I

was grateful for that, but if my hon. Friend is asking whether there is a north-western identity, no I do not think there is. I think that there is a Merseyside-Liverpool identity and a Manchester-Preston-Lancashire identity, but I do not believe that there is a north-west identity. When I watched television in the 1960s, we were in the north. As Granada diminished in size and the structure of the BBC changed, we were suddenly in the north-west. The north-west is a relatively recent concept. The regions are an artificial construct. Manchester does not have close cultural or sporting ties with Leeds or Liverpool, but because they are tied by the M62, it is economically at least as close to Leeds as it is to Liverpool.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister alluded to the fact that in 1993 the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said which regions there would be when he launched the Government offices for the regions. I served on many of Labour's working parties examining regional government, and the one problem that we could never solve was where the boundaries should be, because there are no natural regions. Salisbury and Southampton, amalgamated in the same chamber of commerce, are in two completely different regions. There are no natural regions in this country, but the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal solved that problem.

One of the more bizarre claims that is made for regional government is that decision making will be better. My experience—I am talking mainly about the north-west, but I do not believe that it would be different in the south-east—is that we will end up with lowest common denominator politics, especially given the democratic system that will be used.

The greatest economic generator in the north-west is Manchester airport. It creates more jobs and brings more wealth to the area than anything else. When I was the director of Manchester airport and leader of Manchester city council, I was involved in the scheme to build a second runway at the airport. I went all over the region trying to get support, but because of local pride, especially on Merseyside which put in planning objections that were supported elsewhere in the north-west, we could not get it. I suspect that in regions where there is no natural majority we will get lowest common denominator politics. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) said that the university of Manchester institute of science and technology and Manchester university should be amalgamated, and I agree, but I am not convinced that that would come about more easily with regional government than under the current structures.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I cannot let my hon. Friend get away with saying that there are no natural regions. There is no doubt that the north-east of England is a natural region. We have our own culture, and we require a Bill such as this so that we can get on and make the decisions that need to be made in the north-east, instead of their being made in central London.

Mr. Stringer: I bow to my hon. Friend's knowledge of the north-east, but I have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) give a completely different view of the nature of the north-east from that of my hon. Friend.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Perhaps I could give the hon. Gentleman another view of the north-east. The right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) was right: people who live on the south side of the Tees believe that they come from North Yorkshire, and people in Cumbria would like to be part of the north-east.

Mr. Stringer: Other hon. Members have referred to the voting system for the proposed regional assemblies. I cannot think of anything more likely to put people off voting than constituencies of a quarter of a million, a list of representatives whom they will probably never see and a system that in the north-west and possibly in other regions will almost guarantee a British National party representative on the regional assembly. We must think about that when we set up electoral systems. Our electoral system has kept extremist parties out of Parliament by fair means. It seems strange to set up a system for regional government that will give the BNP and other racist and extreme groups a platform.

I said that one of the bizarre claims was that decision making would be clearer under a regional system. Another claim concerns the core issue of how we deal with regional disparities. It is claimed that regional assemblies and regional development agencies will be the drivers of economic performance. In the north-west, which I know best, the major economic regenerative budget is the single regeneration budget. Why did it drop by £100 million? That is a measure of the commitment to devolution at the centre. It dropped by that much because there was to be no increase in costs to the Government and some of the regions that were created had to have new budgets, so there was a transfer from those areas of need to areas that had not required those resources before because a regional structure was to be established. I do not believe that this measure will be a driver of change. There simply is not enough money.

The amount of money in Scottish Enterprise and the similar body that deals with the Scottish islands is equivalent to that for three RDAs. Even if that money were put into those regional structures, I doubt whether they would relate to commerce and industry.

I do not want to be completely negative about the Bill.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Is the hon. Gentleman intending to vote for it?

Mr. Stringer: Of course I shall vote for it, if only to give people the opportunity to reject the idea. That is one of the good things about the Bill. The people whom I represent are looking forward to the measures promised in the Queen's Speech to deal with bad private landlords and terraced property. I would much prefer to be dealing with a measure that my constituents are desperate for, because their lives are being made miserable from hour to hour and day to day. That would have a direct impact.

What would a real regional policy look like? We would recognise it because central Government would not allow the synchrotron at Daresbury to be moved to

[Mr. Stringer]

Oxford on the basis of poor reasons. We would recognise it because 80 per cent. of transport spending would not be directed at London as at present. That would make a real difference to the regions. We would recognise it if it got rid of the Barnett formula, and if the surplus of highly paid civil servants and others who do not need to be in London were dispersed to the regions. We would recognise a regional policy that made the London cost adjustment fairer. And we would recognise a real regional policy—a policy that took account of democracy, giving local democracy power as well as responsibility. That would mean ending the system whereby 80 per cent. of local government income is determined by central Government grant, and allowing local authorities to collect it directly in the form of taxes so that they could make real decisions on what happened in their communities.

I am sad about the Bill. The House needs to get to grips with the problem of regional disparities—why we have them, why there is so much poverty in the regions and why gross domestic product per head is not as high as it is elsewhere—but I am afraid the Bill does not deal with that problem. It will not help anyone.

6.50 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I do not envy the Minister the job of piloting the Bill through Committee. He will have a really difficult time.

My tutor at university, K.B.S. Smellie, wrote the then seminal textbook "100 Years of English Local Government". It was a fairly short book; but the Deputy Prime Minister has told us of years of neglect. We have had the Local Government Acts 1963, 1972, 1985 and 1992, as well as the Greater London Authority Act 1999. We have, in fact, experienced an extremely unsettling series of changes. It has been a case of for and against, round about and over the hill.

I am puzzled by all this. The Deputy Prime Minister tries to elevate his plans to the status of a grand programme of constitutional reform; but, in truth, does it consist of any more than yet another reorganisation of local government, providing even fewer powers than those held by the existing institutions—some of which have endured for a very long time, and command considerable sentiment in our nation? I do not represent a county constituency, but the counties are among the oldest political units in western Europe. They have a remarkable history.

Mr. Dawson: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says about the history of counties, but are they not a form of local government that simply does not work any more? Should not some of their functions be devolved to a lower level, and are not others—connected with planning, transport and economic development—meaningful only at regional level?

Mr. Shepherd: I was reflecting on the constant change that we have experienced over the past quarter of a century or so, and on whether it has established any of what the Governments involved wanted to initiate. This is what puzzles me. If the Bill represents no more than a stab at some form of local government reform, why does it not follow the normal statutory process? We do not need referendums; we have all the Acts that I mentioned earlier. Important arrangements, which in some measure are constitutions, have been established by a simple Act of Parliament. What Parliament made, it can unmake.

The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) said something that, in a sense, was very important. He wanted a strong central state because it could end what he saw as a disparity. The hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) said that he wanted the regions to be able to perform certain functions, but who can best do that? This is why new Labour is constantly denigrated. The House of Commons is the central institution in the land, and if we have a will it can return to the institutions of local government the powers that it historically gained. I am thinking of the history identified by K.B.S. Smellie—the gradual great municipal developments of the 19th century that brought about the life and standards of our people.

Lawrie Quinn: The hon. Gentleman has obviously spent much time studying these matters. He says that the House of Commons is the appropriate place to effect such scrutiny. I agree with him, but, as a member of the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs for England, may I ask him how effective that Committee has been in scrutinising the matters that he says we should be scrutinising?

Mr. Shepherd: If the hon. Gentleman really wants to know, I think it is an absurdity. The Modernisation Committee looked at it. The Government do not want it. I do not know what it is about. But it could be given life if the House had a will.

The ability to make settlements and adjustments, and to revitalise local government, lies in our hands. There is a great hunger out there among the existing local authorities, whose members ask what is their purpose. There has been a regional attempt at a constitutional convention, whose research papers have identified important findings. Other Members may cite their own areas, but I can say that the west midlands—whatever they may be—receive £1,000 per head less than Scotland. That central point was made, in part, by the hon. Member for Pendle.

I know as well as the Minister that the west midlands have not a chance in hell of suddenly having £5 billion or so cast in their direction. What is being set up is fanciful and, in a sense, phoney. Do people want it? The Deputy Prime Minister speaks of democracy, but it lies in his hands to determine whether there is a local interest and whether the vote will be for or against.

I can conjure up any number of possible tests. Two people wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister, and on that basis he knows there is a groundswell. Well, the tests cannot be quite as fanciful as that. We in the west midlands had always assumed that we did not want this, until the BBC commissioned a poll. Apparently, not one region in England and Wales does not want regional government, and in the west midlands the figure is no less than 73 per cent. On that basis, the Deputy Prime Minister should be signing the documents that will bring about a referendum almost immediately.

Once the Deputy Prime Minister has his referendum, what is the test? There is no test. We do not believe in thresholds any more. I understand why new Labour

does not believe in them: it would not have secured any of its supposed constitutional changes with them. There was once a body corporate. Something that affected one part of this island affected us all. The flow of money to Scotland affects the flow of money to Cornwall and Wales; no one can doubt that. There is only one pot, and it is we who give legitimacy to the system. The regional authorities that are envisaged will not raise the money to support the ambitions that are dangled before the people of this country.

I reflect on what we have experienced already. As I observed to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), when a free people have been asked whether they want change, in no case has the figure been anywhere near 50 per cent. except in Scotland, where it was just under 50 per cent. Does that demonstrate a real will? Are we not just creating yet another political class?

Huge costs will be involved. People should realise that. What about the ambitions of Wales? Is it to have an overarching county council? If only 25.2 per cent. voted for change in Wales, where a free people were urged to go out and express their will for change, that means that 74.8 per cent. did not want change. It is on such a slender basis that the Government trumpet that this is what Wales wants. Never has a minority of votes cast among the electorate been construed as an authority for the introduction of change.

Why do I say that? Let us consider the rules of any club. I know of no club in my constituency that would permit fundamental rule changes on the basis that one in four members wanted them. The Government have put no threshold in the Bill, which is why they could not secure—as the hon. Member for Pendle said—their ambitions for one important, powerful Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, in respect of this nonsense.

The Liberal Democrats say that they want regional government, but it is currently incoherent. Scotland is different from Wales, which in turn is different from other areas. This was once a symmetrical country; to that extent, I disagree with the hon. Member for Pendle. What was so for a man or woman in Cumbria was so for us in what was once Staffordshire. Aldridge-Brownhills never wanted to be in Walsall. It is a nightmare. Such misalliances are repeated across the country. The Government are dedicated to casting those misalliances of arrangements against the grain, so to speak. We have to forget our history to accept measures such as this.

7 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I want to try to redress the balance in the debate, which has been far too dominated by Lancastrians and by quibblers arguing against what could and, I hope, will be the basis of a very good and necessary decentralisation in this country. It is a small step to what has been a lifetime's ambition of mine: to have greater decentralisation, and to give more power to the regions and to the people where they live, interact and function in a modern society.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. He has fought for that over the years in the Labour party against a good deal of opposition and now he is fighting for it in government. When we get these regional assemblies—and, I hope, eventually regional governments based on them—it will be his monument in modern Britain.

I have to make a confession: I started on this journey believing in home rule for Yorkshire. It is a simple proposition. When I became MP for Great Grimsby, I included Humberside in that rubric, otherwise I would have been executed. There is no love lost between Tykes and Grimbarians.

It seemed that Yorkshire had had a bum deal from the nation. It was said of President Hoover that in four years he drained, damned and ditched the United States and it seemed that London had done the same with Yorkshire and the great industrial regions of the north that created this modern society. I wanted to give Yorkshire the ability to fight back and control its own destiny.

Like the Deputy Prime Minister, we all get more moderate as we get older. I duly resiled from that enthusiasm for home rule, but I still believe in the basic principle of the Bill, which is bringing government closer to the people. It is creating not a new level of bureaucracy but a new level of democracy. We already have regional institutions and they are not accountable; a long list of them has been given in the debate. The Bill is dedicated to making them accountable to the people in that region. As I said, it is a first step to regional government. Why do we need it? This country is manifestly over-centralised. It is more dominated and controlled by central Government than any other society I know. Even France, where Paris is supposedly dominant, has gone in for regionalism and decentralisation on a scale that we have not thought of in this country.

All career ladders seem to finish in London. Most of the best and brightest sixth formers in my children's school in Grimsby have gone to London. Industries in the north have been damaged, or ruined in many cases by economic policies dictated by London. Even now it is going on. London house prices are rocketing, so the rest of the country has to bear higher interest rates than are appropriate to a manufacturing area. London is dominant.

Local government has been shackled by London. The greatest skill in local government now is to transport begging bowls up and down the railways to London or, increasingly, to Brussels. No wonder we complain that local government does not attract ability: its basic job is the handing round of begging bowls. The media are dominated from London. House prices are dominated from London. Think of the kind of wealth that will be inherited in London when the houses are sold and people go to live in Grimsby more economically with a great bonus. People from Grimsby cannot go the opposite way.

Devolution and the Bill are about taking power back to the people to help them to get a better deal and not to be dependent—to get them off their knees. In this nation, there should not be a political class as a dominant group in London, with the rest living on handouts and increasingly dependent on London. People should be equal and have the same power over their destinies everywhere.

Complaints have been made about the direction of public spending. Yorkshire and Humberside gets £926 a head less a year than Scotland gets for devolved services, and £850 less a head a year than London.

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

We need regional government not only to give people the power to fight back but because we now live regionally: regions are the basis of life now. As my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) said, they are the basis of identity in the north-east, the Geordie nation. It is not as good as in Yorkshire. Perhaps we are more xenophobic, although that is now a crime in Europe and Yorkshire, but there is a feeling of pride and identity.

Look too at travel to work. My dad used to walk down the road to the mill but now people travel considerable distances. The M62, which I use a lot, is choked with people travelling to work from east and west Yorkshire to Leeds, or they take the M1 to Sheffield. Those motorways are imposing a new pattern of life based on regions, a new scale in people's thinking.

Our culture is becoming increasingly regional. People go to the West Yorkshire playhouse, the Crucible in Sheffield, the theatre in Hull. We have Opera North in Leeds and the Northern Ballet. All those are regional cultural institutions. Even the multiplex cinemas serve bigger regions than the locality. There are great regional shopping centres such as Meadow Hall, the Metro Centre or Trafford Park, which is the newest and best; I am afraid to say that as a Yorkshireman. They have given a new focus to economic activity.

Most organisations have regional structures. The TUC, the CBI, the parties and sport are all run regionally. I am glad to say that, since 1997, we have had a proliferation of regional bodies, for which we need to provide coherence through measures such as this. The problems include planning, development and promoting the region. There are important institutions such as Manchester airport. Transport and housing need to be treated regionally and on a regional scale; those problems are regional rather than strictly local.

We need accountable institutions to deal with all that. The way to make them accountable is to have regional assemblies and eventually a regional government. I welcome the measure because it transfers power to our people where they live, and the people want it. Much has been said about the BBC poll, but it showed strong support for regions, particularly in the north-east, the north-west, Yorkshire and the west midlands, which is also pushing for regional government.

The Economist poll in April 1999 asked people what they most identified with. Forty-four per cent. said local government but 49 per cent. said the region and only 41 per cent. said England: more people identify with the region than with the country. We must have regional institutions, or the constitution would be unstable. We have devolution for Scotland and for Wales. Why should England be treated as one great lump? We cannot have an English parliament—it would be an elephant in a cuckoo's nest—so we have to have regions developing towards equality of status and power. The Conservatives are against it, but then they are against all change until it actually happens. It reminds me of the old definition in the 1950s, when it was said that the Republicans believed that nothing should be done for the first time, but the new Republicans believed that it should be done, but not now.

That is precisely the Conservative position on regional government, as it was on devolution to Wales and on regional development agencies. They accept the regional institutions that are already running. The regional assemblies—the re-named chambers of the development agencies—have many Conservatives on them: the south-east assembly has 34, dominating it; east of England, 13; south-west, 20; and west midlands, 23. They are using regional institutions, and no doubt they will play their part on the new bodies.

Why not let the people decide, as the Bill does? It is true that the south is less enthusiastic than the north, but we could have variable geometry institutions, as in Spain, where the system works very well, with regions choosing how many powers they want, some taking a lot and some having only minimal powers. That is a perfectly feasible future for us.

The ballot should certainly say "directly elected", because we already have elected assemblies, in the sense that many of the councillors on the existing regional assemblies are elected. The suggested preamble for the ballot is far too long. It is incomprehensible, and people would die of boredom by the time they got to the end of it.

The Liberals argued for including abolition of the counties in the requirement for regional government. I know that the Tories wax lyrical about the counties as traditional institutions, although they waxed slightly less lyrical when they abolished the metropolitan counties. They abolished Humberside for party political reasons, because Labour was in power there, and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.12 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) will be very disappointed if regional government ever happens, because his idea that there will be some kind of new exciting democracy is a load of rubbish. If he reads the Bill, the White Paper and the guidance, he will see that there is to be an organisation with a single block grant, with very limited powers other than general powers about making some kind of observation about the region. The power simply will not be there.

I agree absolutely with the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice). It was a joy to listen to him. I would be happier, as he would be, if he came over to the Conservative Benches, with all the sound sense that he has, just as I would suggest that some of my hon. Friends would be far happier where he is. We would welcome someone like him, who believes in a sensible way of spending public money and in the retention of democracy.

What worries me is the extent to which local government has already happened without people being aware of it. I was horrified when I had to inquire into the possibility of getting all these ridiculous Euro-grants for my constituency—although it worked out very well, because we are the only place in the whole of Essex to get objective 2 money. I was told always to remember a place called Hertfordshire, which got substantial sums for unemployment and deprivation, even though there was little unemployment or deprivation there.

I had to find out about regional government in my quest for funding. It horrified me to discover how much there was, and how much was being spent. I spoke to a gentleman called Mr. Riddell, a very nice man, who was the regional director of the Government office for the east of England, which is located in Cambridge and Bedford and was formed from regional council officers from Departments such as the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Department of Trade and Industry. He told me that the running costs of the organisation were £6.5 million and the programme budget £330 million, which involved regional selective assistance, smart grants and other funds, and that the single regeneration budget money had now gone to the RDA.

Then there was something called the East of England Development Agency, which I was told was an NDPB. Clearly, if I had been living in the real world, I would have known what that was—but I still do not know. I found out that its offices were in Norwich, Bury St. Edmonds and Bedford, that it had 12 board members appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, that it had a budget of £4.4 million and a programme budget of £27 million, and that its primary task was to produce a regional economic development strategy.

Then there was the East of England Investment Agency.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the proposals in the White Paper for the directly elected regional assemblies would give them specific powers over the regional development agencies for general economic development as well as for the allocation of European funding? Would not that deal with some of the problems that he identifies?

Sir Teddy Taylor: If the hon. Lady investigates further, she will find that that is not the case. The assemblies do not allocate European money. They simply tell people to send in six application forms, which I did. They do not make the determinations. To believe that we are going to have elected people doing what people who are appointed to the boards by the Government do is living in cloud cuckoo land.

I discovered that the East of England Investment Agency was based in Cambridge. Its budget was only £900,000. Then there was the East of England assembly, which was just about to appoint a full-time secretary. There were also two regional planning organisations in the east of England, apparently called SERPLAN and SCEALA, and there was a possibility that they might merge.

There is a huge amount of regional government already, and the idea that we are simply planning for the future should worry us. Is it right to be moving towards more regional governments, when the sense that we get from the people of Britain is that they want to move away from larger organisations to smaller ones? That is what I found in my constituency, when it was part of a county called Essex. People felt that Chelmsford was too far away and that they were neglected until we became a unitary authority. The idea of saying to my people that, now they have escaped from Chelmsford, they would be better off being run by Cambridge is ridiculous.

There is no enthusiasm for regional government in England, except perhaps in the north-east and in Cornwall, where people are rather unusual. The sole reason that people in the north-east have for supporting more regional government is that they think it will mean getting some of the huge amounts of extra money that people get in Scotland.

Joyce Quin: As a north-east Member, I know that that is not the sole reason why we support regional government. We believe that it gives us an opportunity to influence events in our region, and a single pot of money, whether limited or not, allows a region to decide priorities for itself in a way that we cannot do at present.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I do not know the area as well as the right hon. Lady, but I visit it often. I go to a place called Durham and other places, and the impression that I get is that people are not interested in having more politicians or more government and simply want to know whether they will get more money.

The Government should make it abundantly clear in the referendums what the actual position is. Do not let us mislead people into thinking that there will be extra money if there will not. The Government should also think carefully about the ridiculous electoral system that they are proposing, which is exactly the same as the one used for the Scottish Parliament. If people think that regional government is a great idea, they should go up to Glasgow and ask what people think about the devolved Government there.

Under the proposals, there will be some directly elected people and others who are there simply on the basis of a party list. There will be the ridiculous situation that obtains in Edinburgh, where the majority of Members of the Scottish Parliament have constituents who keep them busy, sending them letters and invitations, but there is another group—sadly, an awful lot of them Conservatives, as we have only one elected Member there—with no constituents and no answerability to anyone. All they have to do is to keep their party happy, so that they stay high on the list. It is ridiculous to have a group of MSPs with no constituency responsibilities, to whom no one phones or writes. That does not create equality, and it is not the type of democracy that we want.

I hope that, during these referendums, the Government will tell people what is to happen to unitary authorities. In Southend-on-Sea, people are happy with their unitary authority. We think that a great deal of money has been saved and that we are providing better services—although only time will tell.

Under the new arrangements, it is proposed to set up even larger unitary authorities. I am told that one plan under consideration is to merge some of the district councils with unitary authorities. It would be extremely dangerous to put people under unitary authorities that they do not want without giving them information about them. For example, I know that Rochford district council, which is in my constituency, certainly does not want to join with any other authority and the last council that it would want to join is Southend-on-Sea. It is dangerous to develop such ideas before thinking them through.

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

Under the Government's proposals, what will happen to the EU Committee of the Regions? Will only countries with elected regional authorities have the right to send representatives to the Committee? I have always been suspicious about this ridiculous Bill, whose proposals are not wanted by anyone. Indeed, part of the pressure may come from Europe where most countries have regional government.

The thing that should worry politicians most of all is the fact that the public are switching off from politics. I recently had the pleasure of speaking at a university in Scotland, but I was horrified when only one person in an audience of 300 said that they were actively involved in politics. When I was at university, everyone was involved in politics, either as a member of a political party or some other organisation.

There is a terrible danger that people in Britain, especially young people, are switching off. They are not interested because there are too many elections and too many public representatives. The Government seem to be planning to offer people not merely elections for the House of Commons, but for the House of Lords and for regional councils, but instead of getting better democracy we shall no longer have any democracy at all. It is not democracy when only 25 per cent. or 30 per cent. of the people vote.

Our democracy would be far more effective if we had effective councils with real powers answerable directly to the people. The Bill will not proceed because the people will reject it. They do not want more government or more politicians; they simply want to hold on to our basic democracy.

It is sad to be talking about how we can spread the powers of this Parliament down to regional authorities when a huge quantity of power is going away from this place already. Almost every day, more power goes to Europe because of decisions taken there. There are so many issues that we should be discussing in the House of Commons—sometimes we do—but in respect of which our powers have gone, so what is the point of setting up more assemblies and councils and handing around more democratic rights when our democracy is largely dying because our decision-making powers are being taken away?

I would love the Government to take a real interest in fighting for democracy, but this Bill is not the way. It will not help anyone. It will cost a lot of money and people do not want it.

7.24 pm

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): I greatly welcome the Bill. I have campaigned for many years for regional government, so it gives me great pleasure to speak in the debate.

When I became a Member in 1997, I mentioned my enthusiasm for regional government to one or two long-standing Members. They told me that it would not last long and that after a few years I would go native, as many regional government enthusiasts had done in the past. There is something about this place that makes us feel important and weakens our belief that decisions should not be made only in Parliament.

I have always argued strongly in favour of regional government. One of the best ways to explain my reason for doing so is to describe what happens when I talk to top juniors in schools in my constituency about what an MP does. I tell them that we sit around in Parliament and discuss laws; we talk about where we get money from and what it should be spent on and decide on the priorities. From my perspective in the north-west of England, the key question is whether many of the decisions made in this place and in Whitehall would be better made by men and women who live and work in the north-west, represent people in the north-west and go back every night to their homes in the north-west. My answer has to be yes.

I do not necessarily want to remove huge tranches of work from this place, but much of our necessary scrutiny and decision making is not done very well because it involves complex detail, such as whether a bit of money should be spent in one local area or another or whether a particular road scheme should go ahead. During the past few months, I have chaired a couple of meetings in my constituency about a road scheme. They have included representatives from Lancashire county council, South Ribble borough council, the residents group and the Highways Agency in Manchester—although it is a national body. We discuss what is, in essence, a regional and local issue: whether a road scheme should go ahead and the priorities involved. That is not a national issue. It should be perfectly possible for decisions to be made by men and women based in the north-west, not by people in London. I should not have to discuss the details of the scheme with the Minister for Transport—they should be sorted out in the north-west. That is why I am in favour of regional government.

The Bill would not give us regional government; it sets up the mechanism by which regional government can be established. Much of the debate has focused on what is in the White Paper, and I shall deal with that later. However, at some point in the future, the proposals in the White Paper need to be turned into a Bill that will set up regional assemblies. This Bill does not do that; it deals with some constitutional issues relating to the referendums on regional assemblies.

I am not sure that unitary authorities need to be dealt with in the Bill. I represent an area where there is two-tier local government. I am strongly in favour of both the abolition of Lancashire county council and the establishment of unitary authorities. When Lancashire was being considered in the review of the early 1990s, I was the leader of Preston council. I vigorously opposed unitary status for Preston because I thought that the town was too small and that unitary areas should be larger. That remains my view, although we still need unitary authorities in Lancashire. That is my perspective both as an MP and as someone who has been politically active in Lancashire for a long time. People in other parts of the country may have a different view on whether the abolition of two tiers is right.

Lawrie Quinn: Does my hon. Friend welcome the principle in the measure that there should be independent assessment of the needs of local government, so that in North Yorkshire, for example, we could put right the wrongs perpetrated after so-

called commissions such as the Banham review, when councils were abolished with no reference to local people?

Mr. Borrow: I agree with my hon. Friend in many ways. One of the difficulties of previous local government reorganisations was that Parliament decided that Parliament could decide, and that such decisions were not really a matter for local communities.

One can argue that the Bill is not perfect, but it is a damn sight better than a lot of the previous legislation that has dealt with the abolition of local government and the creation of new local authorities. I have concerns about Lancashire and wonder whether the commission should consider how the existing boundaries of Blackpool and Blackburn would fit, but we may need to consider those issues in more detail in Committee.

I want briefly to tackle the thresholds issue. Previous generations of hon. Members have taken many decisions that affect the constitutional position of this country's citizens without even asking them. The House voted to take us into the Common Market and to abolish the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils without asking the British people. So it is a bit rich for those hon. Members who were involved in that to claim that it is democratically important to set a threshold for the referendums to set up regional assemblies.

We made it clear in the Labour party manifesto last year that we were in favour of setting up this mechanism to establish regional assemblies. We could have included in the manifesto a promise to establish regional assemblies without holding referendums, but simply by pushing the legislation through. The fact that we agreed to hold referendums is a sign of our belief in asking people in each area whether they want such constitutional change.

The argument to make that move even more difficult by stepping in and saying that there should be a high threshold often comes from those who have often ignored the wishes of the electorate in making constitutional changes in the past, so I seriously question their motives.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: May I remind the hon. Gentleman that in 1978 a Labour Government instigated a referendum in Scotland with the threshold of 40 per cent. saying yes?

Mr. Borrow: There are occasions when the Labour party gets things wrong. The 1997 election was won overwhelmingly and the parties that were in favour of devolution won every seat in Scotland, so it was clearly the will of the people in Scotland that they should be given a referendum without a threshold to establish the Scottish Parliament, which is what they did. Despite their concerns about that Parliament's performance in some areas, all the signs are that they would not wish to see it abolished and to go back to where they were.

The second part of the debate is not about the Bill, but about the constitutional Bill that would need to be introduced shortly after the first successful referendum campaign. The powers in the White Paper and implemented in the constitutional Bill leave a lot to be desired. Before the first referendum takes place, it is absolutely crucial to have at the very minimum a draft constitutional Bill that lays down the powers that the people can expect if they vote in favour of a regional assembly.

We should look fairly closely at the number of members of a regional assembly. In a region such as mine—the north-west—to start by talking about having only 25 or 35 members is total nonsense. The scale of the constituencies is totally over the top, and it will take the regional assembly away from people, rather than making it locally accountable.

We also need to look at the powers that exist. Transport has been mentioned, and I certainly question why the Highways Agency should come to my constituency, as in the example that I cited. That would still happen under the White Paper because the regional assembly would have no power over the Highways Agency, so transport needs to be considered. If employment and economic policies are important, why should all the skills and learning matters still be largely governed centrally rather than regionally? Those issues need to be re-examined to find out whether we can get them right.

I shall try to be a bit optimistic. One of the things that I have learned about politics is that institutions can have certain powers. They can spend money, take certain decisions and make certain appointments, but successful politicians and institutions use that as the springboard to develop leadership in their communities. What I want to see in the north-west is an elected assembly that operates not along narrow party lines, but reaches out to the broader community, gives leadership to the north-west and provides a vision for the region.

We should recognise that the idea of a party operating on the basis of 50 per cent. plus one, which often happened in local government—it still happens now in certain places—is nonsense because it is not civic leadership. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) is not in his place. He mentioned a whole list of things in opposing the principle of regional government, but I should have thought that Manchester city council under his leadership epitomised that civic leadership. As an authority and institution, it accepted a wider responsibility than simply delivering services; it accepted a role in the broader community to make things happen.

If the politicians elected to regional assemblies do not have that wider vision and the ability to bring a broad range of people with them, they will fail. If they can do that, they succeed and will be seen to succeed. They will encourage those parts of the country that do not get regional assemblies early on to follow their example, and I certainly hope that my region will be in the first tranche.

7.36 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) made a thoughtful speech. He and a number of other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), set out the vision of the people who have long been committed to creating regional assemblies in those regions that want them.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

That is very distant from the carping, narrow and limiting approach of the people who try to deny us the opportunity to make decisions in our own region and produce the kind of political leadership from all parties that can make a real difference to the lives of the people in the regions.

I do not want to dwell too much on that general case, which has been so very well made, but instead to contribute some points from the perspective of the northernmost part of the northernmost region in England. By definition, it is the furthest region from London—it seems further from London than many parts of Scotland—and it has a very strong regional identity, to which my constituency contributes a great deal. The region has a very strong cultural identity, expressed in music, dialect and drama, and my constituency contributes enormously to those things.

There is a great sense of pride in the Newcastle-Gateshead bid to be the capital of culture and in other things that are going on in the centre of the region. It is interesting that it is a Newcastle-Gateshead bid because, for years, the two communities on opposite sides of the river were nothing but rivals and ignored each other to an extraordinary extent, but we now have co-operation in what is recognised as the main urban centre of the region. It is not the only urban centre in the region, but it is the largest and some very exciting developments are happening there.

Those who represent an area so far from London as the one that I represent are immediately conscious of the feeling that people have that decisions are taken too far away from them to reflect their own concerns, by people who do not understand or know about their area and problems. It is almost impossible to visit those people in a day's journey, in the way that people in areas closer to London can. It is rare for me to get large parties of people or school children to come to the House of Commons because they have to come for several days to accomplish such a visit. London is a long way from the area that I represent, so there is a genuine interest in taking decisions closer to home.

Of course my constituency covers a large area and the northern part of it is on the Scottish border. There are two different perceptions of the regional issue in my constituency. People close to the Scottish border ask, "Why can't we have what they have got?" They look over the border and they see a lot more money—I shall come to that in a moment—and the Scottish Executive can make decisions about where its priorities lie. It can make decisions about the A1 and other matters because it has the power in its own region. My constituents want that sort of power to be exercised in our own region and at a place that is a reasonable distance away, so that they can make effective representations. So the sense in the northern part of the region is that Scotland has something that we are being denied.

To the southern part of my constituency, however, many more people travel to Newcastle or Tyneside to work because they must look for employment opportunities there. They make extensive use of what are essentially regional facilities based in Tyneside, and are particularly conscious of being located within a north-eastern region. That is a region in which regional government clearly already exists. The idea that the Bill will create regional government is misleading—we have had it for years. Currently, it takes the form of the Government office for the north-east, the regional development agency and the plethora of quangos and other bodies that were described earlier. It is there but it is not accountable to the region. When I or others go to the Government office for the north-east we are always conscious that however helpful the individual servants are, and however much they want to advance the interests of the region, their paymasters are in London, and they are looking over their shoulders to decisions that are taken in London. They will put a case to London, where the decision will be made.

Lawrie Quinn: I recognise that, like me, the right hon. Gentleman serves on the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs. Can he reflect briefly on his experiences, which may be shared, of that attempt to scrutinise and hold to account the current state of affairs?

Mr. Beith: My memory goes back further to the first attempt to set up a regional affairs Committee, which once had a debate about the north-east of England. First, no Conservative Members could be found to attend the Committee, until my good friend Lord Elliott was eventually found—he was usually the only Conservative who could be induced to appear on such occasions. Subsequently, not enough Labour Members could be found to get a quorum for the Committee. Even in its more recent incarnation, it is a virtually non-existent body. I cannot remember when I was last summoned to it, or when it ever did anything. Manifestly, it is the wrong sort of body even to oversee decisions, which should be overseen within the region. Many Members have argued—I do not want to add to those arguments in my limited time—that we need to develop the powers of a regional assembly so that it can fulfil those functions and satisfy those aspirations. We will not get that unless we create the body and build from there. As critical as I am of the limitations of these proposals, we must start, put the body into existence and demonstrate that it needs more power and can make good use of more power.

Although I believe that it is worth creating even a limited regional assembly and building on its powers, I also want to win the referendum. If Ministers also want to win the referendum, and want to be in a position to say to people in the region who have looked closely at these matters that they are offering something worthwhile, they must understand this point. Business people in the north-east are not intrinsically hostile, but their first question is: can the assembly deliver things that will help us in our business in the region? Can it provide better infrastructure or ensure that that is provided? Can it make decisions nearer to us? If Ministers cannot give positive answers to that, they will not get backing from sections of the community who are prepared to be sympathetic if they see that a regional assembly is capable of delivering things that matter to them.

Of course, people in the region also feel strongly about Government finance and the whole issue of the Barnett formula. That issue will not go away, because it is clearly recognised in the north-east that we are not given the same financial opportunities to tackle

problems that have been available to Scotland to tackle the very same problems: the decline of major industries, rural depopulation and so on. We have not had a comparable basis for dealing with those problems.

The other issue that I want to address is local government, which many Members have mentioned. If we go into a referendum campaign having been offered a single-tier Northumberland covering the whole current area of Northumberland as the only local government body, that will make it extremely difficult to persuade people in my part of the region to accept and vote for the regional assembly that they might otherwise want. That is a separate question. At the very least, people should be able to make that decision separately on the voting paper. The only votes that should count on that question should be those of the people who live in the area affected. People in Newcastle and Redcar do not want to decide what the local government system in Northumberland should be, and they should not be given the opportunity to do so. That is a decision for people in Northumberland. If the Government want to demonstrate that they feel that the two issues are related, they should at least give people the opportunity of a second question. Ideally, however, the matter should be decoupled completely. That will be felt most strongly in Northumberland—I refer only to our position—if we are offered a local government unit that is simply too large to deal with local housing questions, too large for people to identify with, and dominated by its south-eastern urban corner to the detriment of rural areas.

When Conservative Members talk about our historic counties, their argument is often bogus. Who can claim that a County Durham that does not contain Darlington, Gateshead, South Shields or Hartlepool is the historic County Durham? That is simply not so. Indeed, my constituency, which is a long way from Durham, contained outposts of the historic county of Durham—Islandshire in the north of Northumberland was part of County Durham. That suited the prince bishops of Durham, and it survived long after they had gone, but it did not make administrative sense. A number of the historic counties simply did not make administrative sense. Some of them were ruthlessly abolished regardless of their administrative merits. Hereford and Worcester was bundled together by a previous Conservative Government. The royal county of Berkshire was totally removed by a Conservative Government—it does not exist in administrative terms. In some areas, the case was strong; in other areas, it was weak. The idea that the counties can be erected as the alternative to a system that recognises and makes accountable the regional government that already exists, however, is unreal.

These issues should be decoupled. The region in which I live, part of which I represent, would benefit from being able to make decisions through an elected regional assembly. I want people to vote for that regional assembly, and I do not want us to be handicapped in that process by Ministers offering less to the region than they could do, or by confusing the issue with a vote about local government, which is a wholly different matter.

7.47 pm

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). I must say that I strongly agreed with his speech. Perhaps it is a surprise that I should be in such strong agreement with a Liberal Democrat, but I am comforted in that thought by the fact that we are both part of the north-east constitutional convention and of the embryonic yes coalition—yes to regional government—that is under way in our part of the world. I strongly agreed with the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the sense of identity in the north-east, and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) also made the point that, in England, and within Britain, we can identify strongly with our region. Growing up in the north-east of England, I always felt that I was part of the region as well as being British. All of us have different levels of identity that can sit comfortably together. That is an important part of the debate on regional government.

Opinion polls in the north-east of England show a strong sense of identity with the region, although I concede that they currently show a less strong feeling in support of formalised regional government. That is simply because much of the argument is still to be made, and much of it is still to be won, in terms of the powers and responsibilities that regional government will have, and the real difference that I firmly believe it will be able to make.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) made much today, as he did in the debate on the Gracious Speech, of the fact that people are being asked to vote without a precise formulation of the powers of the regional authorities. The process is identical, however, to that which was followed in Scotland, Wales and London. To make so much of it in relation to regional government in England does not therefore seem justified. In addition, the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice" describes in detail the powers that the Government expect the regional authorities to have.

Although there are shortcomings in the powers outlined in the White Paper, they make a good start in launching the regional government process in England. Page 12 of the White Paper says that regional government is a process. Once it is set up, it will be possible to consider whether new powers should be devolved to the organisations that have been created. I very much accept the starting point for regional government that is outlined in the White Paper. It provides us with a positive message that we can take to the people of the regions when we fight the referendum.

Mr. Brady: The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the Liberal Democrats have been very clear. They see these proposals as a starting point for regional government and they believe that the process will end up with regional government having tax-raising powers of its own and powers over expenditure. Does the right hon. Lady share that vision?

Joyce Quin: We obviously need to discuss where we think the end point of the process could be. It is probably too soon to say exactly where regional

[Joyce Quin]

government will end up. It will have to prove itself. I very much hope that, on the basis of the Government's proposals, it will do that. Modest powers to raise tax exist already, given that is possible to raise extra money from the council tax. We can argue about whether that is the best approach, but a tax-raising element already exists. We should not get too exercised about that issue at this stage.

If everything is to be based on people's consent—this process is, and I approve of the fact that it gives choice to people in the regions—we will be able to respect people's ultimate decision. In Scotland, people were given a two-part question that gave them a say in the finance-raising possibilities of the Scottish Parliament.

Much has been made in the debate of the views of business. I accept that there is much scepticism on the part of business, and those of us who are enthusiastic about the process need to discuss it with business. However, I hope that it will seize the opportunities available to it in the White Paper proposals and get involved. There are a number of ways in which business can make its voice heard. It is interesting that the submission that many of us received from the TUC shows that it has seen the possibilities of taking part in the civic forums, in the committee work and in the policy council work of the regions. It wants to make its voice heard. I urge business to do the same.

Several of the business community's worries about red tape are exaggerated. Red tape tends to emanate from national and European regulations. There is a real need to ensure that it is simplified and reviewed wherever possible, but the powers for regional assemblies proposed in the White Paper are unlikely to be a source of red tape. In any event, the process is inclusive enough to offer business a real opportunity to make its voice heard. Again, I urge it to do that.

Many contributions have focused on the link with local government reform. On that, I agree with some of my hon. Friends and with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. It is unfortunate that the two issues are linked, partly because that sends out the message that regional government has something to do with local government when it does not. Regional government is about decentralising from the centre. That is the essence of the message that we should seek to convey.

Mr. Dhanda: Some of us who live in areas that do not have as strong a regional identity as the north-east wish that they had it. We see the mechanism as an opportunity to move towards unitary authorities. What does my right hon. Friend think of the idea of having unitary authorities in regions that will not even vote for a regional assembly?

Joyce Quin: It is important to give people the opportunity to move to unitary authorities. I understand the rationale behind that. However, I believe these proposals could mean that unitary areas—most of my area is unitary already—impose a solution on areas that are two-tier at present. I would much rather that the people in those areas could choose for themselves. However, there is a strong argument in favour of unitary authorities, and I wish my hon. Friend well in his attempts to establish a good structure in his region that will provide a successful way forward for the future.

How we engage people in the vote is another important issue. Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), have lamented the low turnouts in elections. Although that may sometimes have something to do with people's disinterest in elections, I was very struck by what happened in my local authority area of Gateshead. In a local election in which there were no particular burning issues and in which there was an all-postal ballot, the turnout went from the normal average of 25 per cent. to 60 per cent, which is higher than the general election turnout in my area. I spoke to people about postal ballots and they said that they fitted in very well with today's lifestyles and, particularly, with those of people who work long hours. It might also be worth considering moving elections from Thursdays to the weekend, but people thought that the postal ballot system that was operated allowed them to cast their vote without the pressure of trying to fit it into their working Thursday. Many people find that difficult. We should consider full postal ballots for the regional election.

We should also consider ways of combining the regional election with other elections. People would not have to vote on different occasions, and combining elections that were important to people would create more interest. I also urge the Government to consider the submissions made by organisations such as the Royal National Institute of the Blind and Mencap, which have said that, whatever system we use for electing regional government, it should be as widely accessible as possible.

There are many ways in which we can make a positive case for regional government. I do not accept the argument that regional government has not been an economic success. For example, the history of Germany since the second world war shows that extremely successful efforts on technology have been made in areas such as Baden-Württemberg. Furthermore, the way in which North Rhine Westphalia managed the transition from older to newer industries shows that economic successes have taken place. Interestingly, the areas that I have mentioned did not have great historic identities; they were largely created by the allies after the second world war. None the less, they have been economically very successful.

The Bill is an important step forward for the economy and our political system. I welcome the fact that Labour and Liberal Democrat Members are firmly grasping the opportunities for the people of our regions. I hope that we will make a success of devolution not just for the benefit of the regions but for the health of the democracy of the United Kingdom as a whole.

7.59 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I shall not vote for the English regions smoke-and-mirrors Bill. This has been a remarkable debate, because everyone who has spoken has had something important to say. Many of them have a great deal of experience, and the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) spoke with great authority. I worked closely with him when he was the leader of a city council and I was a local government finance Minister. We addressed jointly many of the issues that he described.

One issue that we had to address was that of the Government offices for the regions. Michael Heseltine and I, as his junior Minister, had a good reason for deciding that that should go ahead in principle. It was implemented later by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). We decided that there had to be joined-up government with those Departments that had a regional presence, but less than half of them had a regional presence and the others, such as the Home Office, probably never would. There was never any suggestion that establishing the Government offices was a precursor to regional government. That is the myth that is being put about and it needs to be scotched.

I referred to the legislation disparagingly as the smoke-and-mirrors Bill, and I wonder whether the Deputy Prime Minister has read his White Paper, let alone his Bill. When he said that people in the English regions would have opportunities similar to those available to the people of Scotland and Wales, he was extremely wide of the mark, because no such thing is mentioned. The right hon. Gentleman also said that we have made a judgment of what powers will be available. He may have made a judgment, but he has not told us about it. It is not in the White Paper or the Bill. We want to know what it is. I agree wholeheartedly with those hon. Members who said that it is absurd to go into a referendum without knowing for what one is voting. I hope that that will be addressed.

I recognise the strength of the argument made by the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin). I recall a Friday debate in the House a decade ago when I stood at the Dispatch Box as the Minister and she was on the Opposition Benches. We were on the same sides of the argument then. Although more progress has been made down her route, we shall have to wait and see what happens.

As a local government Minister and someone who presided over both the council of the Isles of Scilly and Warkworth parish council, I am in no doubt of the important differences in our region. The problem is how those are to be recognised. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) is right to champion the cause of a Cornish assembly. I wholeheartedly agree with him. Cornwall is very different. It needs special treatment and special opportunities to meet the challenges.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman is in the same Government zone—I cannot call it a region—as I occupy. Indeed, my constituency includes the Isles of Scilly. As the hon. Gentleman has experience of setting up Government zones, does he agree that the purpose of a region is to have an area with internal integrity, shared interests and shared identity? The Government zones do not.

Mr. Key: Yes, that is the point. It is about the delivery of Government services from the centre to local people, and about the voice of individual local people being heard and acted on. Government by focus groups is the most phoney thing we have seen in this country for many years.

What do we do about it? Last Saturday I went to a meeting of the south-west constitutional convention, which hon. Members know is a pressure group designed to encourage everyone to vote in favour of regional assemblies. It was a remarkable experience. I think that I was the first Conservative MP to have set foot in that viper's nest. It was disrupted by a lot of unpleasant people who decided that the meeting was part of a conspiracy. They did not want to debate the issue properly and wandered around with placards saying that we were quislings and traitors and other charming epithets. Nevertheless, the meeting was brilliantly chaired by the Bishop of Exeter, who I am glad to say took a great deal of flak and abuse—as did his staff, which was unjustified. The bishops must be part of the process. They are part of the constitution. They vote and speak in the other place and should be part of the debate. I have no difficulty with that.

As someone who was born in war-ravaged Plymouth; who moved to Salisbury in 1947 at the age of two; who went to Truro in 1960; and who relocated back to Wiltshire, I have a deep love and understanding of regions, especially my region. One problem we face is whether we have a democratic deficit or voter fatigue. I think we have voter fatigue, and creating another tier will not help. Hon. Members on both sides of the House referred to the representation that would result from that, with elected assembly men and women looking after, in theory, about 200,000 electors each. What would they be for? This place engages us in policy making, in the legislative process, in voting on a range of issues, including tax and spending, and in holding the Government to account.

Lawrie Quinn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Key: Of course. The hon. Gentleman has intervened on everyone else, so why not me?

Lawrie Quinn: The hon. Gentleman has made an extensive study of the proceedings of the House and has experience as a Minister. Does the Regional Affairs Committee do a good job? Is it effective and does it meet the demands of scrutiny, which is the high test that he places on it?

Mr. Key: I have no view on that because I had forgotten that the Committee existed.

Let us consider the financial problem. The Government tell us that an elected assembly will cost about £25 million a year to run and the direct budget responsibility of a regional assembly will be about £300 million. The rest of the annual public spend for the south-west is about £20 billion. That would remain with central Government. The pocket assembly that we would create would increase the potential for party strife, institutional inertia, delay in decision making, departmental and local government turf wars and paralysis of good government. It would add in spades to the very problem that we are trying to solve. The notes of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister say that there will be no new bureaucracy, stating that, "By providing stronger scrutiny and improving co-ordination between existing bodies, elected regional assemblies should reduce bureaucracy." Believe that and you'll believe anything.

What we actually have here are scrutiny, influence, patronage, consultation and co-ordination, but no new regional policy making, no new power and no new

[Mr. Key]

money from London, although there may be a rise in the council tax—just the functions that already belong to the indirectly elected south-west regional assembly, minus its social and economic partners, plus endless duplication and second-guessing of existing delivery systems in, for instance, health and culture. The Bill does not offer us regional government. I accept that it is merely an enabling Bill, as the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) explained. Nevertheless, it is hugely important that we recognise that we are not being offered regional government on the same terms as Scotland or Wales.

It is no good thinking that the experiment will work if we do not have cohesive regions in which people believe. The south-west is not a region. Cornwall is, and it should have its own assembly. Wiltshire, my county, is part of Wessex. Bristol is a city state, ranking with its neighbour Birmingham. But all the other counties are just that.

The south-west was created during the second world war as a convenient administrative unit. It is a creature designed by committee. It has no heart and no soul, and people down the ages would not have risked their lives for it. It would not have done Henry V much good at Agincourt if he had cried, "God for Harry, the south-west region and St. George"—or even St. Endellion.

We have to face the English question, which has been touched on. The creation of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly stripped Scots and Welsh Members of Parliament of their responsibility for devolved issues. Yet they still come to Westminster and vote on issues that affect my constituents on which they have no responsibility to their electors. That is widely seen as unfair, unjustified and undemocratic. It is accelerating the disintegration of the United Kingdom and fragments good government. We do not need a regional assembly. Instead, we need a Parliament at Westminster which works for England and the English regions. I do not believe for one moment that we need a separate English Parliament.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: As I argued earlier, that would be an elephant in the cuckoo's nest. It would also increase the dominance and overweening power of London in what will be a smaller population when Scotland and Wales do not count as part of it.

Mr. Key: That would not be the case if the rest of my argument is applied. It is important for us to look through the correct end of the telescope, which we are not doing at the moment. Our constituents are not impressed by the Government rearranging the chairs on the deck of the Titanic. We need to strengthen local democracy and restore faith in the work of our parish councils, district councils and county councils. We need to ensure that they are properly funded, which in the south-west they are most certainly not compared to everywhere else. The Barnett formula is also part of the problem.

We should strengthen our democracy and we should recognise the shift that has taken place in the burden of taxation from central to local. If we measured council tax against the retail prices index, fuel prices or electricity prices, we would be amazed at the shift that has taken place over 15 years. A local income tax is certainly not the answer.

We need to give the Government renewed confidence to deliver what their citizens want. As we know, local authorities are judged against more than 200 annual targets and performance indicators. They have to agree up to 46 plans from Whitehall and they are monitored by four different inspection regimes. That is death by red tape and it is mad. The answer is certainly not another tier of bureaucracy.

We have to consider other ways of strengthening local democracy. I take great interest in the proposition that we should consider electing more public officials, not only mayors. Perhaps we need to consider education—I do not know; I am speaking for myself.

The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) spoke of the importance of having a regional Select Committee. I suggest instead having elected senators in an upper House to replace the existing House of Lords, and I would give them regional responsibilities. That would provide a regional aspect independent of this House which would be worth having.

I finish by simply pointing out that democratic institutions must have legitimacy. Our counties have legitimacy because they are organic communities; they are part of the geography and the geology, the dialect and the architecture, and the customs, practices and traditions of our country. Local government, in district councils such as Salisbury, is built on the rock of our nationhood. My fear is that since regions are lines drawn on a map, regional governments as proposed would be castles in the sand which would be washed away as the first tide of history rose up the ancient shores of the west of England.

8.11 pm

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak after such a clear reference to the beauty of the coastline and the seaside.

As the Member for Scarborough and Whitby, I am particularly pleased to follow the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). Many people in my part of the world remember his role as a former Minister. He was the man from Whitehall who came to Malton and scotched, probably for a generation or more, the possibility of improving the key transport link in the area, the A64 from the A1 to the Yorkshire coast, thereby denying us something that central Government had promised us. I mention that to demonstrate why we need to take a regional and more strategic approach in key areas such as transportation. I am sure that my local newspapers will remember that the key—if I may use that word—to our failure was the man from Whitehall.

I have said that I agree with the Bill in principle. It is an enabling Bill for an important process; it does not achieve the end but it begins to will the end. Like many Labour Members, my first acquaintance with this policy goes back to my involvement in the regional Labour party in Yorkshire. I recall that in the late 1980s, when there was a centralising Government down in London, we realised that we were disconnected from the decisions that would affect our locality.

I shall concentrate my remarks on what I am pleased to refer to as Yorkshire and the Humber because it has become a clearly identified region. If we compare it with a European nation state, such as Denmark, we find that there are clear parallels in the size of the population and in the economy, except that Yorkshire, as usual, comes out on top. Yet we do not have a mechanism for determining our future prosperity.

Mrs. Ellman: Does my hon. Friend agree that for his region, as for the other English regions, the Bill and the legislation that hopefully will follow concerns economic regeneration and the introduction of accountability to the regional organisations, the quangos, which already exist in every region?

Lawrie Quinn: I strongly agree. My hon. Friend gives the lie to some of the contributions by Conservative Members. They talk about extra money and extra costs, but we already have this stream of government. Earlier we almost had an acceptance by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) that we already have a form of regional government. However, it is not accountable and it cannot be influenced by the feelings and contributions of local people, particularly in my area, which is on the very periphery of the region.

Mr. Key: The argument about regional chambers, or in our case the south-west regional assembly, not being representative is wrong. Every tier of local authority, including unitary authorities, is represented on that body by councillors, who make up some three quarters of the membership, in addition to the social and economic partners. It is an indirectly representative body, and those councillors, as elected representatives, are working their socks off for us.

Lawrie Quinn: I do not deny that those individuals are making a contribution to the life of the region, but the key point for Labour Members is that they are not accountable. They do not face the key test of the ballot box. All of us in the Chamber have been elected on an equal basis in a pure and simple form of democracy. That is the acid test. I know that when I go before the people of Scarborough and Whitby, representing my party and my propositions, I stand the chance of being sacked if they do not agree with me. That is democracy, and people want that umbilical cord link between representatives and significant public expenditure. At the moment, there is no ballot box to test whether they are representing the view of communities, and without that acid test our system is not accountable.

I turn now to concerns about the Bill, and I hope that there will be an opportunity to deal with them in Committee. I agreed with many of the contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House, most notably my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). They pointed out that we need draft legislation to indicate what will follow the test of the referendum. I hope that Ministers will give further consideration to that during, if not before, the Bill goes into Committee.

Many hon. Members have referred to unitary local government, and I decided to test the proposition that they put forward not only in relation to my parish councils and my borough council, but among the many North Yorkshire county councillors who represent Scarborough and Whitby. The clear message is that it is unnecessary to separate the two arguments because that would lead to confusion. The wreckage left in North Yorkshire by the Banham commission proposals was forced on the people without any test, any referendum or any consultation. I remember spending many nights in a room in the Shambles in York trying to argue the case for the Labour party in North Yorkshire to the commission. On one occasion, Sir John and the rest of us were locked in the room, and we had to escape by ladder. However, there was no escape from the horrendous piece of legislation forced on the people of North Yorkshire. To this day, the people of Whitby remember the early 1970s, when rural district councils lost the right to decide what was appropriate for an area. I almost received a grudging acceptance of that point in the debate on the Gracious Speech from the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who has great experience of North Yorkshire affairs. The people of Whitby would like a big apology from the Conservatives for what they perpetrated for many years.

The people of Whitby would like a say in their destiny and what happens to them, particularly as the town is one of the most peripheral communities in our region. To many people in Whitby, Northallerton is the other side of the moon and London is a quantum distance away.

Mr. Lansley: I am rather confused. Is it not the Government's intention in clause 2 to impose unitary status where it does not currently exist in regions that vote that way? The people of Whitby will be so heavily outvoted by the unitary authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside that they will have no say in the matter.

Lawrie Quinn: The hon. Gentleman is welcome to visit Whitby any time. I am sure that the people who frequent Baxtergate would tell him that they were most offended by the fact that the Conservative Government did exactly what he has just suggested. At least this time, the people of Whitby, Scarborough and Yorkshire will have an opportunity to have a say in resolving that important question and will have the right to determine their future. The Bill makes that proposition and is a piece of enabling legislation.

There is a feeling that the number of regions allowed to hold a referendum would be restricted by the resources of the boundary committee. I hope that that would not be an unnecessary stumbling block, preventing regions such as Yorkshire and the Humber from having an early opportunity to test the question.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be sensible for the north-west, Yorkshire and the north-east to go together as the proud north in one referendum?

Lawrie Quinn: That proposition is very attractive. In Yorkshire and the Humber, 89 per cent. of people already live in unitary authority areas. The 11 per cent. in the rump of North Yorkshire, forced on us by previous Conservative Administrations, would have an opportunity to sort out that mess.

[Lawrie Quinn]

Finally, I hope that in Committee we can spend some time considering the wording of the ballot paper, especially the preamble. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) covered that in his speech. The preamble sounds long, complex and perhaps even rambling – some Members may think that it is similar to my speech – but we should pay close attention to it. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby talked about the great cultural reputation of Yorkshire and the Humber, but in his list of theatres he failed to mention the Stephen Joseph theatre, the pre-eminent theatre in our region, and Sir Alan Ayckbourn.

I hope that the Bill receives a fair wind on Second Reading, and I wish to express my willingness to serve in Committee.

8.25 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): May I tell the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) that his speech was by no means rambling? We listened to it with interest but, sadly, he is plain wrong about the people of Whitby having a say. They will not – they will be so heavily outnumbered by people in unitary authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside that their vote will be totally irrelevant. That also applies to my constituency, where the same situation arises.

I listened with great interest to the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin). I am sorry that she has just left the Chamber, as I wanted to pay her a compliment. No doubt if she reads *Hansard* she will pick it up. I can let Members into a secret which, as I am mentioning it in the Chamber, will doubtless remain a secret. If there is to be an independent regional assembly in north-east England, the right hon. Lady is tipped to be First Minister. I hope that there will be no regional assembly in the north-east, but if there is – and if there is not a Conservative First Minister, and if there is not a monkey which we would like to elect in the north-east – I hope that the right hon. Lady will be the Labour First Minister. Her interest in regional government goes back many years and although I completely disagree with her, we should all compliment her on her long-term pursuit of regional government for the north-east.

We would all agree with the Bill much more if the Government proposed real devolution, but that is not on offer. If it suggested giving more power back to local authorities, I would be more inclined to support it. If it proposed to give much more power back to individual schools and hospitals, I would certainly support it. If it proposed getting rid of the dreaded Barnett formula, which discriminates against the north-east of England and, now I hear, the south-west, I would support it, but that is simply not on offer. Speaker after speaker on both sides of the House has said that the proposals are for a pygmy assembly with no real power. Those such as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and my neighbour, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), and others who say, "Vote for what is on offer tonight, because it is only a small beginning, and it will be a beginning", should have listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice). He made clear the Government's true agenda.

If one is a socialist – I take it that there are one or two socialists left on the Government Benches – one believes fundamentally that whether one gets good treatment in hospital or adequate benefits should not depend on where one lives. The welfare state should be based on need, not area. I think I am right in saying that that is what Labour Members believe. The very idea of regional assemblies being given full powers over health and education, as the Liberal Democrats want, will mean disparities between one region and another. I am sure that that is what the Prime Minister believes. That is why nothing more will happen. If we have some regional assemblies in this country, that is as far as it will go. The Bill will not be the start of a process that will lead to anything like proper devolution.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman should not slur the new Labour party with the taint of socialism. That is a shocking attack, particularly when he misinterprets what socialism is about. Socialism is about democracy, which requires the provision of good universal standards, and the freedom for regions and the authorities accountable to the people to vary and improve the standards that they choose for their purposes.

Mr. Atkinson: The term "universal standards" is the clue. That is what the hon. Gentleman wants. On this side, we believe in competition. I would favour competing regions with independent hospitals and independent schools, all trying to provide the best service for their people. That is what I believe should happen. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. If he believes in the universality of services and benefits and the welfare state, a fully devolved regional system in this country would work contrary to that.

I believe that the Bill will go no further. Hon. Members should have listened carefully to the hon. Member for Pendle, and they should read carefully what he said, because he was telling the truth about what will happen. I believe, too, that the reason there is to be a question about local government reform in the referendum is that it was inserted by the Prime Minister. We know, and it has been confirmed again tonight, that the Prime Minister is not in favour of regional assemblies. The Deputy Prime Minister might be, but we suspect that the question about local government reform was intended to sabotage the proposal.

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions points to the Prime Minister's preface to the White Paper, but the Minister was not in the Chamber when that was mentioned to the hon. Member for Pendle, and he should hear the response from the hon. Member for Pendle – "If you think the Prime Minister wrote that, you must be joking – he probably never even read it." I agree again with the hon. Member for Pendle. It is essential that hon. Members do not think that by voting for what is on offer tonight, they are opening the door to something more. It will not happen.

I shall deal with one point that affects my part of the United Kingdom, the north-east of England, particularly the county of Northumberland, which the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed mentioned. Perversely, if there is to be a Boundary Committee review in that area, it is not the county that will be abolished, but the district councils.

In 1994 the Boundary Commission on Northumberland, after much argument, came down in favour of the two-tier status quo. One of the proposals at the time was that there should be three unitary authorities in the county of Northumberland. The Boundary Commission considered that, and concluded that because the total population of Northumberland is just over 300,000—apart from the Scilly Isles, it has the smallest population, although it is huge in area—and about 200,000 of those live in the urban south-east of the county, the remainder of the county would have too small a population and too small a rate base to support unitary authorities.

What will happen if the boundary committee is forced to introduce a unitary authority there? The only conclusion is that there will be county government in that area. At present there are six district councils that cover vast areas—my own district council is the biggest in England, with over 800 square miles. Decision making will be taken away from that local level. Some of it will be moved to county level, and in the case of Northumberland, that will mean that county hall is many miles away from many of my constituents. Some decision making will be moved up even further, to the regional level.

What the people of Northumberland will gain from that is decisions being made far, far away from where they count. How is local democracy served by that? I suspect that when the matter is put to the people of Northumberland and they realise that they will lose their district councils, they will have a very different attitude. That is why support for regionalism in the north-east of England is beginning to decline.

The Deputy Prime Minister made the point that the reason why the Government are choosing the regions for referendums as they are now is that that was a legacy left by the last Conservative Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) mentioned that. The regions were designed for administrative convenience. The north-east region has nothing to do with an area for which people feel an affection. Regions can exist only if people have a cultural affinity with them, or an emotional or historical attachment to them, as in counties. People go on about Germany, Italy and other devolved countries, but they are largely made up of traditional former states. There is a cultural and historic connection.

The north-east of England does not have that. It is not a unified area. The people up in Berwick on the Scottish border have nothing in common with the people down on Teesside. The people on Teesside do not want to be ruled by a Geordie parliament based in Newcastle. The people south of the Tees want to be in north Yorkshire. Perversely, the people of north Cumberland, who were traditionally part of the northern region, want to be part of the north. If there were a northern region, they would like to be included in it and not placed alongside Manchester.

I hope that more Labour Members who have spoken against the Bill will join the Opposition in the Lobby. The Bill will not help local democracy, but damage it, so it is right that the House should reject it.

8.35 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): It is a pleasure to take part in what has been a very good debate, especially as a Northumbrian following a Northumberland MP and a fellow Northumbrian. I must ask the permission of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), but I would like to be known as an adopted Lancastrian as well. As a strong supporter of the mighty Sunderland in the premier league and the almost as mighty Lancaster City in the UniBond premier league, I am a strong supporter of the idea of north-east and north-west going hand in hand in the first phase of a referendum on regional government.

I strongly support the Bill because I think that regional government is in the interests of the people whom we represent. We have heard some extraordinary arguments against it, one of the most peculiar of which was the suggestion that people do not want regional government or understand what it is about. People who come to my surgeries and contact me speak about issues of democracy, powerlessness and strategic planning and the feeling that they have no effective voice. They also speak about transport and economic development, and complain that the county council, which I think is an archaic form of local government, is remote from their lives. The county council cannot properly engage with crucial functions at a district level or with the health service because of its size and the weight of bureaucracy that is present in all such councils, and it does not properly engage with the voluntary, private or community sectors, which are vital to the development and reconstruction of our democracy.

The issue is about democracy and the people whom we represent having genuine involvement in the powers that are currently devolved at a regional level, but are operated by people who are unelected, even though they are doing a good job in many cases. In the city of Lancaster, we are seeing the tremendous work of the North West Development Agency coming to some fruition. Only last week, the Infolab development at Lancaster university was approved. That will provide a sustainable base for the science-based business of the future in the northern half of the north-west region. Major efforts have been made at regeneration, including the development of brownfield and riverside sites and the reconstruction and re-use of old buildings for new forms of business, housing and development that are fit for the 21st century.

I think that regional government is government for the 21st century. It will not merely be government in which county councils are writ large or the sort of municipal local government that developed during the 19th and 20th centuries. I believe absolutely the words of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, who said that it would be a lean and fit form of government. It will focus on specific, vital functions. It is essential that it be allowed to do that before we consider the further development of the regional assembly. We are at the beginning of a profoundly important, democratic, developmental and inclusive process.

People who weave a fantasy about regional government being a vast, overweening bureaucracy in large regions, and those who complain that there will not be many more elected members or powers overlook some crucial factors. Regional government must engage positively and creatively with the business community and work flexibly with the voluntary and the private sectors. It must engage positively with existing forms of

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democracy such as parish councils, which are developing powers over planning and transport, and unitary authorities.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman mentions the importance of engaging positively with the business community. Why did the north-west CBI become so disenchanted with the regional assembly that it withdrew from it?

Mr. Dawson: I cannot speculate about that. We do not currently have an elected regional assembly. I have held several discussions with the business community and I am sometimes surprised at the scepticism that it displays. I am also surprised by the Opposition's scepticism. It has already been said that we can confidently expect the Conservative party to fall into line with the democratic structures of regional government in time. We are considering democracy and it is vital to have a democratic voice in powerful and important functions such as planning, transport and economic development.

Mr. Lansley: I am astonished by the hon. Gentleman's argument. How is it more democratic for planning, transport and the structure plan or the local transport plan of a county council to be taken out of the hands of those who were elected by several thousand people and given to members of a regional assembly who will be elected by 250,000 people? That is distant and undemocratic, not democratic and accessible.

Mr. Dawson: I am delighted to answer that. The regional assembly is democratic because the functions of remote county councils—I mean no disrespect to those who work for them—will be devolved to unitary authorities that operate on a smaller geographical scale and use the flexibility that the Government introduced in health and social care to engage properly with vital functions outside such bodies. It will also bring the regional powers on planning guidance and transport strategy, and the functions of regional development agencies, within a democratic remit. The proposals will do away with county structure plans and transfer some of those powers. However, I firmly believe that such powers are not currently effective at county council level. The crucial, meaningful level at which to intervene is regional and very local.

Mr. Dhanda: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) needs to be more familiar with the planning process? All complex planning applications are currently decided by central Government and take a long time to determine. It would be far better to determine them locally or regionally.

Mr. Lansley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dawson: No. This is my speech. I shall continue to make it, if I may.

Regional government is profoundly important, and by using the opportunity that the Bill gives us, we can strengthen and refresh democracy. We have encountered a number of red herrings tonight, the most notable of which was that the form of government to be used in regional assemblies would allow obnoxious bodies such as the British National party to hold sway. We defeat fascism on the streets and fight it through campaigning. We should not deny ourselves the opportunity for new democratic institutions and new forms of government because of the threat of fascism. We must take those racists and fascists on.

We have a tremendous opportunity here to affect 6.9 million people in the north-west, and regional government can be a unifying factor for those people. It will ensure that power is used throughout these very large regions, and give an effective voice to both urban and rural communities. It will also ensure that we have a pluralistic democracy in which we are not competing with other regions or with fine towns and cities within the region. Rather, we shall be co-operating and working together effectively for the whole region, and redressing the historic imbalance in terms of powers that have been taken to the centre, and of the economic success that has come to regions such as the south-east and been lost to the north-west.

I shall be here tonight firmly supporting the Bill, and I very much want to see it go through. As a Northumbrian who is now an adopted Lancastrian, I would like to see the home of the regional assembly of the north-east in the city of Durham, where my father and daughter were both educated. There is a real parallel between Durham and the city that is at the historic heart and geographical centre of the north-west. That is, of course, the city of Lancaster.

8.48 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I am pleased to be able to take part in this debate. I am, however, astonished that we are talking about this matter at all, on a day on which the fire brigade is on strike—and we may be facing that industrial action for several months to come—and on which school teachers across London have been on strike and schools have been closed. Yet here we are, talking about something that is not of the faintest interest to any of our constituents.

I have never heard from a single constituent who supports regional government for the north-west. It simply is not an issue. It is not something that my constituents want, nor is there any demand for it across the rest of the region. My constituents are interested in the state of the health service and the quality of schools. They are desperately interested in whether the Government are about to slap top-up fees on young people going through higher education. They are also concerned about the transport infrastructure, which is grinding to a halt. They are not keen to see the establishment of a new tier of government, a new set of politicians or a new regional bureaucracy. There is simply no demand for that.

Only 18 months or so ago, we went through a general election in which there was a dramatic collapse of interest among the British public. Politicians from both sides of the House returned saying that the fact that so few people wanted to vote had provided them with a salutary lesson and that we had to learn to talk about

what matters to the British people, yet here we are on another frolic—a constitutional fancy that is of no interest to anybody.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): The hon. Gentleman says that his constituents are not at all interested in regional government and he may be right. We may have a referendum in the north-east, but the proposal may be rejected—who knows? However, we are not afraid of the test of a referendum in the north-east. What is he afraid of?

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, as he has exposed one of the Bill's most basic flaws: even if it receives a Second Reading—Labour Members who properly opposed the whole principle this evening none the less suggested that they will be loyal Back Benchers and troop through the Lobby—and completes its parliamentary progress, we shall not know whether there will be a referendum in the north-west of England, as the Deputy Prime Minister has not been good enough to explain to us how he will judge the demand for it. We have a bizarre proposal before us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) is not in the Chamber, and I would be careful in making this remark if he were: there may be some interest in the proposal in the part of the country represented by the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland), but there certainly is not in mine.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) made a point about the synchrotron investment decision, which was made a couple of years ago. That was the biggest scientific investment in this country, involving £500 million, but this is the acid test for the north-west: would that £500 million have been more likely to come to Cheshire, rather than go to Oxfordshire, which is where the Labour Government chose to send it, had there been north-west regional government? The answer, simply, is no. Such government would have made no difference. The decision was for central Government and it was taken on central grounds involving strategic planning, economic interests and various ideas about agglomeration of scientific facilities. It had nothing to do with the voice from the region.

Mr. Dawson: Does the hon. Gentleman understand why people feel that the Conservative party has so little to offer? He is promoting a strategy of hopelessness.

Mr. Brady: Absolutely not. The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong, because I am the north-west Member who brought the synchrotron issue before the House for debate. That was done not by one of his colleagues, but by a Conservative Member. I believe passionately that Members of Parliament are sent to Westminster to represent their constituents and the interests of their regions. That is what we should be doing, not considering silly tinkering with the constitution and setting up new tiers of government in which there is no interest.

The hon. Gentleman said in his speech that the Opposition are less than enthusiastic about the Bill, but I wonder whether he shares the assessment of his colleague, the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer). He is referred to in yesterday's *Manchester Evening News*, which says that

"only a minority of Labour MPs support an elected north west assembly and that there is little enthusiasm among the region's local councils. Most were choosing 'to keep their powder dry.'"

There, it quotes the hon. Gentleman directly and, following my conversations with Labour colleagues from the region, I think he is probably right.

As far as I can see, regional government is a minority interest among Labour north-west Members and not a single Conservative north-west Member supports the idea. If the Deputy Prime Minister is serious about consulting the elected representatives of the people of the north-west about whether there is sufficient demand for regional government there, the idea will not get off the ground. I very much hope that that is the case. Why? As I said when I intervened on the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre, there is no real support for it. There is no support from the business community.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): That is not true.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman apparently now has a great knowledge of these matters in the north-west. He says that that is not true, but I would rather listen to the north-west director of the CBI, Mr. Chris Clifford, who is also quoted in the *Manchester Evening News*. He says:

"Our members are very sceptical about the whole process. It would create extra costs, create jobs only for bureaucrats and do nothing in terms of the economic well being of the region. All major issues will be conditional on the agreement of the secretary of state.

It is not the right way forward. It will not add any value to existing arrangements and will increase the political baggage business has to contend with rather than sort it out."

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre would not speculate on why business is not interested in having regional government in the north-west. I do not think that anyone could encapsulate the reason better than Mr. Clifford. Business knows that it will involve more costs and more bureaucracy, and will add no value for those who are trying to run effective, efficient, profitable businesses in the north-west.

There is also the question of regional identity. We do not have a north-west regional identity. The hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley rightly made the point that before the ITV franchise was split no one used to talk about the north-west. Perhaps we should amend the Bill and dub the north-west "Granadaland", as that may be a more accurate reflection of the region. No regional identity unifies Manchester, Cheshire, Liverpool and the part of the north-west represented by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre.

Mr. Dawson: Tomorrow is Lancashire day, and people will declare their allegiance to the real county of Lancashire.

Mr. Brady: As a Lancastrian by birth, I welcome that enormously. It may be one of the few occasions on which I permit myself to wear a red rose in celebration of that fact. The hon. Gentleman makes the point that there is a real affinity with the county of Lancashire. There is no affinity with the north-west as a geographical region, which is entirely artificial.

If we went down the road that the hon. Gentleman and one or two others would like us to go down the costs would be huge. The cost of the referendum would be the

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smallest part. There would be the massive cost of reorganisation: the costs of a new bureaucracy, new buildings, new politicians—that is surely the last thing people want–secretaries, researchers, press officers and a whole bureaucracy to support the regional structure. Nothing positive would be added for the people whom we represent. There would be only a huge cost and a huge extra bureaucracy.

Mr. Swire: Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the possible constitutional and financial imbalance if one region voted for an elected regional assembly and others did not? Would that not create a nightmare that would far outweigh the unfairness of the Barnett formula?

Mr. Brady: Indeed, and it could do so in a number of ways. If we had the arrangement to which the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) referred, or a tax-raising regional assembly in one part of the country, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) suggested, that could work in my hon. Friend's favour. If we had an assembly in the north-west of England that raised higher levels of taxation, all our businesses would flock down to the south-west to get away from it. Perhaps he should not be too concerned, as it could work either way.

My hon. Friend is right, except that there is an assurance in the White Paper that significant resources would not be provided even if regional government were to proceed. That point was raised at the outset of the debate. In the first instance, there would be more costs with no benefit and no real change. If regional government were to develop, my hon. Friend's point would be valid.

I should like the Minister to deal with the issue of the use of public funds in this process, because I do not think there is any direct reference to it in the Bill. The Deputy Prime Minister said that he is not neutral on this matter and will campaign strongly for regional government to be adopted as we go through one or more referendums. We know that there are at present various regional conventions or assemblies that combine local authorities. I would like a clear assurance from the Minister that public resources could not be used to promote the idea that there should be a referendum or to campaign on one side or the other in a referendum. I hope that he will make it clear that that would not be allowed, and that strict action would be taken to prevent that.

Let me end by returning to the central point. I do not think the Bill has any real support in my region or from my constituents, and according to comments attributed to Labour Members representing Manchester in yesterday's local press they do not believe it is even supported by most of their colleagues with seats in the north-west.

I hope that when the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) has his tête-à-tête with the Prime Minister tomorrow—which he advertised in his speech—he will make it clear that the Bill has no support from Conservative Members representing the north-west, no support from the majority of Labour Members representing the north-west, or so we are told, and certainly no support from the people whom we represent.

9 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I think that there is one thing that we might have got right constitutionally five years ago. Surely, if we create Welsh, Northern Irish and Scottish Parliaments or Assemblies, the least we can do is create an English Parliament, and make the upper House a House of representatives of the four constituency Parliaments. We missed a trick there.

A case that I encountered illustrates all the problems and confusions raised by what we are debating. A steel mill went broke. It was partly in Cardiff and partly in Sheerness. The part located in Cardiff had the support of Members of the Welsh Assembly and the Secretary of State for Wales. We in the south-east of England have no Assembly, no Parliament, no Minister for the south-east and not even a Select Committee dealing with the south-east. My constituents, therefore, are not treated as fairly as they ought to be.

I was going to make the point made by the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire). Let us assume that the north-east or the north-west has a referendum first. I note that I am the only Member present who represents a constituency in the south-east. This issue is of no interest in the south-east, because no one in Milton Keynes connects with anyone in Margate or Portsmouth. The south-east is a complete fallacy of an area, and we will never vote for this proposal.

If a regional assembly is set up, who will my constituents go to? They cannot go to the north-east. There is no south-east parliament or assembly. There will be no Minister or Select Committee for the south-east. They will come here, and that is absolutely wrong. It is unfair and unreasonable. The whole constitutional issue is brought into question. As I have said, we missed a trick by not having four constituency bodies with an overarching House of representatives connecting them.

Fortunately, my favourite saint is St. Jude, patron saint of lost causes. I feel passionately that we have got this completely wrong. Why has not government for the south-east worked? Why has the South East England Development Agency not worked? It is because it is not accountable here. It is not accountable to a Select Committee for the south-east, or even to a Minister for the south-east—and if such institutions are not accountable, they will create more and more quangos and spend more and more of our money, quite obscene amounts. It is a pity that the Bill is not stronger.

Even if I have to vote with the Government this evening, there is an issue that I cannot resolve. My constituency has no unitary authorities. There is one unitary authority in Medway, which is too small. It does not work. It was approved on the basis of a single vote at a meeting. If we want a unitary system, my constituency will have to decide whether to go up the river to Dartford, Medway and Sittingbourne. But how will that be done? We cannot possibly have a vote, because we have no unitary authority. There are no unitary authorities in Kent apart from Medway, although Kent is the largest county council in England.

I am thinking of all the things that we believe in, such as local democracy. I want local democracy. I am sick of the system of centralisation. Nothing will change for us,

though, because we will not vote for a regional assembly. My constituents will be worse off in every way.

I repeat that this is a constitutional problem with which we have not really wrestled. I leave it with the House.

9.4 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I follow the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) in making a similar point about the regions. During the referendum in Scotland, there was no debate about what was or was not Scotland. It was the same with Wales. In Northern Ireland, the whole debate is about what is Northern Ireland, where the boundary is and where people's allegiances lie.

We have regions in our country, some of which have some affinity but many of which, particularly those in the south-west and south-east, have very little in common. That is a great difficulty. People have a sense of community and of allegiance. I do not believe that most of my constituents have any feeling for the south-west.

Under the Bill, the Secretary of State must consider the level of interest in a region before he sets the process in motion, yet there has been no way of setting out what that means, how it is weighted or what the tests for a level of interest are. Is it Members of Parliament or local authorities making representations, petitions, a letter-writing campaign, or a self-selecting group that has a particular role in lobbying a Minister? It would help the debate if the Minister, who I know is a details man—I have served with him on several Committees that considered Bills—set out a little more about how the level of interest in a region will be defined.

The Secretary of State must consider under clause 1(6) whether there is interest to start the process but subsection (8) says:

"If subsection (6) does not apply . . . the Secretary of State must consider—

(a) views expressed and information and evidence provided to him;

(b) such published material".

As I read that, it means that the Secretary of State must publish why he is not going to proceed with a referendum but not why he is going to proceed with one. Nothing in the Bill says that he must publish information that has been sent to the Ministry if he proceeds.

I notice that the Bill contains provision for the Secretary of State to change his mind. I suspect that the Secretary of State will get lobbied, he will say that there is interest in a region, he will announce it, and all hell will break loose as people suddenly start to say that they are not interested and make further representations to him, so it is important for the Minister to make clear what the tests are. Will it be a formalised procedure with a beginning and an end where everyone knows consultation has taken place, or will it be informal—just letters, petitions or whatever coming in on an ad hoc basis? We need to know. That will be critical, as will how the Government weigh up the competing claims of regions in terms of referendums. How will the interest in the south-west, say, be weighed against the interest in the north-east? A lot of that is not in the Bill. Since it is not, it will largely be up to the Secretary of State to state the position, which is a pity.

It is important that we know what the tests are and what the Secretary of State defines as a level of interest. Whether we have referendums or not, it is important that the information that goes to the Secretary of State is published.

The regions are not natural areas. I hope that, where referendums are held, votes will be counted on a local authority basis, not on a total regional basis, so that one can see, whatever the overall result in the region, what the level of support is in the constituent parts. Some concern has been expressed on behalf of people in Northumberland, people on the fringes of conurbations that have single unitary authorities at the moment and those on the fringes that have a two-tier system. It will be interesting to see the different levels of support for changes as they are proposed.

Under clause 5, if there is a referendum and it is lost, another referendum cannot be held for five years and a day. If one were being fair, there would be a provision saying that, if a referendum were won, those who lost the referendum would have the opportunity to have a re-run after five years. It is rather like those European referendums where, if the referendum is lost, they keep having a vote until they get the right answer.

I have some concerns about the Electoral Commission under clause 8. It seems to be required to give information, but one person's information is another's propaganda. The concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) about what public moneys are going into the process and what the overall cost will be is entirely appropriate. Several of my hon. Friends have spoken about the cost of reorganisation into new tiers of local government and of the assemblies themselves. Experience in Scotland and Wales has shown that the costs of devolved government often end up much greater than originally anticipated.

My constituents bring local issues to me. We have problems in Poole with social services, which is overspent by £1 million. A centre used by disabled and disadvantaged groups is about to be closed. My constituents would be far better pleased if the resources were given to the local authority to undertake its important tasks rather than being used to create a new class of politician or bureaucrat at some remote regional centre with which they feel no affinity.

The electoral system is not the brightest, given that having 25 to 35 members for regions of such a size will mean having vast constituencies. I remember the debate here when we abolished first-past-the-post European constituencies because, apparently, they were too large for one person to do anything with, and it was much nicer to have a list. When we moved to the list system, the argument was made almost immediately that the Euro constituencies were too large. Then we had London regional government with large twin-borough constituencies. Now we seem to be setting up very large constituencies in the regions, with populations of 200,000 or 250,000, and a list.

My main concern is about the level of interest. In the Bill and the notes on clauses, the Government have not provided answers about what will be considered

[Mr. Robert Syms]

sufficient to trigger this whole process. Perhaps the Minister will fill in some detail about the procedure, especially because, given that the Secretary of State has to gather the information and start the process rolling, and the review of local government may take a year, circumstances may change in the meantime. If a process is started and it is clear that it does not have public support, it is wrong that the Government should not have an opportunity to think again.

I cannot support the Bill. We have spoken about the regions not being natural. A few years ago, I went as a guest of the Federal Republic of Germany to study its federal system. Of course, the Länder are not ancient. They are amalgamations, and they were amalgamated by military occupation—they could not have been amalgamated without it. I suspect that the Government, who sometimes display some of the characteristics of a government of military occupation, will not wish to open up the question of the boundaries of regions, because frankly, we would never get agreement. I see the Minister nodding at that.

The proposals are a mistake. I was at school in the city and county of Bristol when it became Avon, and people never reconciled themselves to being in that new county. We have heard a lot about Conservative Governments getting rid of Humberside and Avon without much debate, but the real reason was that people had no real affection for those counties. They had an affection for Somerset, Gloucestershire and the city and county of Bristol. Governments who tamper with ancient loyalties and affections do so at their peril. I rather suspect that, if the Government get this wrong, major campaigns to reverse the changes will bedevil politics for a long time to come.

We are a very conservative nation and we still argue about what was wrong or right about local government reorganisations that took place 20 or 30 years ago. It is easy to propose constitutional change and to institute referendums, but if we get it wrong, it can cause endless misery and campaigns.

9.14 pm

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): I very much welcome the Bill, although it is not without its difficulties.

Regional assemblies can do much to reduce the democratic deficit. They will also speed up the planning process, on which I shall elaborate. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) will be interested in my comments on that.

The greatest single benefit of the Bill will be for the many of us who are fed up with the two-tier structure of local government. It is time to move on from that and the ultimate benefit of the Bill will be unitary status for local authorities, although there is a downside. Although a recent Mori poll showed that 61 per cent. of people in the south-west of England favour a regional assembly, I must have spent much of my time talking to the 39 people in every hundred who are not in favour of it.

The hon. Members for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for Salisbury (Mr. Key) both represent south-western constituencies and they hit the nail on the head. Some parts of the country have a much stronger regional identity than others—much to my annoyance, because I support a regional assembly for the south-west.

When people in my constituency turn to the BBC regional news, they will see "BBC Midlands". If they switch over to ITV, some of them will be watching HTV West while others will be watching Central. That is one of the regional identity problems for areas such as Gloucester that are on the cusp—on the edge of several regions.

My constituency is an hour away from Birmingham and equidistant from the two national capitals, Cardiff and London, yet it is only half an hour away from Bristol, which is the heart of the south-west. Oxfordshire is the next county along, but it falls into the south-east region, so we are very much on the cusp.

That may be one of the many reasons that the Conservatives did so badly at the general election in Gloucester. Their campaign slogan was "Gloucester born and bred", but most people in Gloucester nowadays were not born and bred there. They come from a wide range of areas, including the big cities that I have mentioned. The Conservatives are so local that they have moved from Gloucester to Cheltenham, so perhaps they will not be using that slogan at the next election.

The restructuring of local government that will accompany the Bill will be a major benefit. It is high time that we undertook that restructuring. That is not an attack either on county or district councils, but it is difficult to explain to our constituents that they have to approach one local authority about housing and another about education. Similarly, why should roads be dealt with by one authority, yet road-calming measures, pavements, or the trees and shrubs that border the pavements are all dealt with by separate bodies?

I ask the Minister for Local Government and the Regions to consider the referendum questions. In many areas, such as the south-west, where unfortunately we may not get a yes vote in a referendum, people should still have the opportunity to decide whether local authorities should have a unitary structure. In Gloucestershire, there is a feeling that we could have two unitary authorities, one based in the east and one in the west of the county. Such proposals should not be ruled out during the process.

A regional assembly would bring many advantages to a constituency such as mine. For example, I hope that it would speed up the planning process. St. Oswald's park, a former cattle market in my constituency, is the subject of a mixed site proposal worth a couple of hundred million pounds and will include retail, leisure and housing. The proposal has the support of the city council, the county council, the MP and local residents. The local newspaper has run a vocal campaign in support of the development. There was little or no objection to the scheme, yet it was called in by central Government. We would still expect to go through the inquiry process—we have done so with St. Oswald's park—but the application has had move on to the Government, the wheels of Government have to turn and it then comes back to the local authority before we can get on with the development. If the planning process

were carried out at a more local, regional level, perhaps we could speed it up and help developments such as those in my constituency.

Matthew Green *rose—*

Mr. Lansley: I fear that the hon. Gentleman slightly blundered into the subject of whether I had any experience of the planning system as he will not know that, in the past two weeks, I have spent three days at the public examination of the Cambridge structure plan, discussing the green belt and new settlements. One thing that has emerged from those discussions is that the Government have told the regional planning conference that they will determine sub-regional strategies, but we have received a consultation document from the regional planning conference that says that the sub-regional strategy for Cambridge will be determined in the Cambridge structure plan. So, in fact, without the county structure plan, the region would have no idea at all what it was doing.

Mr. Dhanda: Different regions will find different solutions. That is what democracy is all about. We cannot expect to have exactly the same solution in every part of the country. My point is that big plans for developments often get kicked to central Government, and the Government have to deal with a great number of plans. If we could streamline that process, with more plans going through the regional process, we would be better off.

I was about to give way to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green), but he is now quite happy.

The key thing is not just regional accountability and addressing the democratic deficit, but doing away with the present two-tier system. Our constituents and many local councillors—I was a councillor for four years—do not understand why we have the current system. This is a fantastic opportunity for us to move to a unitary structure, and I hope that we can do so whether or not people vote for a regional assembly.

9.22 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): I nearly had a déjà vu experience, having bobbed up and down last week during the debate on the Queen's Speech and not having got in, so I am pleased to have this opportunity to make a short contribution to this important debate. I hope that the many contributions made today will encourage the Government to think again about the Bill, which needs some serious further scrutiny before being allowed to proceed.

I am pleased to follow the hon. Members for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) and for Poole (Mr. Syms), both of whose constituencies are apparently in my region, although they are about 200 or so miles away from my constituency. I probably share about as much affinity with Poole as I would with Preston or Prestatyn, but such is the nature of this process, which needs to be reconsidered.

I agree with the criticisms made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). Every aspect of his criticism of the Bill was absolutely right. I am sorry to say that I will not join him in the Lobby this evening to vote for the Bill because it is not just flawed, it is fatally flawed to such an extent that I cannot support it. I cannot vote against it because I am in favour of the principle of devolution, but this is not devolution; it is, frankly, nonsense. It is called the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, but I fear that it is, in fact, a recipe for chaos throughout the country.

The Deputy Prime Minister criticised the "Whitehall knows best" attitude, and it is certainly true that although the Bill is poorly conceived, inadequate and timid, at least the Government should be congratulated on attempting to make an important development. The Bill really represents two contradictory cultures within the Government: one is confident enough to believe that it can let go of power; the other does not share that confidence, still has a fundamental control-freak tendency, and is not prepared to let go of power in the way that is needed to make this piece of legislation work.

I am pleased that there are many regions—the north-east and others—in which there is some kind of internal integrity and the issue does not arise, but there is such an obsession with boundaries that the policy is at risk of being derailed. I would rename the Bill the emperor's new clothes Bill, as it is propped up on a web of flimsy tautology. Clause 26 says that a region is a region on the basis of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. I remember the debate on that Act, and the then Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), said that he would debate anything but the number of the regions or their boundaries, and that we could wait for the Bill on regional assemblies to debate that issue. We now have the basis of that Bill.

The Bill is based on this tautology: a region is a region because it is a region. That is like saying that the emperor's clothes are his clothes because they are the clothes. The issue in the referendum will therefore be whether people like the clothes, not whether they think that the clothes exist. The quicksand on which the palace of regional government will be built will ultimately lead to it sinking. It is undeliverable. As many Members have pointed out, we agree with what the Government are trying to do, but the Bill is fundamentally flawed. A region is a region because it has common identity, shared interests and internal integrity.

If the Deputy Prime Minister means what he says, and we shall have those regions in places where people want them, I can tell him one place that wants one: Cornwall. As has been established, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) was at the south-west convention explaining what he found good and bad in its approach. That same morning, I was at the Cornish constitutional convention, and I think that more people attended that than the south-west constitutional convention. Usually, when I ask what we do if we find that the region does not exist, the question is met with stunned incomprehension, as though one is asking to redefine the boundaries of God. The fact is that we must allow a debate on the issue. Instead of running away from it, and feeling that it will unleash powers that result in a derailing of the project, we must recognise that some of the so-called government zones—they are certainly not regions—need to be redefined to allow the project to go ahead.

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman might like to know that at the south-west convention, the head of the

[Mr. Key]

Government office for the south-west, when asked whether it would be possible to have a Cornish assembly, smiled sweetly and made it clear that Ministers had decided that under no circumstances would there be one.

Andrew George: It will be found that the south-west is undeliverable—people have prayed in aid the BBC poll, which, having looked at it, would make a statistician's eyes water—as there is no basis for the belief that people will vote for something that is based on a synthetic place that has been created purely for administrative convenience. The Government need to recognise that. In Cornwall, more people have demonstrated in response to the White Paper that they support a Cornish assembly than in the whole of the rest of the country put together. Fifty thousand people signed a declaration that was delivered to Downing street and to the Minister, demonstrating that they support a Cornish assembly. It is not a Trojan horse for Cornish nationalism, and it is not about cutting Cornwall off. It is about cutting Cornwall in to the celebration of diversity. People understand that in Cornwall, and I am sure that they understand it in all other places, too.

It is not that I am opposed to the development of assemblies in the north-west, the north-east and Yorkshire. Where there is support for regional assemblies, we should allow them to go ahead. However, they are undeliverable in much of the rest of the country. If the Government think that they can get away with this, it will be the triumph of "placelessness" over place and identity. If they and their control-freak tendency are not sufficiently constrained and they do not understand that devolution is about letting go rather than hanging on, they could become seriously unstuck. They will succeed only if they chill out a bit, let go and perhaps get out a bit more.

9.30 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). He is most robust on the issue of regional assemblies, but he pulled his punches today. I have a quote from him that appeared in the *Western Morning News* on 8 June 2000. He dubbed those pushing for the idea of a regional assembly as

"minor empire-builders and anoraks behind this mindless nonsense."

I do not know what the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) is—a minor empire builder or an anorak. Perhaps, on occasions, he is both.

The Government have managed to achieve what many would have thought impossible at the beginning of the debate. They have managed to obtain a degree of consensus in the Chamber. Whether we vote for or against the Bill, there appears to be unanimity that it is a load of pusillanimous nonsense. A couple of speeches were made in favour of the Bill, but as those speeches developed it became pretty clear that they were about an entirely different Bill.

If the Bill is taken to its logical conclusion, it will commit the spending of £2 billion, which is a lot of money in anyone's terms. Two billion pounds make the sums needed from the Government by the employer's side to settle the firefighters' strike seem small beer. Two billion pounds makes the mobilisation of our armed forces for war seem cheap. One would expect considerable benefits from the commitment of £2 billion of the public's hard-earned cash—perhaps more teachers, more nurses or more police officers. But no, regional government will create not a single new teacher, nurse or police officer. If the Government get their way, the remaining 34 county councils will be abolished. Two billion pounds seems a lot of money to provide a cosy bolthole for regional politicians who did not make it to this Chamber or Strasbourg or who have grown weary of the inconvenience of being responsible to their local electorate.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) said at the beginning of the debate, there is a crisis right across Europe on regional policy. He produced figures that demonstrated the increase in the disparities between the prosperous and the poor. A regional assembly would be a toothless commentator on those events. There is a clear need for a regional policy from the Government to address those disparities, but a regional assembly would not do that. A bit of window dressing is no substitute for a policy and a collection of gimmicks do not make a single policy.

As the Confederation of British Industry said in a brief prepared for the debate, its members believe that regional assemblies will not improve decision making in the regions, enjoy the business community's confidence, strengthen democracy or be value for money. The British Chambers of Commerce has said:

"Business frankly wonders why the Government is wasting its time on something that few people want and even fewer people need."

As the Joseph Rowntree Foundation put it:

"The link between democratic decision-making at regional level and economic competitiveness is uncertain".

We have already heard from the hon. Member for St. Ives about his "anoraks". Little wonder that the business community has withdrawn from the unelected regional assemblies in the north-west and the east of England. It was not the assemblies' lack of a direct mandate that made the business community walk away, but the fact that they were a complete waste of time.

Mr. Lansley: My hon. Friend and I come from what is termed the east of England. Did he observe that no one on the Labour Benches from the east of England cared to speak up for regional government? Those who spoke on behalf of the south-east and the south-west acknowledged that regional governments would never be established there. Members from the west midlands and east midlands did not appear on the Labour Benches, and opinion was strictly divided in the remaining three regions. So it seems—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has brought his intervention to a close.

Mr. Pickles: I somewhat regret the fact that my hon. Friend did not get an opportunity to participate in the debate. His memory is correct. We come from the same region. Obviously, I have enormous affection for him,

but our constituencies have little in common. We do not share economic or planning interests. That can be said of constituencies across the eastern region—*[Interruption.]* I hope that I am not going to be heckled into submission.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that a regional identity exists in his constituency, but he had to admit that the paymasters remain in London. The Bill will not change that.

The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), who is meeting the Prime Minister tomorrow to tell him a few home truths about regional policy, made a courageous and important speech. He explained that the north-west has no regional identity. He also rightly told his hon. Friends that a regional assembly will not deliver on a number of things. For instance, it will have virtually no impact on the west coast main line. He spoke most eloquently about money and the Barnett formula, which is what the debate is really about.

Mr. Lloyd: I understand that the hon. Gentleman is from a different side of the Pennines, but for my whole life I have been aware of certain differences between Yorkshire and Lancashire. We have got a bit beyond that now, but the idea that there is no north-west identity betrays his origins as someone who comes from Yorkshire.

Mr. Pickles: My entire life has been one of co-operation between Yorkshire and Lancashire because I married a Lancashire girl. After the hon. Gentleman left the Chamber, we had a decent discussion about the difference between Manchester and Leeds and how those cities co-operate across different regions. There is a commonality of needs along the M62 and the regions are a side issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) exposed the charade of regional inefficiency. He was right to talk about the need to revive democracy. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) made an excellent speech in which he clearly demonstrated the diversity in Northumberland. Few of us will forget the description of his district council, which is about to be abolished. It represents 800 sq m and is to be replaced by a more remote local authority.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) rightly talked about the needs of his constituents. He said that the people of Cheshire have nothing in common with people in the rest of the north-west.

Mr. Dawson: Is not the hon. Gentleman compounding the error made by the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) in referring to the remoteness of Northumberland county council? Surely he is undermining the arguments of the rest of his hon. Friends about county councils being wonderful, viable democratic institutions.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands what we have been saying, particularly about the need for a two-tier system of district and county councils.

The referendum proposed in the Bill lacks quality, transparency and openness. People are being asked to vote without knowing what they will receive. The question will be difficult to frame, and as we have seen the Electoral Commission has already had problems with definitions of single tiers of local government.

If the majority of citizens in a county vote against regional government, their county can still be destroyed because of the way in which the Government impose regional boundaries. We have heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) that 86 per cent. of Yorkshire and Humberside is governed by unitary authorities. Why should 86 per cent. decide the fate of the good people of North Yorkshire? He was right to say that we would give local authorities additional powers.

The abolition of long-established boundaries needs a clear mandate; it should not, to quote the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), be done by a trickle of minor empire builders and anoraks. The Government ultimately have the power to pick and choose when and where referendums are to be held. They are vague about when the trigger for a referendum will be reached. Threats of continuous periodic referendums will lead to instability and a reduction of long-term planning. The Government should have the courage of their convictions and let all the regions decide on the same date, instead of having a trickle of referendums. If there is a need for regional government, as Labour Members have said, let us have it now. Let us have referendums and test their case.

The people of England do not live in regions; they live in counties, towns and villages. Their allegiance is to the immediate community of their country. Between county and country there are no intermediaries. I was born in Yorkshire, not Yorkshire and Humberside. Where I was born has nothing in common with north Lincolnshire. I now live in Essex, not in the eastern region. Brentwood has nothing in common with Cromer or Cambridge. The creation of an elected regional assembly will not create affection for a region that exists only on paper.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is becoming what Spiro Agnew would have described as one of the negative nabobs of nattering negativism. Has it occurred to him that exactly the same negative quibbling was used in the argument put forward by one of his Front-Bench predecessors against devolution in Scotland and Wales? Is he imitating that speech?

Mr. Pickles: I enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's trip down memory lane in his earlier contribution, but when he was talking about regional affinity he kept moving from one region to another without understanding that he was talking about different regions.

There is a case for co-operation between authorities along the M62 corridor, but that is not a pan-regional matter. There is a case for co-operation between authorities around the M25, but that is not a pan-regional matter. There is a case for co-operation between authorities along the southern coast, but that is not a matter of regions; it is common sense. The regions proposed by the Government are too rigid.

Let me give the House an idea of the way in which regional assemblies try to garner support for regional pride. The south-east assembly had the opportunity to meet in various locations, including Aylesbury, Canterbury, Dover, Guildford and Windsor, to

[Mr. Pickles]

demonstrate the wonders of the region. However, it decided to meet in London, which best represents that great region, the south-east of England, and is more convenient than anywhere else in the south-east. I commend it on that decision—it was more honest than any other regional assembly and demonstrated better than any other regional assembly that the assemblies will be the Government's poodles. They will be the Government's representatives in the regions and will see that the Government's will is carried out, not the will of the people of the regions.

9.45 pm

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We have had an interesting, varied and, at times, frustrating debate on one of the most significant issues that we will deal with during the course of this Parliament.

The Bill represents an important further step towards the modernisation of our constitution following the measures already enacted to devolve power to Scotland, Wales and London. It reflects the commitment and determination of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to give the people of England the choice of devolved regional assemblies. For decades, the needs and aspirations of the English regions were at best neglected and at worst ignored. The approaches of the past were either laissez-faire or "Whitehall knows best", and created a widening economic divide and a regional democratic deficit. The Government have been working hard to decentralise power, to make our politics more open, accountable and inclusive. The Bill is a major step forward in that process.

We have had a variety of contributions. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), speaking for the official Opposition in a curiously muted speech, started by claiming that there was something wrong with devolution because unemployment in the UK was highest in areas with new tiers of government. Let us consider that curious concept. Not only did the right hon. Gentleman forget his party's shameful record of rising unemployment, which stained its period in government; he forgot that under the present Government unemployment has reduced to historically low levels in comparison with all our major competitors. If there is a connection between unemployment and devolution—the principle on which the right hon. Gentleman based his argument—devolution, where it has been introduced in this country, shows clearly that we can take action to tackle unemployment. That is our party's commitment—*[Interruption.]* I was laughing at the right hon. Gentleman, who proceeded to try to build a case for opposition to regional devolution on some curious comments from representatives of the CBI, effectively ignoring the fact that the CBI itself has a regional structure and is organised on a regional basis. Its director general, Digby Jones, at a fringe meeting at the Labour party conference at which I was speaking, made it perfectly clear that the CBI strongly supports regional devolution.

The right hon. Gentleman then got into deep water by arguing that if about 25 per cent. of people voted in favour of a referendum, that was a technical basis for making that referendum valid—a point which his hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) effectively demolished. Finally, he was silent on the issue that he spent a lot of time raising in the House last week—the concept that the Government should hold referendums in every region on the same day. What happened to that policy? The right hon. Gentleman appears to have forgotten what he was arguing just last week. It is a typical case of the Opposition not knowing what they are doing.

Mr. Pickles: I know that time is getting on and that the right hon. Gentleman has stayed up late. However, may I politely remind him that I raised that matter about five minutes ago?

Mr. Raynsford: I remind the hon. Gentleman that I was referring to the right hon. Gentleman who leads for the Opposition.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), in a passionate speech, made it clear that we are considering one of the most important constitutional developments in our lifetime. He properly made a distinction between affection for historical county identities—in his case, he spoke about Lancashire—as against effective administrative structures. I strongly agree with his contributions.

Speaking for the Liberal Democrats in a thoughtful speech, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) indicated his commitment to regional government and democratic accountability, and rightly criticised the Conservative Opposition for their opposition to extending democratic accountability. He believed that our proposals did not go far enough, and gave us an entertaining list of quangos that he would like to see abolished. He also asked a number of questions, not all of which I am able to answer this evening owing to lack of time. He asked specifically whether we would publish a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny. We are not necessarily opposed to that idea, but there are timetable issues that will determine whether that option is feasible. We will keep that under consideration.

The hon. Gentleman asked what research we had undertaken on the ballot question in clause 2, and whether we had used focus groups. We did not use focus groups. We tried to use common sense, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 gives a specific role to the Electoral Commission to test the intelligibility of questions. That is why we prepared a draft question and submitted it to the Electoral Commission, which has given its views. We will give those views careful consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) announced at the start of his speech that he would not need 12 minutes to say what he had to say, although he ended up taking the full time to indicate that he was opposed to devolution and remained a fierce centralist. I differ with him wholeheartedly on that issue.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who passed me a note to apologise for the fact that he cannot be present for the winding-up speeches, in a speech full of graphic images made a case for regional devolution—even if he differed from the

views contained in our Bill and our White Paper. He said that he thought the Bill was produced by people who water their red wine. That, I thought, was rather typical of the right hon. Gentleman. He might have suggested that it was a Bill produced by people who water the workers' beer, but there was no such image. Instead, he described it as a "mewling and puking" measure. As my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) pointed out, the right hon. Gentleman clearly started life on that basis.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): In the absence of my right hon. Friend, will the Minister explain to the people of North Yorkshire why, if they vote in favour of the retention of North Yorkshire county council, the rest of the people of Yorkshire should overrule them?

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman had been present throughout the debate, I might have had more sympathy for his intervention. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer!"] I will deal with the question when responding to a North Yorkshire Member who raised questions during the debate and was present throughout the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) questioned the existence of a north-west identity. He argued that no one can agree on boundaries because there are no natural boundaries. I disagree. I believe that we have a natural tendency to disagree about boundaries, whether they are at regional, county, constituency, local government or ward level, and such disputes rarely contribute to progress. We believe that we need to make progress on the Bill, and we do not want to be caught in a morass of boundary disputes.

My hon. Friend also argued that the electoral system would give a platform to extremist parties such as the British National party. The 5 per cent. threshold contained in the provisions, as in London, is an important safeguard against unrepresentative extremist parties gaining representation on a small percentage of the vote.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), in a nostalgic speech, celebrated the great municipal developments of the 19th century, but seemed a little less comfortable with the current manifestations of them on his own patch. On his point about a threshold, he will recall the unfortunate example of Scotland, where the existence of a threshold in the 1978 legislation resulted in the people of Scotland being denied an opportunity for devolution, even though a clear majority had voted in favour, thereby deferring the process of devolution for almost 20 years. I think that that is the strongest argument against thresholds.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby argued passionately about home rule for Yorkshire.

The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) characteristically saw a European plot behind our proposals. I can assure him that there is no such plot.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) believes that decisions can be more effectively made at a regional level. I agree wholeheartedly with him.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) expressed concern about the powers available under our proposals, but supported the principle of regional assemblies. He was worried about the consequences of unitarisation of local government. I shall return to that issue in a moment.

Matthew Green: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I am afraid I do not have time.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) spoke in a thoughtful and well-considered speech about the important development of the yes coalition in the north-east, in which she is playing a leading and very important part. She rightly stressed that the White Paper makes a very good start on regional governance and argued the case for the use of postal ballots to help with turnout, perhaps in combination with other elections.

The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) was unsympathetic to regional government. He argued for greater devolution to local government, but was clearly unaware of the measures that we announced today dramatically to reduce the obligations on local authorities to produce plans and other red tape.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) rightly highlighted the benefit of directly accountable regional institutions. He raised concerns about whether resource restraints would prevent the boundary committee from considering the need for local government reorganisation in the regions that may be interested in that. I can assure him that our primary test in deciding where to hold referendums will be the level of interest in each region. He represents North Yorkshire, which is not a separate and isolated part of the country, but part of Yorkshire and Humberside. It is right that any decision relating to the future of that region, whether or not it has an elected regional assembly, should be taken by all the people living in Yorkshire and Humberside.

The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) was opposed to elected regional assemblies and claimed that reorganisation would destroy the districts in his county, thereby neatly demolishing the Opposition's claim that what we are doing is all about abolishing the county councils. I could not have had a better case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), a strong advocate of regional government, argued that regional decisions should be taken at a regional level. We wholeheartedly agree. He also put in a strong bid for the city of Lancaster as the home for the new assembly.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) opposed the idea of elected regional assemblies and asked about the use of public funds to promote referendums. I assure him that there will be no use of public funds other than through the Electoral Commission, whose role is to provide objective information to inform voters.

I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) to read chapter 2 of the White Paper, which relates to improving existing arrangements in the south-east and other regions.

[Mr. Raynsford]

The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) asked how the Government would assess the degree of interest and competing claims. I assure him that we have already consulted on that matter and will set out detailed arrangements during the Bill's passage through Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) made an important case for unitary government.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) challenged the validity of regional boundaries and spoke for Cornwall in that regard. I disagree on the case for a Cornish assembly.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), who finished the debate for the Opposition, made a remorselessly negative speech that revealed why the Tory party is in its current mess, with nothing positive to offer.

Since the Government came to power, we have worked hard to increase democracy, devolve power and break free from the over-centralised system of governance that we inherited from the previous Administration. The Bill gives the English regions the historic opportunity to decide whether to have an elected regional assembly. We are giving the people of England a choice that was denied them for far too long. Devolving power is central to providing public services, and I warmly commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 141, Noes 389.

Division No. 7] **[10:00 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael

Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'rns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew

Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Phil Woolas

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third reading).

The House divided: Ayes 386, Noes 134.

Division No. 8] **[10:13 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas

McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Phil Woolas and Dan Norris

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John

Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES (PREPARATIONS) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill:

Committal

1. Clauses 1 to 4 of the Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

2. The remainder of the Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

3. All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further message from the Lords) may be programmed.

Proceedings

4. Proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be completed in one day.

5. (1) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 19th December 2002.

(2) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

6. When the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee, have been reported to the House, the Bill shall be proceeded with as if it had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.

Consideration and Third Reading

7. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

8. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

9. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 178.

Division No. 9] **[10:28 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen

Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Phil Woolas and Dan Norris

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. Laurence Robertson

Question accordingly agreed to.

REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES (PREPARATIONS) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified,—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill:

(1) there shall be charged on and paid out of the Consolidated Fund any sums required by the Electoral Commission to meet:

(a) the charges payable to counting officers in connection with a referendum held about the establishment of an elected regional assembly; and

(b) sums payable in respect of increases in superannuation contributions required to be paid by local authorities in consequence of fees paid as part of those charges.

(2) there shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament:

(a) any expenditure of a Minister of the Crown—

(i) in connection with a referendum held about the establishment of an elected regional assembly;

(ii) in making payments to the Electoral Commission;

(iii) in paying grant in respect of the expenditure of regional chambers;

(iv) in preparation for elected regional assemblies;

(v) in connection with the transfer of any function to such an assembly;

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

ESTIMATES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 145(2) (Liaison Committee),

That this House agrees with the Report [21st November] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

HOUSE OF LORDS REFORM (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That the Lords Message [14th November] relating to House of Lords Reform be now considered.

That this House concurs with the Lords in the said Resolution.

That, in accordance with the Resolution of the House of 19th June in the last Session of Parliament, a Select Committee of 12 Members be appointed to join with a Committee to be appointed by the Lords, as the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform, with the same terms of reference, powers and membership as in the last session and that the proceedings of the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform in the last session of Parliament be referred to the Committee.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Industrial Organisation and Development

That the draft Potato Industry Development Council (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 23rd October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 14394/01, draft Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Community and amending Council Directive 96/61/EC; and supports the Government's objective of establishing a flexible, market-based instrument across the European Union in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions towards meeting the United Kingdom's international obligations and domestic targets on climate change.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Stansted Airport

10.41 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I wish to present a petition on behalf of the residents of east Hertfordshire, north and west Essex and the surrounding communities. In just 14 weeks, the petition has attracted signatures and support from more than 33,000 people.

The petition states:

We, the undersigned, oppose the construction of more runways at Stansted Airport because our area does not have the infrastructure needed to sustain such a development and because it would destroy whole villages and blight thousands of homes; severely imperil our wildlife and countryside; and overwhelm existing and planned road and rail transport.

We therefore request that the House of Commons require that Her Majesty's Government to withdraw its proposals for the construction of more runways at Stansted Airport.

To lie upon the Table.

Consumers for Health Choice

10.43 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I rise to present the petition of Mr. and Mrs. Brown of Fordingbridge, which has been signed by 230 of my constituents.

The petition states:

That consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and the petitioners fear that the European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons require that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

To lie upon the Table.

Hare Coursing (Northern Ireland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

10.44 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this subject this evening. First, it is a pleasure to have my debate answered by my hon. Friend the Minister. I congratulate her on her ministerial appointment. I believe that this is the first Adjournment debate that she has done, and the coincidence that it should be on this subject is wonderful. It is an awful paradox that while most of us would like the Northern Ireland Assembly to be running again as soon as possible, all of us would wish my hon. Friend to continue in her ministerial role for as long as possible.

I must make it clear at the outset that I recognise the strict parameters on this debate, and on what my hon. Friend can be expected to answer. Although I might stray into issues of cruelty at times, my concern is to explore and, I hope, illuminate the issues around the licensing of the netting of hares in Northern Ireland and associated conservation matters. She knows that, as the MP for Altcar, I have a long-standing interest in hare coursing and the unnecessary cruelty that it involves. That has led to my concern for the conservation of hares and the well-being of a magnificent animal that is under constant pressure from change in agricultural practice generally.

The system for addressing hare coursing in Northern Ireland is a recent addition to my concerns. The Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) would have included Northern Ireland in its embrace. The subsequent hunting Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) did not do so. As yet, we do not know what the Bill to be introduced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs will involve.

The Minister is well aware that hare coursing in Northern Ireland takes place under Irish coursing club rules, and differs greatly from hare coursing in England and Wales. The greyhounds are muzzled and the coursing fields are semi-enclosed. In particular localities, there may not, at any particular time, be enough hares for the purpose of a specific event. Accordingly, club members will go into the countryside to collect hares. The latter are netted and put into containers for transport to the coursing venue. For that, the former need a licence.

In late 2001, the Northern Ireland Assembly discussed concerns about the decline in the Northern Ireland hare population when it was debating the game laws. Most studies—by Professor Montgomery of Queens university, by the Northern Ireland species action plan, and by the biodiversity strategy for Northern Ireland—reveal a decline in hare numbers. The Irish hare is the only mammal selected for a specific Northern Ireland action plan, which, inter alia, states:

"The provision of refuge areas, adequate and varied food supply and freedom from disturbance are essential if Irish hare numbers are to be maintained at present levels."

Records show that in 1864 there were 138 hares per square kilometre in Northern Ireland—I am not sure how that was worked out, but that is what I am told.

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

Current records show that there are 0.6 hares per square kilometre in Northern Ireland. Even over such a long period, that is a pretty dramatic difference. The action plan of 2000 also states:

"Research is required to determine whether numbers are still declining".

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can tell me what that research concluded and whether it informed previous decisions to license netting made by her predecessor.

The Northern Ireland Assembly voted to ensure that the Minister responsible should not issue licensing for the netting of hares for coursing without being satisfied that it

"would not endanger the hare population in Northern Ireland or any part thereof."

I suppose that "any part thereof" is particularly significant. That is part of the Game Preservation (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002. What is the nature of the research data available to the Minister and to her predecessors that would allow such a judgment to be made, particularly on a local basis?

I understand that the most recent estimates of the hare population in Northern Ireland range from 8,250 to 21,000. In other words, we have no real idea. It is one heck of an area to cover. Recent researches by Professor Montgomery suggest that the Irish hare population may, in some areas, be extinct or near extinct. The crucial point in the present context is for my hon. Friend to ensure that all future decisions on licensing made by her and her successors are based on clear and unambiguous scientific evidence such as may have eluded her predecessor.

A new study has been initiated by the Environment and Heritage Service of Northern Ireland. Does my hon. Friend think that it would be invidious to license any further nettings until the results of that new study are to hand and have been examined? Will she tell me how long a licence lasts?

Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the circumstances of netting and coursing in relation to hare conservation? Coursers claim that, because the dogs are muzzled in Northern Ireland coursing, hares are not killed but are later released. That sounds, at least, a gesture towards conservation. It is an argument that I have often used to hare coursers in West Lancashire. I say to them, "If it is not all about blood and killing, why don't you muzzle the dogs?"

However, in its evidence to Burns, the National Coursing Club of England and Wales claimed that muzzled coursing might be more inhumane than unmuzzled coursing. It said:

"The hare could be bludgeoned to death, involving considerably more suffering than if the dog had been unmuzzled."

There are certainly videos showing hares in Northern Ireland being buffeted about, tossed into the air and mauled into the ground. Handlers often have to kill the hares as a result.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Although I know that the hon. Gentleman and I disagree about some of the substantive points in the general debate, does he at least accept that the middle way group seeks a regulatory solution that takes account not just of cruelty to hares but, more broadly, to all hunted animals?

Mr. Pickthall: I know what the middle way group says and what its platform is. I also know that most people who espouse the middle way detest hare coursing, of all the blood sports. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point.

I am not highlighting the relative cruelty of what goes on, but pointing out that there is, at least, an impact on hare numbers. In *The Belfast Telegraph* of 22 November, a piece quotes Ronan Gorman, the Northern Ireland chief executive of the Countryside Alliance. The article quotes his view that the decline in the Irish hare population was to

"'a very large extent' due to changes in agriculture and that is was 'absolute nonsense' to blame coursing."

That totally misses the point. No one is blaming anyone. We are concerned with the conservation of the hare population in Northern Ireland, as was the Assembly when it considered these matters. The issue of whether we blame agricultural changes and practices and/or hare coursing is almost irrelevant. Both, in some measure, are causing hare numbers to decline in that area.

The process of netting and transportation might damage hares physically and in terms of stress. I do not know whether research has been carried out on that. If my hon. Friend knows, I am sure that she will put it on the record in one way or another. One aspect of those activities is their effect on the reproductivity of female hares. What research on that is available to the Minister when considering applications for licences?

I have a few questions on the conditions for granting licences. Condition B obliges the coursing club to notify the Department at least 72 hours in advance of the date, time and location of any netting activities. Is that done in such a way as to allow researchers, scientists or academics to monitor the events?

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful and interesting case on legal hare coursing and the problems that that causes in Northern Ireland. Is he aware of the terrible problems in rural areas in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom caused by individuals from urban conurbations who trample across farmers' land, which is often cropped, to chase hares illegally? Does he agree that additional police powers should be put into the hunting Bill that will come before Parliament soon?

Mr. Pickthall: Indeed I do. I agree almost entirely with the hon. Gentleman. I know a good deal about illegal hare coursing and have done much towards doing something about it. If there is one thing on which hare coursers and anti-hare coursers agree, it is the horrible nature of illegal hare coursing. Not only does it destroy animals, which are left to rot in the fields, but it poses a threat to farmers, landowners and people who spot it taking place, an activity in which I have been physically involved. I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman. Illegal hare coursing happens a great deal in my area. I do not know for sure, but I suspect that it happens in Northern Ireland too. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that.

Condition C says that netting and releasing may be subject to inspection by the Department. Is that done? If so, how often? Condition D says that all caught hares must be humanely marked to identify their place of capture. Who does that? Should not it be done by independent vets, academics or people who know what they are doing? Condition E says that surviving hares must be released into the locality. Is that monitored by the Department? How many are released into the environment, and how many have to have their necks wrung because they are badly damaged by the coursing? Condition G says that netting should be undertaken only by members of the club that has the licence. Is that monitored? Can we be sure that it is done by experienced people and that there is no commercial trade in netted hares?

Condition H is a sweep-up clause. It says that the club must co-operate with Queen's university in research to monitor the condition and fate of netted hares. Is that done? If so, is the research thorough, satisfactory and made available to the relevant Minister? Condition I concerns the obligation on clubs to file a detailed report on all those matters to the Department within one month of the expiry of the licence. Is that evidence made public, and if not, why not?

I could have made a passionate speech about the hare and its decline in these islands, especially as I understand that hares in Northern Ireland are generally smaller and weaker than English and Welsh hares which makes them more vulnerable to the activities that I have described, but that would have been unhelpful in this context. I hope that the need for our debate will be made otiose by a hunting Bill, but who knows how long that will be in the gestation?

I realise that my hon. Friend is in a difficult position, and I have asked her a lot of questions. No one in the House has a finer record on animal welfare than her. Her present role restricts her to ensuring that all the mechanisms for the licensing of netting are properly used to ensure that the hare population of Northern Ireland is not further damaged and, indeed, that it is enhanced. I can think of no one more capable than her to do just that.

11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Angela Smith): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) for his kind and generous comments. I accept his comments about my position but I make it clear that my ministerial appointment is temporary. We all want the Assembly to be up and running as soon as possible, and we work to that end.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising this subject, because, as he said, it is of interest to me. In racing terms, I have some form on the issue. My hon. Friend has a reputation in this matter, being well known as a campaigner for conservation. His interest in hare coursing arises from his commitment to see hares preserved and protected. I share his concern about the protection of our biodiversity, and I fully support the aims of the recently published Northern Ireland biodiversity strategy.

The netting of hares for coursing is governed by the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928, which was amended in 2002. Under that legislation permits are issued by the Department of the Environment, for which I am responsible. The permits are issued subject to a number of conditions, currently nine, designed to minimise the harm to hares and to avoid adverse effects on the hare population.

In Northern Ireland hares are traditionally caught over a six-week period prior to the coursing event. They are individually marked and kept in a spacious enclosure until the event. On the day of the meet, the hares are coursed once by a pair of dogs and then allowed to escape into the enclosure. I have to admit that I have not seen evidence of that, never having seen hare coursing in Northern Ireland. However, I visited my hon. Friend's constituency to see the Waterloo cup on one occasion—it was not an experience that I would care to repeat.

Mrs. Iris Robinson (Strangford): Does the Minister accept that the holders of the two existing licences stringently adhere to the conditions of those licences?

Angela Smith: I understand that there is only one existing licence; another has expired, or is due to expire on 30 November. I am not aware of the holders breaching the conditions, but I shall make some comments about action that we can take regarding monitoring.

I am told that, the day after the event, the hares are returned to the place of their original capture and released. As my hon. Friend made clear, dogs are muzzled in hare coursing in Northern Ireland, under the Irish Coursing Club rules, and they cannot bite. However, I am interested in his comments about what can happen to the hare during coursing with muzzled dogs. He mentioned a video, and I would be interested to see it if he could get me a copy. I am informed that most hares are returned to the wild following the event and that only occasionally a hare has died while in captivity. I do not know and do not at this stage have access to the information about how many, if any, hares died during the process of capture, netting, transport and release.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has considered hare coursing within the past year. It rejected an amendment to legislation which would have had the effect of banning organised coursing of Irish hares that were trapped or netted in Northern Ireland, but it introduced an amendment governing the issue of permits to net hares. That requires that the Department be satisfied that the trapping of hares for a coursing event will not impact on the hare population in Northern Ireland, or any part thereof, before another permit is issued.

The legal advice is that in deciding to grant or refuse an application, the Department must have sufficient relevant evidence to support its view that the taking of hares by netting would or would not endanger the hare population in Northern Ireland or any part thereof. The Minister must therefore be satisfied that netting does not have an adverse effect.

As is highlighted in the Northern Ireland biodiversity strategy, the Irish hare is an endemic sub-species not present outside Ireland. Historically it was widespread and common throughout Ireland, including Northern Ireland. However, a detailed survey of the Irish hare population during the late 1990s indicated that it had

[Angela Smith]

undergone a marked decline. Similar information was available to my predecessor, but we have now been able to update it.

Estimates indicate that the present Northern Ireland population may be as low as 8,250 or as high as 22,000, but it is at critical levels in some areas. Professor Montgomery is currently undertaking a further survey for my Department's environment and heritage service. As a result of those figures and the concerns that have been expressed, the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions issued in October 2000 a local species action plan for the Irish hare. The Ulster Wildlife Trust is taking the lead in delivering that plan, which draws on current evidence to analyse the main factors causing loss or decline and goes on to draw up objectives and targets for protection of the Irish hare.

Key factors thought to have a negative effect on hare populations include loss of refuge areas for daytime lie-up sites, conversion of species-rich grassland to ryegrass and clover mixes, increased levels of disturbance due mainly to high livestock densities on farms, increased use of farm machinery, illegal coursing, lamping and overhunting. The plan recognises that the provision of refuge areas, adequate and varied food supply, and freedom from disturbance are essential if Irish hare numbers are to be maintained at present levels. A number of challenging targets are set in the plan, including a target to double the present population of the Irish hare by 2010 over as widespread an area as possible. Improving the habitat of the hare is one of the most critical factors in hare conservation, and agri-environment schemes such as environmentally sensitive areas and the new countryside management scheme will have an important role to play. Hare sanctuaries or hare reserves will be set up. Greater public awareness will be promoted through the publication of management advice about hares.

The plan also sets out the need to review and, if necessary, increase protection for the Irish hare under current legislation. It points to the need for further research into both hare ecology and population levels. My Department has commissioned further studies of the Irish hare with a view to considering what enhanced protection measures may be required to ensure that targets in the action plan are met. Legislation alone, however, will not ensure protection of the species. Greater public awareness of the uniqueness of the Irish hare will also be an important factor.

Given the importance that my Department and all those interested in supporting our biodiversity place on that endemic sub-species, I will need to consider carefully the issue of permits for hare netting. Clearly, the issue of permits to net hares for coursing sits uneasily alongside policies that are aimed at conservation of the species. Any such permits will have to looked at within the wider review of the conservation of the Irish hare.

I can assure my hon. Friend that all available and up-to-date evidence on the Irish hare will be carefully examined before any permits are issued. The wider public perception of any tension between the Department's conservation policy and the issuing of permits must also be considered. As I said earlier, greater public appreciation of the uniqueness of that species will be an important factor in the success of measures set out in the species action plan. I cannot remember his exact phrase, but my hon. Friend asked whether any future decision would be based on clear and unambiguous scientific evidence. I can give him an assurance that we shall of course look at and use scientific evidence. I agree that where a species may be under threat the general environmental precautionary principle is apt. It may take some time fully to develop enhanced conservation measures for the Irish hare, but in the meantime I will be cautious in taking any administrative action that may run contrary to the development of measures that have already been agreed by my Department.

My hon. Friend asked a number of questions about the conditions for a licence, which I shall do my best to answer. If I do not address them all, I hope that he will take them up with me later. Condition B says that the club must give the Department at least 72 hours notice of netting. My hon. Friend was concerned that Queen's university and others should make preparations to attend netting attempts. I assure him that in the past year coursing clubs have been helpful when Queen's university has attended such attempts. He also asked about condition C on inspection by officials. Previously, officials were not present at every stage of netting and release, but in the past year they have been. I can assure my hon. Friend that my officials will do their very best to be present, and I see no reason why in future years it should not be a condition of the licence that they should be present. Of course, that would need co-operation from the coursing clubs, but in the past year my experience is that they have co-operated. There is therefore no reason why officials should not be present.

My hon. Friend asked about condition D and whether the tagging of hares should be done by independent vets, so that when the hares are released, some assessment can be made of how they fare afterwards. There is no difficulty with that. An independent vet was present this year, and advised that the tag should not be invasive. I understand that he has indicated his willingness to be involved again in future. That was done with the co-operation of the coursing clubs, which I would like to see taken forward. We will look at the matter again.

Condition E deals with surviving hares being released into the locality in which they were caught. That is part of the tagging process. If an independent vet tags the hares, there is a means of assuring that they are released back into the same locality and recording how they fare. That will be important to me and future Ministers when we come to make an assessment on the issuing of licences.

Condition G stipulates that netting should be undertaken only by members of the coursing club. My hon. Friend asked whether my officials can ensure that those involved are fit people with sufficient experience. I do not think that it is the job of my officials to check the experience of those involved in hare netting, but officials from my Department would be present and check that people are authorised for that purpose.

Condition H covers the club's co-operation with Queen's university. Again, there has been a positive relationship with the university. I should like more

information on that. The coursing clubs have been co-operative and we will encourage them to co-operate further with the university.

Mr. Pickthall: My hon. Friend has been exceedingly helpful. I asked whether we could be sure that there is no commercial netting to sell hares on to other areas. If she does not have that information now, I am happy to receive it at any other time.

Angela Smith: I am not aware of any such information, but if I am incorrect, I will write to my hon. Friend. I do not think that enough hares were caught even for coursing this year, let alone for any commercial activity.

My hon. Friend asked whether the report could be made public. The coursing clubs issue a report to the Department. I see no reason why that cannot be made public. I will check the legislation, but I should think that it would be to the advantage of all if the information about the date, number and location of hares caught and hares released were made public.

As I said, there is only one current licence, which expires on 30 November. For that licence to be used, application would have to be made tomorrow in order to give 72 hours notice. If such an application is received, I can give the House an assurance that my officials will monitor the conditions of the licence.

Finally, there was a comment from the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) about illegal hare coursing. I share his views. Action is available to the landowner. In England, the charge would be taking game without consent; in Northern Ireland it is civil trespass with intent. I appreciate the problems and hope that the police could be involved in dealing with the matter. One of the things that make it difficult to police illegal hare coursing is the difficulty of explaining to people that one form of coursing is legal, while another form is illegal. I am aware of the disruption and distress that that can cause. I hope that I have answered all the comments. We shall monitor the activity closely.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 27 November 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Police Service of Northern Ireland

1. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): If he will make a statement on recent reforms to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [81599]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I refer my hon. Friend to the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland made on 25 November. The Government remain committed to the new beginning to policing, building on the implementation of the recommendations of the independent commission on policing for Northern Ireland. Working with the police and the Policing Board, we continue to make steady progress across a range of areas.

Helen Jackson: Does the Minister agree that we now have a unique opportunity—while the Assembly is in recession, so to speak—to ensure that, through policing, we put in place the final, difficult ingredients? Is it not the case that any party that wants to play a constitutional role in the government of Northern Ireland must play a role in its civil police service, and must recognise that that is part of politics—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the Minister gets the drift.

Jane Kennedy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. The Government's aim is to develop a modern police service that is both effective and widely accepted throughout the society that it serves. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on 17 October, the concept of republicans being on the Policing Board while maintaining an active paramilitary organisation outside of the law is an absurdity.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Given the evident need for good, well-qualified police officers in Northern Ireland, of whatever religion, will the Minister please explain the consequences if a police recruit from one religious denomination or another pulls out during the qualification process? Is there any pressure for a reciprocal withdrawal to maintain the 50:50 ratio?

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman knows the detail of the arrangements that bring into effect the 50:50 recruitment of Catholics and Protestants to the Northern Ireland police service. He also understands that our efforts are directed towards achieving a more accountable, representative and effective police force. It is worth noting that 35 per cent. of those applying to join PSNI over the last year have come from the Catholic community. I look forward to that trend continuing over the coming years.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I know that the Minister is convinced that policing is a crucial part of the creation of peace and political stability in Northern Ireland. I note with more than a little pleasure that 14 of the amendments that have been made will be instantly recognised by those who sat on the last police Bill Committee. Will she give an assurance that, this time, nobody will be allowed to play political games with the very important issue of policing, and that no party or Government will be allowed to use it as a bargaining chip for political reasons?

Jane Kennedy: The forthcoming Bill will cover the commitments, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, to legislative change that we made in the updated Patten implementation plan that we published in August last year, and other issues that have arisen during the review.

Lady Hermon (North Down): Given that the Patten report specifically warned against the balkanisation of policing in Northern Ireland, can the Minister assure me that the new policing proposals announced this week will not lead to any such balkanisation?

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Lady knows that we are in the early stages of discussing the detail of the Bill. Her specific point would not be any part of our intention in developing the new proposals surrounding the accountability of policing in Northern Ireland. We will debate the detail as we proceed through the parliamentary stages of the Bill, and I hope that we can thrash out all those details in debate in time-honoured fashion.

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): Does the Minister accept that further concessions on policing, such as permitting terrorists to sit on district policing partnerships, will be viewed across the community in Northern Ireland, in Unionist and nationalist areas, as totally unacceptable?

Jane Kennedy: The clauses that we have published, which we hope will form part of the Bill, give effect to the commitments that we made at the Weston Park talks last year. Those commitments, once enacted, will fully reflect the Patten recommendations. Had the Government contemplated further concessions, however, they would have been included in those clauses.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): As a precondition of convicted terrorists sitting as independent members of

district policing partnerships, the Secretary of State has said that there must be "acts of completion" by the IRA. Will the Minister confirm that these "acts of completion" must include decommissioning and, crucially, disbandment?

Jane Kennedy: We gave a commitment to consider in the context of the policing review the disqualification rules for membership of DPPs and, indeed, the powers of the Belfast DPP sub-groups to which the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) referred. However, we are not yet persuaded that the time is right to introduce changes in these areas, so they will not be included in the Bill. It is our view that the removal of the disqualification of ex-prisoners could happen only in the context of acts of completion as envisaged by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his speech in Belfast last month. I could not improve on his words.

Northern Ireland Assembly

2. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What the preconditions are for the ending of the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [81600]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): The devolved institutions can operate only if there is trust that all parties to the Belfast agreement are committed to fulfilling their obligations, including the commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means. Rebuilding trust was a key focus of the talks at Parliament buildings last Thursday. We are urgently seeking with the Irish Government and the parties in Northern Ireland the basis on which that trust can be restored.

Simon Hughes: The House will accept entirely the premise that the Secretary of State set out. Does he agree that it would therefore be timely for the Government to initiate in this context a complete review of the Good Friday agreement as provided for under paragraph 8 of the agreement? Does he accept that, to see a good way forward, one has to predict all the foreseeable difficulties, and they must include how Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly are designated? That was a major stumbling block a year ago.

Mr. Murphy: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we will conduct the review under paragraph 7 of the agreement. That review gives all parties in the Assembly—those that choose to turn up to the meetings in Parliament buildings, such as the one that we held last week and that we will hold tomorrow—the opportunity to put their cards on the table and to make the points that they want to make.

The hon. Gentleman referred specifically to designation. He will know that his colleagues in the Alliance party raised this issue last week. Of course, it is important that all of us get round the table, talk about the issues and resolve the current impasse.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Given that for the first time in history the people of Ireland, north and south, have overwhelmingly, by voting for the agreement, stated how they wish to live together, it is therefore the duty of all true democrats to implement the will of the people. That sends a message to certain people on both sides. It sends a message to the paramilitaries such as the IRA, which since its foundation has always said that it is acting in the name of the Irish people. If it is now truly acting in the name of the Irish people, it should not only cease the violence but cease its existence as an organisation. It also sends a message to certain people—

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is a supplementary question. I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to continue. *[Interruption.]* Order. The hon. Gentleman must sit down. Will the Secretary of State reply?

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend is right in terms of the fact that the people of Ireland, north and south, agreed to the Belfast agreement in a referendum after the Good Friday agreement was signed. Some 90 per cent. of the people of the island of Ireland and 70 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland agreed with it. That means—I am sure that he agrees with this—that there is an onus on everyone in Northern Ireland to understand that the only way that we can achieve progress is to do what the people of Ireland have voted upon.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): In recalling the circumstances that led to the suspension, I am sure that the Secretary of State has seen the statement by the police in Northern Ireland that the criminal conspiracy that they uncovered went to the very heart of the republican movement. Their inquiries are continuing. In the light of that, would it not be wise to wait until we have seen the full extent of that conspiracy and who was involved in it? Should we therefore not wait until the inquiries have been completed? While doing that, would it not also be wise to have a thorough public inquiry into how the Northern Ireland Office conducted itself while the spy ring was operating in its own offices?

Mr. Murphy: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that a thorough investigation is being undertaken by the security services as to why these events took place. He is also right to remind the House that this series of events finally led to the loss of confidence and trust between the parties in Stormont and to the suspension of the Assembly. It is important to discuss these issues in the political context. I am sure that that will happen tomorrow; it certainly happened last week.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if it is not possible for the Assembly to be reinstated immediately or in the near future, the proposed elections to it will go ahead next year as planned?

Mr. Murphy: We have no plans to change the dates of the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, set for 1 May next year. I sincerely hope, as I am sure every hon. Member does, that we resolve the difficulties before then.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Does the right hon. Gentleman's less than precise first answer to the question—I am putting it kindly—mean that the

completion of decommissioning and disbandment will be a precondition for Sinn Fein resuming its place in a revived power-sharing Executive?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that that is a precondition in the sense that, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, republicans

"must make the commitment to exclusively peaceful means, real, total and permanent".

My right hon. Friend went on to say:

"We cannot carry on with the IRA half in and half out of this process."

That is clear to me. Those issues will be discussed at the beginning of the meeting tomorrow in Belfast and doubtless they will be at the heart of discussions in meetings to come.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful for the clear assurance at the beginning of that answer. It is enormously important. To put minds at rest in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, will the right hon. Gentleman give another assurance? He has made it clear in his handling of the police Bill that he has gone some way to understanding the error of unilateral concessions and the importance of linkage and of enforcing compliance. Will he therefore deny the rumour in the Northern Ireland press yesterday that the Government are again contemplating an amnesty for on-the-run terrorists?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman knows that those issues were discussed at Weston Park. We all know that those issues are particularly painful to victims in Northern Ireland on both sides of the community. I repeat what I said: as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear, the Government will only contemplate steps on all issues, including the ones to which the hon. Gentleman referred, in the context of acts of completion.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): Despite the tortuous nature of current negotiations on police reform and the peace process, will my right hon. Friend commend the words and actions of all those politicians who are working towards peace? Will he also commend the words of Martin Luther King:

"Peace is not merely a distant goal . . . but a means by which we arrive at that goal"?

Mr. Murphy: Of course I echo my hon. Friend's eloquent comments. When I recently took on this job after an absence of three years, I was struck by the fact that the streets of Belfast and Northern Ireland are still very peaceful by comparison with the situation a decade ago. We cannot take for granted the progress that has been made, but we understand that much still needs to be done.

Irish Fertilizer Industries

3. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the employment impact of the closure of Irish Fertilizer Industries' factory in north Belfast. [81601]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Ian Pearson): The loss of 207 jobs and some £11 million to the local economy has obviously had a devastating effect on employees and their families. I have asked Invest Northern Ireland to work with the liquidator to try to identify an investor for the Belfast factory, and the Department for Employment and Learning is advising the work force on employment and training opportunities and on social security matters.

Dr. Cable: Is the Minister aware of the problem arising from the fact that the workers have lost not just their jobs, but 60 per cent. of their pensions because the owners—the Irish Government and ICI—chronically underfunded the pension scheme? Will he and his colleagues approach the Irish Government on behalf of the workers who have lobbied us in London and appeal to them to honour their moral obligations to the work force?

Mr. Pearson: I met trade union representatives from the company and the local management last month. I have been in contact with both shareholders, the Irish Government and ICI, and I am seeing the chief executive of ICI tomorrow. I take a close interest in the issue. It strikes me that four pension funds are involved and the position remains unclear. I am committed to doing all that I can to ensure that the work force get their full entitlement.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): I welcome what the Minister is doing to deal with the problem. The workers have been treated in a shabby and despicable way by a blue-chip British company and the Irish Government, with whom there is supposed to be a special relationship. May I urge him to do everything in his power to ensure that pension rights and other rights of workers, and the rights of creditors, are protected?

Mr. Pearson: The Irish Government and ICI have put together a funding package of some €24.5 million for severance payments, and they have agreed to subordinate loans to ensure that creditors are paid. The important thing is that if jobs can be saved and a new investor can be found, we should be doing that. We must also make sure that the work force receive their full entitlement through pension arrangements and that the money owing to them in redundancy is paid out.

Grammar Schools

4. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): If he will make a statement on the future of grammar schools in Northern Ireland. [81602]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): The consultation on the Burns proposals indicated an emerging consensus for the ending of the transfer tests, which the hon. Gentleman and I would

recognise as the 11-plus, and I will be taking forward the review and working to abolish the transfer tests as soon as practical.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does not the Minister seek to abandon—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is far too noisy and it is unfair to those who are interested in these questions.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does not the Minister seek to abandon the shameful and destructive policy, initiated by Martin McGuinness, of abolishing the selection test? Does she agree that the absence of a clear judgment in these matters will undermine a facility that provides opportunities for able children from working-class homes to break through class barriers and ensures that Northern Ireland has better A-level results than England, Scotland or Wales?

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman is right in that the education system does well for certain very able pupils in Northern Ireland. I assure him that no decisions have been taken about academic selection or new post-primary arrangements. In the consultation, various suggestions were made for future arrangements, including options involving academic selection. My officials have been discussing those proposals with the education partners and parents' representatives, and they will continue to do so over the coming weeks.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the Minister give us a commitment that she will continue to support our grammar schools in Northern Ireland, just as her Government support the remaining grammar schools here in Great Britain? Will she acknowledge that it is now being acknowledged here that the comprehensive system has been failing pupils for far too long?

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman makes a forceful point, but he will know that the consultation on the Burns report indicated an emerging consensus, which, I hope he will accept, included political parties, on an end to the transfer test. I am confident that by working with our education partners and by keeping our focus on the interests of the child, we can develop a modern, fair education system that enables all children to fulfil their potential.

Economy

5. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the Northern Ireland economy. [81603]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Ian Pearson): The Northern Ireland economy has witnessed significant improvements in recent years. Employment growth has been sustained with some 656,000 employees now in employment, the highest figure on record. Unemployment has also fallen considerably, now standing at 6.3 per cent., well below the European Union average. Forecasts for the local economy remain optimistic for the coming year.

Mr. Chapman: Does my hon. Friend agree that in manufacturing, traditionally a weak area of the Northern Ireland economy, dramatic improvements in productivity have taken place, making Northern Ireland an ever more attractive market for inward investment? Does he agree also that that could not have been achieved without the stability and confidence provided by the Good Friday agreement, and that further progress in that direction may be hindered without its full implementation?

Mr. Pearson: I totally agree. Manufacturing throughout the UK and Europe has been having a tough time in recent years, but in Northern Ireland it has been holding up very well. Over the last four years, manufacturing output went up by over 10 per cent., compared with a 5 per cent. decline in the UK. Business research and development increased by 40 per cent. last year, and productivity, which was 10 per cent. lower than in the UK, is now reaching UK levels. Those are all promising signs, and we must ensure that we continue to move forward and sustain, and improve on, that impressive track record.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Minister must agree that economic progress depends on stability in the institutions of government, whether across the United Kingdom or in the regions. What are he and his colleagues doing to ensure that we have stable devolved government that is not under the constant veto of a paramilitary terrorist organisation, Sinn Fein, and that we are rewarded with accountable government at Stormont to help in the economic promotion of the Province?

Mr. Pearson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and others are doing all they can to make sure that we get the Assembly and the Executive back up and running as soon as possible. In the meantime, while we are asked to perform the job of Ministers, we will do so to the best of our ability to ensure that we have a stable economic climate in Northern Ireland, which is crucial to future business prosperity and success.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the Minister discuss with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry the possibility of introducing legislation to prevent the market distortion affecting the Northern Ireland economy whereby offers of retail products, life insurance and car insurance are restricted to the United Kingdom, excluding Northern Ireland? It is neither fair nor appropriate to a market economy that such discrimination is allowed to endure.

Mr. Pearson: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. On a number of issues, the interests of Northern Ireland's economy are different and diverge from those of the United Kingdom. He mentions one of those issues; others include cross-border smuggling. They are all matters on which one would expect representations to be made to the UK Government, and they are.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): We now learn that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has had to borrow £10 billion in the past six months and that corporation

tax has fallen by 14 per cent. Does the Minister agree that the worst thing that could happen to the fragile Northern Ireland economy would be a rise in taxes on corporations?

Mr. Pearson: I dispute that. The simple fact is that the Northern Ireland economy is not in a fragile state. Manufacturing businesses are doing well, and we have a young, well-educated and highly committed work force. Northern Ireland is a great place for inward investment and we are holding our market share in that respect. There is every reason to believe that the prospects for Northern Ireland's economy are good and will remain good in future.

Northern Ireland Assembly

6. **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): If he will make a statement on the prospects for establishing the Northern Ireland Assembly. [81604]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): As I said in my reply to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), we are working urgently with others to find a basis to restore the devolved institutions. I believe that doing so is of the utmost importance to the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Illsley: Given the progress that has been made since the signing of the Good Friday agreement—progress to which my right hon. Friend has already referred—does he agree that it is essential that the Assembly is re-established as quickly as possible?

Mr. Murphy: Indeed I do. One of the great changes for the better in Northern Ireland in the past few years is that Northern Ireland people are taking decisions on behalf of other Northern Ireland people. The quicker we restore devolution in Northern Ireland, the better for everyone.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the Secretary of State—and the Prime Minister—accept that the trust and confidence, the re-establishment of which he says is so necessary, would be re-established more quickly if he gave the House a categorical assurance that there was no question of giving fugitive terrorists an amnesty?

Mr. Murphy: I think that the best thing that can happen is that, when we talk—as we will tomorrow in Belfast and in the weeks ahead—the parties in Northern Ireland can reassure each other of the importance of settling those issues that are in front of us. That is a matter not only for the Governments, but for the political parties as well.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Does the Secretary of State agree that the permanent re-establishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland can be achieved only by the complete fulfilment of the Good Friday agreement, endorsed by all participating parties. Does he agree that the current round of negotiations should refer only to matters as yet to be implemented under the Good Friday agreement, including those to be implemented by Government?

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend is right that the chief reason why those talks have been held is that the institutions have been suspended because of lack of trust. At the end of the day, however, that trust can be restored by referring all the time to the Good Friday agreement itself and its implementation. That is a duty upon our Government, the Irish Government and all the parties working together.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [81629] **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): If he will list his official engagements for 27 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Paul Goggins: Has my right hon. Friend seen this week's report from UNICEF, which shows that in reading, maths and science this country is now one of the best-performing countries in the world? Does he recognise, however, that in many disadvantaged areas pupils and teachers still face substantial difficulties? What further action will he take to back his Government's commitment to raise standards for all pupils?

The Prime Minister: It is correct that the UNICEF report found that Britain was seventh in the world for academic skills, above the United States of America. I shall quote briefly from the report:

> "The United Kingdom, where hand-wringing over educational failures is a national pastime, fares better than all other countries in the European Union except Finland and Austria".

The reason for that is the investment now going into schools in every single part of our communities. It is important, therefore, that we keep the investment programme moving forward, not cut it back, as some would have us do.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Tomorrow, tube drivers will hold a strike ballot arising from the fire strike. Does the Prime Minister agree that such a strike would be secondary action?

The Prime Minister: I agree that there is absolutely no cause for a strike because the Health and Safety Executive has made it clear that the tube is safe operating under London Transport's terms and conditions. It therefore follows that any strike, in my judgment, would be totally unjustified.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister never said whether he felt that it was secondary action or not,

which is critical. The whole of London's underground is likely to grind a halt, but he has not given a straight opinion. He knows that the Government own London Underground and that every member of its board is appointed by the Secretary of State. Will he now tell us whether the Transport Secretary, under his instructions, has told London Underground that it should use every available trade union law to stop the strike going ahead? In short, has it been told to get an injunction?

The Prime Minister: First, it is for the court to decide whether it is illegal or not; it is not a matter for me or my right hon. Friend. However, as a result of the action already taken by London Underground, the total number not working normally is, I think, three. It is important that London Underground makes every effort to ensure that that is right. Of course, ultimately it is a decision for London Underground, but I am sure that it will enforce the law in whatever way it needs to.

Mr. Duncan Smith: There are 8,000 people about to have a ballot, but the Prime Minister has given them no clear signal that if they take strike action it will be considered secondary action. Thousands of teachers and council workers have been on strike this week. Tube drivers and power station workers are now threatening secondary action that would paralyse the country, but the Prime Minister cannot say whether it is secondary action or not. After his answers today, does he not think that that will give a green light to all those who believe that they should have a right to strike? He made a promise in his manifesto that there would be no return to secondary action, but does he not think that people will believe that that was not true?

The Prime Minister: There must indeed be no return to secondary action, secondary picketing or anything that is unlawful. All that I was pointing out to the right hon. Gentleman is that it is ultimately for the court to decide whether something is unlawful. I have just told him that the ballot on action tomorrow would be totally unjustified and that London Transport should do everything it can to enforce the law, so I hardly think that he can say that I have thereby given a green light to secondary action. That is a slightly extraordinary thing to say.

Let me repeat the position: I do not believe that any action is justified. London Transport should use all the powers at its disposal, including those under the law, to enforce the law. I should have thought that that was plain enough even for the right hon. Gentleman.

Q2. [81630] **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I am not a killjoy—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that my right hon. Friend is not one either, but is it not time that we stopped treating fireworks like a toy that children can play with when the nights are getting dark in September and October, thereby terrifying people in the community, and saw them as the fairly dangerous explosives that they are? Will he ensure that action on this issue is included in the antisocial behaviour order, on which we are legislating this Session?

The Prime Minister: It is obviously important that we use the antisocial behaviour legislation to try to bear down on that problem. In the areas where we are piloting antisocial behaviour fixed penalty notices, such provision is already being made available to deal with the unlawful use of fireworks. If we were to use the fixed penalty notice route and some exemplary fines were meted out to those engaging in the practice, it would be stamped out fairly quickly. We keep all legislation closely under review; I am sure that the Home Secretary will have heard my hon. Friend's point. I know that it will be echoed by many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): For a Government who promised economic stability, how embarrassed does the Prime Minister feel that we have had the longest period of manufacturing recession since the second world war and that business investment levels are now lower than during the Tory recessions of the 1980s and 1990s?

The Prime Minister: It is correct that manufacturing has had an extremely difficult time, but if we look at the economy as a whole, we can see that there has been immensely strong growth. We have the lowest unemployment, inflation and mortgage rates for decades. Were we to follow the spending programmes of the Liberal Democrats, that would all be put at risk.

Mr. Kennedy: The fact is that the percentage of investment in the European Union that comes to Britain was 28 per cent. four years ago, 20 per cent. last year and currently stands at 16 per cent. How low must it go before the Prime Minister takes action, particularly by setting a timetable for a referendum on entry into the single currency?

The Prime Minister: I thought that we might get to that issue eventually. The position on the euro remains as it is: it has to be right for the economy as a whole. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that there has been some falling off of investment in this country. Of course, it is mainly going to many of the accession countries such as Poland and Czech Republic, which obviously offer very low labour costs indeed. Overall, however, I hope that he recognises that the performance of this economy in the past five to six years has been an extraordinary one of high growth and employment, and low unemployment, inflation and mortgage rates. That is what we must and will preserve.

Q3. [81631] **Mr. Hilton Dawson** (Lancaster and Wyre): Does my right hon. Friend share my grave concern that, at a time when we have seen real progress in children's services, we have also seen the tragic deaths of 13 children in young offenders institutions? Will he assure me that the work currently being done to develop policy for children will reflect the fact that prison is no place for children to be?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, what my hon. Friend says about the need to improve conditions in some young offenders institutions is right. We must do two things. First, over the past couple of years various changes have been piloted in the institutions, including in Feltham in particular, where I think there has been most concern. Secondly, we are setting aside several tens of millions of pounds for a strategy of improving the

services for young people in young offenders institutions. At the same time, my hon. Friend will agree that, unfortunately, there are young offenders—often very young people—who need to be in young offenders institutions or secure accommodation to protect the public from their behaviour.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The Prime Minister is aware that in the past two days my party has met the Minister with responsibility for security in Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We put one question to both: what is an act of completion? Does it consist of IRA-Sinn Fein repudiating and ceasing violence and being disbanded, or does it simply mean that they make a statement that they will give up violence? Can the Prime Minister tell us what he believes it means?

The Prime Minister: I can. It is not merely a statement, a declaration or words. It means giving up violence completely in a way that satisfies everyone and gives them confidence that the IRA has ceased its campaign, and enables us to move the democratic process forward, with every party that wants to be in government abiding by the same democratic rules.

Q4. [81632] **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the mere suggestion of university top-up fees is already causing anxiety in areas such as mine, which has a historically low take-up of university and higher education places? If collective provision is the right model for the national health service, should not it also apply to our education service?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the anxiety, which has been expressed in many quarters. My hon. Friend is right to express his concern. He knows that we will publish a review in January next year, but we do not intend to do anything that will put people off going to university. The Government have a proud record. In the past few years, we have increased the number of people who go to university by almost 100,000.

However, our universities have a serious funding problem. Provided that everyone agrees that the status quo—the huge backlog of repairs to infrastructure and university lecturers' pay increasing by only 5 per cent. in the past 20 years, when the figure for the rest of the economy is 45 per cent.—is not an option, we should work out the right basis on which to change matters. That is fully consistent with the need to get more people into our universities.

Q5. [81633] **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): Why is the Prime Minister using the armed forces to break the firefighters' strike when he could have used the courts?

The Prime Minister: That sums up the Conservative party in its current state. Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that we should not have made preparations for the armed forces to take over? What a ridiculous question to ask me! When the firefighters cannot provide fire service cover because they are on strike, it is right that our armed forces, who do a fantastic job, should stand in. If we refused to have the armed forces standing by, Conservative Members would be on their feet, accusing us of incompetence and chaos.

Q6. [81634] **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): I am sure that my right hon. Friend knows that I have organised a meeting on Friday evening for the residents of Tingley to consider policing and antisocial behaviour. They will be pleased that we have almost achieved our target of 130,000 police officers—a record number—four months in advance, but they will not be so happy that the distribution of officers does not appear to be equal throughout the country. Will my right hon. Friend take steps to ensure that everywhere, including West Yorkshire, gets its fair share?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the meeting in Tingley is one of many throughout the country to consider such serious issues. We are increasing police numbers throughout the country, but my hon. Friend's point is important. We need to ensure that they increase in areas such as West Yorkshire. I understand that, as well as the additional 250 police who were recently recruited to West Yorkshire police authority, more than 400 extra are on their way.

I pay tribute to police officers in West Yorkshire. Their work has meant that street crime in the county has fallen by 45 per cent. in the past six months.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Prime Minister said that stakeholder pensions

"would transform the landscape of private provision".

There are a third of a million company stakeholder schemes. How many of those schemes have any members?

The Prime Minister: I assume that the right hon. Gentleman has the figures before him, but I can tell him that there are 50,000 additional stakeholder pensioners a month.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The answer to the question is that of 330,000 company stakeholder schemes, 300,000 have no members and no money. It is no good the Prime Minister weaselling his way out. Will he tell us what proportion of occupational pension schemes are open to new pensioners?

The Prime Minister: Again, I assume that the right hon. Gentleman is about to tell me. More than 1 million people have taken out stakeholder pensions. There are, as I said, around 50,000 a month. If that stretches over the next few years, it will amount to several million. I should have thought that that is a good record for stakeholder pensions.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I do not think that the Prime Minister knows what a company pension scheme is, as he has given the wrong answer. More than half of those pension schemes are now closed to new members, and the latest evidence shows that the rate of closures has doubled in the past year. So occupational schemes are closing, stakeholder schemes are failing, and every year under Labour the number of people retiring without an

occupational pension has risen. Given that his Chancellor's £25 billion tax hike has damaged pensioners, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer rises to speak today will the Prime Minister tell him to apologise for destroying pensions?

The Prime Minister: No. It is correct that many pension schemes have had difficulties, for all the reasons that we know, not just in this country but in other parts of the world. However, when stakeholder pension schemes are attracting some 50,000 people a month, it is absurd to say that they have failed. It is correct that changes are necessary. They will be set out in the pensions Green Paper later this year, but in the end the single best guarantee for today's pensioners and tomorrow's pensioners is a strong economy. That is the economy that we have produced, but it is not the economy that the right hon. Gentleman's party produced when it was in power.

Q7. [81635] **Gareth Thomas** (Clwyd, West): May I draw the Prime Minister's attention to continuing concerns in my constituency, particularly in the lovely market town of Ruthin in Denbighshire, about the adequacy of flood prevention measures and flood defence? I seek my right hon. Friend's assurance that the Government are committed to long-term investment in flood defence and protection.

The Prime Minister: We are committed to long-term investment in flood protection. Several hundred million pounds are going into it over the next few years. In addition, as my hon. Friend knows—I know that this is of concern in Ruthin and other places that have suffered from heavy flooding—we are working with the insurance industry to make sure that it provides proper cover for people. There are many difficulties that we need to sort out, and we are working closely with the industry in doing so. I can assure my hon. Friend that part of the investment in the comprehensive spending review was investment against the problems caused by flooding. There is one other thing with which I am sure that he and his constituents would agree: we also need to take action on climate change, for the benefit of Britain and the world more generally.

Q8. [81636] **Mr. Adrian Flook** (Taunton): In a recent poll conducted by the *Somerset County Gazette*, 88 per cent. of respondents said that they wanted to keep Somerset county council. Will the Prime Minister confirm that if every voter in Somerset wanted to keep the county council, every urban voter in a unitary authority such as Bristol or Swindon could outvote them?

The Prime Minister: As we have said, it is for people in the region to decide how their future is governed. The campaign that the Conservatives have been mounting about county councils is simply wrong.

Q9. [81637] **Mr. John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): As my right hon. Friend knows, 50 per cent. of calls to 999 centres are hoax calls. Will he make sure that the courts treat hoax callers in the manner that they deserve, and ensure that human life is preserved? Will he ensure that the punishment fits the crime?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's strong condemnation of hoax callers. The figure for the country as a whole is about 7 per cent., which is still far too high. Hoax callers should know that they are liable not only to be disconnected but to be imprisoned. Several people have been arrested over the past couple of weeks in connection with hoax calls, and I hope that anyone who engages in this appalling practice will be treated with the utmost severity by the courts.

Q10. [81638] **Peter Bottomley** (Worthing, West): In his first four years as Prime Minister, did the right hon. Gentleman notice the state of the universities and the pay of university lecturers?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course I did. That is one of the reasons that we introduced the first tranche of university reforms, following the Dearing report. If the hon. Gentleman is trying to say that we need to do even more, because of the rising number of people going to university, he is absolutely right. That is why I hope that, when we publish our review in January, the Conservative party will have the courage to make its own proposals if it does not agree with ours.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Given the Catholic Church's use of the Nolan guidelines to keep an abusive priest in office, does my right hon. Friend agree that the time has come for the Catholic Church, as an employer, to be required by law to remove such priests? Does he further agree that it is simply not good enough to hide behind risk assessment and forgiveness, as that does not protect children?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, the law has to take its course. In my view, this is a matter for the Church, and the decisions that the Church takes should be taken only after the closest investigation of the facts.

Q11. [81639] **Mr Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): In view of the fact that lives are being lost in the fire dispute, and of the spreading of secondary action, is it not high time that the Government became personally involved in the negotiations, and asked the firemen to postpone their industrial action and evidence to the Bain inquiry on the modernisation of working practices in the run-up to Christmas? Will the Prime Minister now become personally involved to ensure that they postpone their industrial action until they have given their evidence to the Bain inquiry?

The Prime Minister: The attempts by some sections of the Conservative party to try to squeeze every little bit of political capital that they can from this dispute are absolutely extraordinary. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the firefighters are somehow under some misapprehension about our wanting them to call off the strike—well, I would have thought that they would have got that message by now. As for their giving evidence to the Bain inquiry, we have been saying throughout that that is what they should do. The only way in which this

dispute is going to be settled is by the employers and unions agreeing to debate in detail the prospects for modernisation, giving a better deal over and above the 4 per cent. That has been the position throughout, and it is absolutely right that it should remain the position. It is for the employers and the unions to negotiate around it.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): It has been 28 years since the Turkish army invaded Cyprus. Over that period, 1,500 people, including children, have gone missing. Will my right hon. Friend take up this issue as a matter of urgency with the new Turkish Government? Mothers and fathers need to know what has happened to their loved ones. Have they been murdered or tortured? Have they been imprisoned? Will my right hon. Friend please do something about this?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue. There is every possibility of trying to resolve it in the context of an agreement on Cyprus. I genuinely believe that the United Nations plan that has been put forward offers the greatest prospect for a final settlement of the Cyprus issue than we have had for many decades, and if that can been agreed by the parties involved some of the traumatic and difficult issues that my hon. Friend has raised could be resolved. Obviously, we raise individual cases all the time, but the best way of dealing with the matter comprehensively will be in the context of an agreement to that settlement.

Q12. [81640] **Mrs. Marion Roe** (Broxbourne): As my constituency is close to Stansted airport, will the Prime Minister explain to my constituents whether the Government's consultation on future airport expansion is essential and balanced, as Ministers claim, or irrational and unfair, as the High Court concluded yesterday?

The Prime Minister: The High Court decision, I think, was on the exclusion of Gatwick and the reason for that is quite simple: we had an agreement that we would not put Gatwick in the consultation. However, the court's decision rules otherwise.

In relation to the airport proposals, of course I understand why the hon. Lady's constituents are concerned. It is always difficult when there is a consultation process and everything has to be put into it, but that does not mean that decisions have been taken. However, as the High Court decision showed, if we were to exclude certain things, we would be accused of conducting an unfair process too. It is important that we continue with the consultation process in the way that I have described—we look at absolutely every option—but her constituents should not think that we have made up our minds on it, because we have not.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): My right hon. Friend has referred to the UN settlement plan for Cyprus, which has been welcomed by the Greek Cypriots as the basis for further negotiation and in relation to which the Turkish Cypriots have yet to make a judgment. Will he assure the Greek Cypriots, who are very concerned, that that delay will not in any way prevent their entry to the European Union at the Copenhagen summit?

The Prime Minister: It was partly as a result of the representations of this Government that we made it absolutely clear that Cyprus should be able to join the EU, even if there is not a final settlement. However, it is important, obviously, that we want there to be such a settlement. I have had good conversations with the new leadership in Turkey about that issue. I hope that the UN proposals can at least be a basis for concluding these negotiations reasonably quickly. If that happens, the Cyprus issue would be resolved—Cyprus, in any event, will join the EU—and relations between Greece and Turkey could improve. That would be of enormous benefit to the whole region.

Q13. [81641] **Mr. John Taylor** (Solihull): Will the Prime Minister confirm that modernisation means 10,000 firefighters losing their jobs?

The Prime Minister: No, I will not confirm that. The truth is that 20 per cent. of the firefighters are due for retirement for demographic reasons in any event. That allows us to sit down and talk about those who are necessary to give the proper manpower for the fire service. Of course, there will be people retiring from all public services. For example, some 12,000 people have retired from the police and 30,000 have retired from the teaching profession, but there are more police officers and more teachers in employment today. So, the Deputy Prime Minister was saying—we know this; indeed, it was published by the Government Actuary's Department last year—that 20 per cent. will retire for demographic reasons, but that is simply one more opportunity to sit down and get the essential modernisation that the fire service needs.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Monday was international day for the elimination of violence against women? In that context, may I thank him for his personal commitment and that of this Government to introduce the first comprehensive legislation on domestic violence in this country? However, is he aware that, although legal protection is vital, so too are support and advocacy services for women and children? Is he aware that most Government initiatives do not fund outreach, helplines or children's services and that 40 per cent. of local authorities—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was the fourth question.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend says about the measures that we are taking on domestic violence. It is a real problem, and she rightly draws attention to it. We are not simply taking measures; we are also investing, I think, almost £11 million specifically in programmes to try to diminish domestic violence. I entirely agree that it is important that we carefully measure any forthcoming legislation to see how it bears on that appalling problem.

Stansted Airport

Q14. [81642] **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): What representations he has received concerning the Government's proposals for Stansted airport.

The Prime Minister: The Government continue to receive a large number of responses to the consultation document, "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom". Ministers and officials in the Department for Transport have also met a wide range of organisations as part of the consultation.

Mr. Prisk: Given the High Court's decision that the Government's consultation is indeed irrational and unjust, will the Prime Minister clarify for my constituents and for the House why his Transport Ministers specifically overrode the advice that they were given, which was that they should include Gatwick in the first place? That was the advice; why did they ignore it?

The Prime Minister: We excluded Gatwick because we had given an undertaking to exclude Gatwick. Yesterday's court hearing found that, in any event and despite that, we should include Gatwick. The Secretary of State for Transport has said that that will be done, and that is of course right. The hon. Gentleman says that it was decided that it was unfair, arbitrary and irrational; the reason is the one that I gave. Many people around Gatwick will feel aggrieved that it has gone back in when we had given a specific undertaking that it would not. However, the court has decreed that it should go back in, and that is what will happen.

Engagements

Q15. [81643] **Mr Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): Will my right hon. Friend look at the number of youth workers in our communities? Many of us feel that an enhanced and improved youth service would do much to tackle antisocial behaviour in our communities.

The Prime Minister: It would. One reason the Government are putting a huge investment into the Connexions partnerships, which give proper guidance and career advice to young people, is precisely because we know that, along with increased investment in education and sure start, such investment is not just in young people but in a more secure, safer and fairer Britain. That is the Britain that we shall continue to fight for.

Speaker's Statement

3.31 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a brief statement to make to the House. I have to inform Members that I have received the following letter from the Clerk of the House:

"Dear Mr. Speaker,

I am writing to let you know formally of my desire to resign as Clerk of the House at the end of the year.

I entered the service of the House in September 1961, and I first sat at the Table of the House in 1977. By the time I resign, I shall have been Clerk of the House for exactly five years. Two years ago, I had the further privilege of being appointed the First Chief Executive of the House Service.

It has been an honour and a unique privilege to serve the House of Commons over these 41 years, and especially to do so as its principal adviser on privilege and procedure. I shall always be grateful to the occupants of the Chair and Members in all parts of the House, past and present, for their courtesy and friendship over that long period.

For at least the past decade, the House's procedures and services have adapted to meet new demands and challenges at a pace which would have startled my colleagues in 1961. I hope we have been generally successful in coping with change while maintaining the traditional high standard of service. If so, the credit must go to all those men and women in the six departments of the House on whose loyal service so much depends. It has been a privilege for me to be associated with them.

I shall leave the service of the House with regret, but I shall do so in the knowledge that no other career could possibly have provided as much satisfaction and opportunity for service.

Yours sincerely,

William McKay"

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): Members on both sides of the House who have benefited from the sound and impartial advice of Sir William McKay over four decades will regret the announcement that you, Mr. Speaker, have just made to the House. I realise that Members on both sides will wish to express their appreciation of his service, and therefore we shall shortly table a motion on his retirement, which will give Members the opportunity to pay tribute to him.

Pre-Budget Report

3.33 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Last year, of the major economies, the British economy was the fastest growing. This year, 2002, amid the worst global slowdown for almost 30 years, the British and north American economies will grow faster than all other major economies. I can report that next year, in 2003, Britain and north America are now forecast, even in a still uncertain and unstable world, to continue to be the fastest growing of all the major economies.

Today, as I examine in turn world and British growth, the balance of the economy, including the housing market and the position of manufacturing, and the fiscal figures now and for the future, I will report that with the lowest inflation for 40 years and long-term interest rates also the lowest for 40 years, Britain's monetary and fiscal framework is meeting the challenges of each stage of the economic cycle, and we will tolerate nothing that will put that hard-won stability at risk.

As Britain meets the challenges of the wider global economy, the pre-Budget report will also outline further labour market, capital market and product market reforms to improve British science, skills and enterprise, and I will outline proposals for continuing public service reform and tax and benefit modernisation showing that, both in Britain and abroad, strong economies and fair societies advance together.

I start with the international economic outlook. Twenty of the world's biggest economies, accounting for 60 per cent. of the world's output—the United States, Japan, much of Europe and Latin America—have been or are in recession after what has been the sharpest slowdown in global economic activity for almost 30 years, indeed the biggest contraction in industrial output in the world's major economies since 1975. World trade growth, which held up through both world recessions of the early 1980s and 1990s, fell 12 percentage points last year, and while trade growth resumed early this year, it has faltered yet again. It is one of the many reasons why, at an international level, the British Government are working for an early resumption of the world trade talks and why, at a European level, we must curb industrial and agricultural protectionism.

While the present political and economic uncertainties—the continuing aftermath of 11 September, unfolding events in Iraq, the impact on oil prices, concerns about equities and corporate standards, continuing trouble in the IT sector and current account imbalances—have all caused business investment to fall sharply since 2000 in every major continent, the challenge for the British economy in this more uncertain and unstable world has been to steer a stable course, combining low and stable inflation with sustained demand growth and with high levels of employment.

I can report that 175,000 more people are in employment in the British economy this year than last year and in total 1½ million more work force jobs have been created since 1997. Our unemployment rate is lower than in Japan, America and the euro area for the first time for 50 years.

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Our monetary and fiscal foundation, which is based on the independence of the Bank of England, imposes a symmetrical target for inflation, requires debt at low levels, holds to tough fiscal rules over the economic cycle and is thus designed not just for times of high growth, but for a global contraction with all its attendant difficulties. It is because the Bank of England has established credibility through year after year meeting our 2½ per cent. symmetrical inflation target that it has been able, supported by fiscal policy, to sustain growth in our economy. It is that same symmetrical inflation target, which was designed to prevent both deflation and inflation, that explains why the Bank of England is rightly vigilant not only about the continuing weaknesses of equities, trade and investment and of G7 current account imbalances, but about domestic risks, including the need for a sustainable housing market and for affordable pay settlements across the economy—public and private sector alike. We will continue to give steadfast backing to the Bank of England and the Governor, Sir Eddie George, who retires next June, in all the difficult decisions that have to be made.

It is because we are determined both to have stability and value for money in reformed public services that, just as in the private sector, public sector pay rises must be set at a sustainable rate and justified by productivity. When inflation is around 2 per cent., we should not put our hard-won stability at risk by yielding to inflationary and unaffordable pay settlements, whether in the private or public sector. That would put low inflation and low interest rates in jeopardy and damage the whole economy. To continue to steer a steady course, we must hold firm in our demand for discipline in pay setting across the economy.

Let me give the full detail of the economic forecasts. I can report that inflation will meet our target of 2½ per cent. this year. We now forecast inflation to be 2¾ per cent. next year and 2½ per cent. from 2003 for every subsequent year of our forecast period—having met our inflation target in each of the past five years, we will continue to do so in the future.

With that platform of domestic stability and an expected world trade recovery, to rise next year by an estimated 5½ per cent., we can forecast consumption to grow in 2003 at a sustainable pace of 2¾ to 2½ per cent. with the housing market slowing. We forecast manufacturing output rising by 1¾ to 2¼ per cent., and business investment by 2¾ to 3¼ per cent. to make for more balanced economic growth.

Across the industrialised world, including in Britain, since the further slowdown since this spring forecasts for growth this year have been downgraded. In the euro area, gross domestic product growth is forecast to be 0.8 per cent.; in France, 1 per cent.; in Italy, 0.4 per cent.; in Germany just 0.4 per cent., and in Japan it will be minus 0.9 per cent.

For the UK, GDP growth is forecast to increase by 1.6 per cent. this year. It will rise to 2½ per cent. to 3 per cent next year, rising again to 3 to 3½ per cent. in 2004. Some have argued that Britain is least well placed to cope with global slowdown. In fact, taking growth last year, this year and next year together, Britain is not the weakest but the strongest of the major economies. And while Japan, America and Germany have all been in recession, Britain has now grown consistently in every quarter for the past five and a half years.

As with monetary policy, so our fiscal policy is designed to help sustain growth at every stage in the economic cycle. Our fiscal rules are set for the long term and based on deliberately cautious assumptions, including for revenues. These assumptions, which are independently audited by the National Audit Office, mean that when stock market values fall we take that fully into account, and not just in assessments of this year's current revenues from stamp duty, capital gains tax and corporate tax—we also build such falls fully into revenue projections for future years. The assumptions include not only a cautious view of tax receipts from growth, of oil prices, and of the impact of revenue gains from, for example, anti-fraud strategies, but cautious assumptions about unemployment, where we claim no social security savings when unemployment is forecast to fall.

From 1997, we also took decisions to freeze spending for the first two years, achieving surpluses of £30 billion; to cut debt from 44 per cent. of GDP to 36 per cent., and then to use the £22 billion spectrum auction to repay even more debt; and regularly to achieve not just a current balance but a large surplus. In each year since 1997, we have met our two fiscal rules, with current surpluses worth a cumulative £58 billion, and debt far below 40 per cent. of national income. With debt interest payments £7 billion a year lower than in 1997, debt interest consumes a smaller share of national income, this year as last year, than at any time since 1915. So while some have, in the past, criticised this long-term and deliberately cautious approach, we are, with current surpluses and historically low debt, able at every stage of the economic cycle to meet our fiscal rules, including in the cautious case.

Let me provide the detailed figures. Figures for our current Budget for this year, 2002–03, and for the five years to 2007–08 are minus £6 billion, minus £5 billion, plus £3 billion, plus £5 billion, plus £8 billion and plus £10 billion. So we meet our golden rule over the cycle—not just achieving a balance but with an estimated surplus at £46 billion. We meet the golden rule on the cautious case, too. Taking the full economic cycle into account, the current surplus for each year is forecast to be 0.2 per cent. of GDP this year, 0.3 per cent. next year, then 0.6 per cent., 0.5 per cent., 0.6 per cent. and 0.7 per cent. in the four years to follow.

Our second rule is the sustainable investment rule—that over the cycle net debt should be kept below 40 per cent. of national income. Debt this year is 41 per cent. of GDP in the US. It is rising to 43 per cent. in France, to 45 per cent. in Germany, to 54 per cent. in the euro area, to 70 per cent. in Japan and it is almost 100 per cent. in Italy. I can report to the House that, in Britain, net debt this year and in future years will be at 31 per cent. this year, then 32.1 per cent., 32.4 per cent., 32.6 per cent., 32.7 per cent. and 33 per cent. So we will comfortably meet our sustainable investment rule, and we shall do so over the cycle, and in every year.

Our commitment to meeting these fiscal rules is not just for this year and this economic cycle, but for the long term, so I am also publishing today a report that examines the sustainability of Britain's fiscal position

decade by decade, and compares our position with those of other countries. It shows that if we take account of population change, and the cost of ageing to public spending, the British fiscal position in this period is sustainable, and in a strong long-term position compared with those in other countries.

I have said that our fiscal framework is designed not only so that we make the right decisions when the world economy is growing, but so that it is robust so that at all times we meet our fiscal rules. An alternative approach has been put: that, instead of our holding firm to this long-term course, this stage of the economic cycle would be the time to cut spending and borrowing. I have examined such an approach. It would lead directly to depressed demand, rising unemployment, and the old familiar boom-and-bust approach—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes. It would lead to the old familiar boom-and-bust approach of capital investment in infrastructure that is vitally needed being slashed, and hard-won stability would be put at risk.

In the last world downturn 10 years ago, Britain was bound into such a position, when inflation was high, debt was rising fast and the fiscal disciplines were not being met. But today, in this world downturn, with a foundation of historically low levels of inflation and debt, such an option would be neither competent nor prudent—because, after the decisions we have made, we can comfortably meet our fiscal rules, we can fulfil our spending plans, and we can borrow for investment across the economic cycle.

Figures for net borrowing for this year and for future years are £20 billion, £24 billion, £19 billion, £19 billion and £20 billion—that is, 1.9 per cent., 2.2 per cent., 1.6 per cent., 1.6 per cent., 1.5 per cent. and 1.5 per cent. of gross domestic product. That compares with a deficit 10 years ago of 8 per cent., equivalent to an £80 billion deficit today, and to an average deficit of 6 per cent. in the early 1990s.

I can confirm that this year, and each year in our forecast period, we are well within the Maastricht criteria, and that the Treasury will publish the assessment of the five tests on the euro by June next year.

If we take the full economic cycle into account, net borrowing—which is forecast this year, cyclically adjusted, to be 2.7 per cent. in the United States, 2½ per cent. in France, nearly 3 per cent. in Germany and 7 per cent. in Japan—is, in Britain, just 1.2 per cent. this year, and 1½ per cent., 1.3 per cent. and 1½ per cent. for the next three years.

So, in both monetary and fiscal policy, with the lowest inflation and the lowest long-term interest rates for 40 years, as well as the lowest unemployment for 25 years—and we are able to meet our spending plans in full—the right approach is to hold firm to our long-term course.

As I conclude this section on monetary and fiscal policy, I wish to thank Sir Edward George, whose period of office as Governor of the Bank of England ends in June next year, for the steady hand he has consistently shown in the leadership of the Monetary Policy Committee since we made the Bank of England independent in 1997. In welcoming the announcement this afternoon of the appointment by Her Majesty the Queen of the new Governor of the Bank of England—the deputy Governor for the last five years, Mr. Mervyn King—I can assure the House that the same steady grip will continue. It is that steady hand—that long-term strength of purpose in monetary and fiscal policy—that, in testing times, is keeping our economy stable and growing to meet our long-term goal of prosperity for all, and we will do nothing to put that steady approach and our hard-won stability at risk.

If stability is the precondition for economic progress, enterprise is its driving force. And Britain today is challenged by a long-term global restructuring of industry—low value-added production shifting from the highly industrialised to the industrialising countries; competitive advantage in manufacturing and services increasingly coming from high value-added technology-driven products.

In the next wave of globalisation, which is now upon us, it is the flexibility of our product, capital and labour markets, the strength of our science base, the level of British research and development and the scale and dynamism of knowledge transfer from our universities to business that will drive our productivity growth and thus future prosperity.

Building on the independence of our competition authorities, the surest route to British companies becoming global champions is to extend competition and open up new markets at home. The public sector must also meet this test, and the investment that we make must be matched by continuing reform. First, in central Government contracts worth £14 billion a year, the Office of Government Commerce will maximise competition and encourage bids from the widest range of companies, small as well as large. Secondly, the Office of Fair Trading will scrutinise proposed public sector regulations to assess their competitive effects. Thirdly, we will use the discipline of the market to deliver value for money through private finance initiative projects worth £30 billion, which will include large-scale regeneration projects, while recognising the limits of markets in areas such as health care, education, defence and policing. Fourthly, to maximise efficiency in dealing with the Government's own businesses, we are announcing today the creation of a new shareholder executive.

In January, we will receive and respond to the Higgs report on the role of non-executive directors.

Having cut corporation tax to 30p and having consulted business on further corporate tax reform, we are considering detailed proposals to reform the tax treatment of capital assets, the use of losses and of trading and investment companies. To stop tax avoidance, measures announced today will root out abuse of the VAT regime, and we will be tightening rules governing employee benefit trusts, industrial building allowances and profits on sales of extended warranties.

I turn to measures to help small and medium-sized businesses. Following our cut in small business corporation tax to 19 per cent. and the cut in the starting rate from 10 per cent. to zero, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is today announcing the extension of eligibility to the small firms loan guarantee scheme to include businesses with turnovers of up to £3 million a year in a wider range of sectors. Some 400,000 businesses in all are now eligible.

Following our deregulatory measures for flat-rate payment of VAT—under which, from April, 650,000 small businesses are no longer required to report on each

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

VAT transaction—the pre-Budget report will consult small businesses on extending the scheme. Following the exemption of 200,000 firms from the requirement of a statutory audit, we will consult next year on the same deregulation for medium-sized firms.

To help small and medium-sized firms export and build modern manufacturing strength, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is also ensuring that from today the Manufacturing Advisory Service will extend to every region of the country; and in response to concerns about rising insurance costs, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is undertaking a formal review of the operation of employers' liability insurance.

To build stronger local economies in each region and to devolve decision making out of Whitehall, in the north-west, east midlands and west midlands we are devolving business support services from Whitehall to the regions, and in the north-east, north-west, south-east and east, we are devolving to the regions management of the skills budgets.

Because the enterprise culture that we want to see starts in our classrooms, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is following the Davies report, announcing, over three years, £75 million to promote education in enterprise in our schools and colleges. To encourage local initiatives in enterprise, we are consulting on allowing local authorities to keep additional rates income from the creation of new businesses in their area.

To match the proposed greater flexibility in the planning system with measures to increase the affordability and numbers of houses, the Deputy Prime Minister is publishing the communities plan in January.

For high unemployment areas, where the answer is more economic activity and more enterprise as the route to more jobs, we are today, jointly with the Small Business Service, publishing details of 2,000 new enterprise areas, in which, following state aids clearance which we expect in January, not only will we abolish from Budget day stamp duty for all business property transactions in these areas and, with the 25 per cent. community investment tax credit, cut the cost of investing in these areas, but we will give local authorities powers to relax requirements for detailed planning permission. In pilot projects in high unemployment areas, we will test a more intensive approach, estate by estate, of interviews, training and job search services, matched by benefit sanctions so that we can help the long-term unemployed back into work.

I have two further announcements on business taxes. From 1 January, we will abolish all royalty taxes on North sea oil and gas. Following the consultation that I began in my last Budget on the future of bingo tax on player stakes and whether to replace it with a tax simply on bingo companies' profits, I am sure that my decision— having covered all the numbers in this area— to abolish in the Budget bingo duty will be welcomed on both sides of the House.

Our charity tax reliefs are worth an additional £2 billion a year, and I can announce today that we will extend for one more year the Government supplement on payroll giving. To match our initiatives on giving with initiatives encouraging volunteering, the Home Secretary and I will consult business on a new corporate volunteering initiative. Based on the success of the United States Americorps, we will pilot a financial scheme to help British young volunteers from lower-income backgrounds take a year out after school to undertake community service.

We also have a commitment to protect the environment for future generations, so we are publishing today a detailed paper setting out our approach to the environment. We will consult on what will be a revenue-neutral proposal to raise the landfill levy by £3 per tonne per year from 2005–06. On environmentally based fuels, I can also announce that, for bioethanol road fuel, we will reduce the duty rate by 20p per litre.

The modern route to competitiveness also demands that Britain's most innovative companies work ever more closely with Britain's enterprising research universities. Today, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is beginning a review of Government support for innovation, and she and I have asked the former editor of the *Financial Times*, Mr. Richard Lambert, to examine how, building on our research and development tax credit and the university challenge and higher education innovation funds, the long-term links between British business and British universities can be strengthened to the benefit of the whole British economy.

Since 1997, the new deal has been helping the young, lone parents and many disabled people back into work. The priority now is to focus, too, on how we help young people and adults to move up the skills ladder. I can therefore announce that we will use the remaining surplus from the windfall tax and, at a cost of £130 million, extend to a quarter of local learning and skills council areas the new employer training pilots, in which the Government support wage and training costs in return for employers providing time off so that employees can get proper training.

To spearhead what I believe the whole country wants—the expansion of modern apprenticeships so that nearly a third of young people are covered by 2004—a new modern apprenticeship taskforce will be headed by someone who knows a great deal about training and skills, the chairman of Manchester United football club and chief executive of Centrica, Sir Roy Gardner. In addition, following the success of our new university for industry, with half a million students already, and talks with the banks, we are now going to consult in detail on how we expand training and management courses for small businesses.

We will also continue the expansion of work permits for managed migration, which was begun by the Home Secretary. He and I are extending the highly skilled migrant programme, and through a new unit we will help small firms seeking to recruit skilled workers from overseas.

Our policy is to combine enterprise with fairness. To continue to make work pay more than benefits, we are, from April, extending the principle of the working families tax credit to single adults and couples aged 25 and over without children. Couples with wages of less than £280 a week, or £14,000 a year, and single people with wages of less than £10,500 a year will stand

to receive more money from the new working tax credit, taking forward our belief that an enterprising economy and a fair society advance together.

A flexible, efficient labour market must not only promote employment but be fair to parents. Next month, in a joint Department of Trade and Industry-Treasury report, we will publish new proposals for enabling parents to make real and effective choices on balancing work and family life.

Building on our rise, from April, in maternity pay to £100 a week, the first ever paternity and adoption pay, the new tax credits that we are introducing and the first ever national child care strategy, we will consider further reforms: first, new tax and national insurance incentives so that we can expand employer supported child care; secondly, paying the child care credit for approved home child care by carers who are not already childminders; and, thirdly, increasing flexibility in parental time off, including giving fathers time off to attend antenatal care.

Our goal—stability and prosperity for all—means also fulfilling our goals to tackle child and pensioner poverty. Following last week's social security uprating, the starting level for the new child tax credit, taken with child benefit and now to be paid direct to the mother, will be £1,400 a year for those with incomes below £50,000; between £800 and £1,400 a year, for those with incomes of £50,000 to £58,000; and for 2 million of our lower income families, £2,800 for the first child and £4,800 for a two-child family as the child tax credit, based on support for all and most support for those who need it most, becomes the most powerful weapon for tackling family poverty.

That same progressive principle underlines our proposal that all children have a child trust fund that builds up year by year to be drawn upon at the age of 18. We are now proceeding to detailed discussions with a range of providers—the banks, building societies and friendly societies.

Now that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has also announced the pension rise next April from £75.50 to £77.45, and to £79.40 at least by 2004, the Government can also announce the levels of the new pension credit. From next October, instead of penalising modest savings and small work pensions, it will reward savings.

In the typical constituency of Members of the House, 7,000 pensioner households will benefit. That is couples with total incomes of £200 a week or less, and single elderly people with £139 a week or less. They stand to benefit from what is £2 billion extra that is being paid out in pensions. Let me give the House the figures: a pensioner couple with income of £150 a week will receive £21.50 a week extra. That is £1,100 more a year. On an income of £160 a week, it is £17.50 a week or £900 a year. With an income of £170 a week, it is £13.50 a week or £700 a year. A single pensioner with £110 a week will receive £11.60 a week, or £600 a year on top of their pension rises. For 5 million pensioners, this will be the biggest increase in pensions since the old age pension was introduced. I can also announce that the minimum income guarantee for single pensioners will be £102.10 a week as we seek security and dignity in retirement for every single pensioner in our country.

When, next month, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions publishes the Government's Green Paper on pensions, this will include our proposals to simplify the tax treatment of pensions. I can confirm that the tax-free lump sum payment to retirees will remain. Existing tax reliefs for pension contributions for employees, the self-employed and employers will also remain.

I have two more announcements to make. Because we have built sound foundations of low debt and low inflation and are today meeting our fiscal rules, we have rejected the view that we should cut back our spending plans at home and abroad. So I can not only confirm that we will fund our planned investments: by 2006, there will be £8 billion more a year for local authorities; £15 billion more a year for education; £63 billion more a year for public services; and by 2008, for health alone, there will be £41 billion more a year to be paid for by our national insurance rise—all to be matched with reform.

But we can also, amid global uncertainty, do more to meet our international obligations. It is right in the new figures presented today, consistent with past Treasury practice, to set aside to meet our international defence responsibilities a provision of £1 billion to be drawn on if necessary. We must not only meet the global security challenge; there is today not only a new imperative but, I believe, a new opportunity to meet the global poverty challenge.

In the last five years, through the Prime Minister's Africa initiative and the tireless work of the International Development Secretary, Britain has spearheaded the fight for debt relief and social justice for the poorest countries. I can tell the House that having already agreed $62 billion of debt relief for 26 countries, our aim is now $100 billion for the 38 countries in total that stand to benefit from the cancellation of debt. I thank all Members on both sides of the House and all churches, faith groups and non-governmental organisations in our constituencies for their tremendous work.

But because at this critical moment we must move forward, I have held discussions over recent days with Finance Ministers from America, France, Germany, Italy and other European countries, as well as with the heads of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. I can inform the House that Britain is now proposing a new international development finance facility, with public finance leveraged up by long-term international commitments, so that we can raise the amount of development aid for the years to 2015, with a step change from $50 billion a year to $100 billion a year, so that we can meet by 2015 the millennium development goals, including that poverty be halved, that child mortality be reduced by two thirds, and that every single child has the right to primary education.

Having written as chairman of the International Monetary and Finance Committee to all fellow Finance Ministers, and to the World Bank and the United Nations, I can tell the House that we will, as a Government, be prepared to provide a British commitment to help underpin that plan. The Secretary of State for International Development and I are now asking other countries to join with us. I believe that all parties in this House will wish to support this British initiative for global justice, so that we not only win the fight against terrorism, but win the peace.

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

In conclusion, we have been tested by world events and have resolved to steer a steady course. That steady strength of purpose will continue, and we will honour our commitments to invest in public services, to advance enterprise and fairness and to meet and master the global challenges. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I begin by drawing attention to my declaration in the register and express my gratitude to the Chancellor for advance sight of part of his statement, blank pages and all—a total of eight minutes of it.

I start on a note of consensus. I welcome what the Chancellor said in his closing remarks about the relief of global poverty. He said that he welcomed the support that that would receive from all quarters of the House, and he was absolutely right. We support those measures.

I must congratulate the Chancellor on something else. Up to now, he has been overshadowed by the Prime Minister, but at last he has come into his own. He is being paid the supreme accolade of having a song dedicated entirely to him. It is written by Kenny Jones and Robert Hart. *[Interruption.]* The song is released later this week, and I can give the House a preview. *[Interruption.]* It is called "Mr. Brown, You're Robbing Me" and its lyrics include the lines:

"Giving with one hand, taking with the other.
Shatter your dreams. Then you run for cover".

But the Chancellor has not been able to run for cover today. This is a moment of humiliation for him. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chancellor was heard and the right hon. and learned Gentleman has to be heard.

Mr. Howard: I quite understand, Mr. Speaker, if Labour Members do not want to listen to this.

The Chancellor was forced to admit that his forecasts on growth were wrong; his forecasts on revenue were wrong; his forecasts on borrowing were wrong; and his forecasts on his deficit were wrong. These are the downgraded forecasts of a downgraded Chancellor. For weeks on end, he and his spin doctors have been trawling around looking for alibis. In the words of the *Financial Times*, he has been "rehearsing his excuses".

Everyone is to blame for the fact that the Chancellor got his forecasts wrong except the Chancellor himself. In Thursday's *Financial Times* he blamed it on the fall in world trade between 2000 and 2001, but in his Red Book, at the time of his Budget forecasts, he said that world trade was estimated to have contracted in 2001 and grown only slowly in 2002. At the CBI and in the House last week he said that we are seeing the sharpest contraction in world economic growth since 1974, and he is wrong about that too. We had world growth of 2.2 per cent. in 2001, and the rate is expected to be 2.8 per cent. in 2002, but in the early 1990s we had three years when world growth averaged just 1 per cent. a year.

The Red Book made it clear that independent forecasters took a much more realistic view of prospects than did the Chancellor. His central forecast for 2002 was for growth of 2¼ per cent., but independent forecasters said that it would be 1.9 per cent., and so did the OECD just eight days after the Budget. What were those independent forecasters telling the Chancellor at the time?

"Economists were surprised by the strength of the forecasts",

noted *The Independent*. Growth projections in the next year or two were "very ambitious", said Deutsche Bank. "It is not prudent," said HSBC economists. Everyone knew about this—except, apparently, the Chancellor. Indeed, far from heeding any of that independent advice, the Chancellor increased his forecast for growth in 2003 and for longer term trend growth. He thought that everyone else was wrong and he was right.

Today the Chancellor announced a borrowing figure of £20 billion for next year. Does not that demonstrate how dramatic is the deterioration in the public finances? His forecasts for borrowing over five years have risen from £30 billion in last year's Budget, to £66 billion in last year's pre-Budget report, to £72 billion in this year's Budget and to over £100 billion for the next five years.

The Prime Minister looks surprised; the figures obviously take him unawares. We know that the Red Book is not his favourite reading but he ought to take a little more interest. There they sit—what a shambles, what a shower. "Brown and Blair, the posturing pair." They are very good at taxing the people of this country; they are very good at spending the people's money; they are very good at wasting the people's money and they are very bad at delivering the improvements that the people want.

The Chancellor said that none of that matters as long as borrowing balances over the cycle, but will he comment on the view of the Ernst and Young item club that half the expected revenue shortfall for this year could be structural rather than cyclical? Will he comment on the view of the *Financial Times* that he took "the most unusual years" as the basis of his calculations, something that the newspaper says "seems daft"? What is more, he cannot even say when his much vaunted cycle starts and ends. When I ask him about that he refers me to the Red Book, but the Red Book says that these things are very difficult to judge. It says that the start date for the cycle is provisional and that it is an assumption. Why on earth has the Chancellor spent the past five years claiming that his fiscal rules are rock solid when he cannot even tell us the start date of the cycle on which they depend?

Is not the end of the cycle even harder to predict, and is not that rather convenient for the Chancellor? Does he agree with the National Institute of Economic and Social Research that the current cycle will end early next year or early in 2004 and that he will not then be able to balance future deficits against past surpluses? That seemed to be the Treasury's view in the spring.

Is the Chancellor planning to do what has been suggested and try to make the cycle last longer? Why did the Treasury brief the press, first, that the cycle was about to end and then that it would end as late as March 2005? He told the House last week that the Government's fiscal policy

"can adjust to the economic cycle".—[*Official Report*, 18 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 388.]

Is not the truth that he is trying to adjust the economic cycle to suit his fiscal policy? What does he say to the national institute, which said of his golden rule:

"You can already smell the fudge being cooked up in Great George Street"?

What of the Chancellor's sustainable investment rule? If he had not, Enron-style, put £100 billion of his liabilities off the balance sheet, public sector debt would already have reached the 40 per cent. limit in his own rule. Will he confirm that the extra borrowing he has announced today takes us over that limit? Is not a black hole now emerging in the public accounts—a hole entirely of the making of this Chancellor of the Exchequer?

As we have constantly pointed out, the growth of public spending under the present Government is far faster than the growth in the economy. Is not the heart of the problem that the Chancellor is following his present course because without reform, his spending is not leading to the improvements to the public services that we all want? His only answer now is to spend more. How far he has come from his view in 1997, when Labour's manifesto stated:

"The level of public spending is no longer the best measure of the effectiveness of government".

By spending more without reform, he has locked himself on an unsustainable course, and if spending keeps rising faster than the growth rate of the economy, he will have to put up taxes again.

There were, as usual, plenty of promises on the public services in the Chancellor's statement, but every year he makes those promises and every year he breaks them. The Government are already taking almost £40 a week more in tax for every man, woman and child in the country. Yet while spending is indeed up on the NHS, patients are waiting longer in accident and emergency departments, and now, for the first time, there are more bureaucrats than beds. Although spending on law and order is up, crime and the fear of crime are on the increase—street crime has gone up by 31 per cent. in the past year. Although spending is indeed up on education, we were told yesterday that reading standards in our primary schools have actually declined in the past two years, and one in every four children leaves primary school unable to read, to write or to count properly. In fact, the Government have failed or are failing 40 per cent. of the targets that the Chancellor set in 1998, and 75 per cent. of those he set two years later. Every year he makes those promises and every year he breaks them.

We shall study with care what the Chancellor said about pensions, but it is a great pity that he did not answer the questions which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition put to the Prime Minister, but which the Prime Minister was so palpably unable to answer. Why does the Chancellor not start by getting the basics right—by encouraging people to save for their pensions, rather than discouraging them? How has his £5 billion a year pensions tax helped those who want to save for their retirement?

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Pay for the rich and the gap will get bigger.

Mr. Howard: Will the Chancellor say also whether any provision has been made for—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Campbell, please be quiet.

Mr. Howard: Will the Chancellor say what provision he has made for public sector pay rises? Is it not the case that the Government have been in a complete mess and muddle on that issue, with the Chancellor, the Deputy Prime Minister and other Ministers all contradicting each other by the hour? This week, the Prime Minister entered the fray. On Monday, he was indulging his thespian fantasies, trying to play Margaret Thatcher. Well, I know Margaret Thatcher, and this Prime Minister is no Margaret Thatcher. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

In the statement, where was the announcement of action to reduce the burdens on business that the Government have imposed? Are not those burdens stifling the wealth creation on which we all depend? Does not yesterday's news that business investment has suffered the sharpest fall for 35 years—a fall significantly greater than that in Germany or the United States—represent a devastating vote of no confidence in the Chancellor and his policies?

What does the Chancellor have to say about the causes for concern in the UK economy, such as savings? We are now saving less than we have practically ever saved before. Borrowing is at record levels, and house prices are rising at an unsustainable rate. The newly appointed Governor of the Bank of England is now warning of the risk of a large negative demand shock at some point in the future. There are concerns about the world scoreboard of competitiveness, where we have been relegated from the top 10; about productivity growth, which has halved; about business investment, which has now fallen for seven quarters in a row; about the trade deficit, which we have run nearly every single month for five years; about manufacturing, where 15,000 jobs were lost in September alone and half a million since Labour came to office; and about the stock market, which has fallen disproportionately in comparison with the United States, hitting people with savings, pensions and mortgages. Does the Chancellor agree with *The Independent*, which said last week that he should face up to the severe imbalances in the economy? We have seen no sign of that today.

This is a Chancellor who clung like King Canute to his economic forecasts in the face of all the evidence. Today's statement shows him to have been wrong on all counts. His fiscal rules are not as rigorous as he claimed, and he has missed the very targets that he described as cautious and prudent. How mortifying that he, of all Chancellors, should have got it so badly wrong. On top of all that, we have still not seen the improvements in public services that he promised. Has not the time come for an end to the policy of taxing and spending and failing? Does the Chancellor not think that the people of this country deserve better?

Mr. Gordon Brown: The shadow Chancellor is making exactly the same economic policy mistakes as those made by the Conservative Government and every previous shadow Chancellor. He said that our spending is unsustainable and tried to say that the national insurance tax rise should not go ahead. He refuses to match our spending on the public services, but his solution is to cut spending this year, next year and in future years. Cutting spending during a world downturn would depress demand, put up unemployment and put stability at risk. His colleagues have said that he would

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continue to spend on the Home Office and on defence, so the major spending cuts that he proposed would hit the health service and education. He must tell us which schools and hospitals, and how many teachers, nurses and doctors would lose out as a result. Like his party, he is making exactly the same economic policy mistakes that the Conservatives made in the early 1990s.

We will take no lectures from a shadow Chancellor who was Employment Secretary in the early 1990s. Inflation is 2 per cent. in this country, but under him, it was 10 per cent. Interest rates are 4 per cent., but under him, they were 15 per cent. The deficit is 1 per cent., but under him it was 8 per cent. Unemployment is below 1 million but, worst of all, during his term as Employment Secretary, it was above 2 million. We will therefore take no lectures from the Conservative party.

It is not only me who is criticising the shadow Chancellor's record, but the current leader of the Conservative party. In *The Sunday Telegraph*, 6 October 2002, the leader of the Conservative party talked about the economic mistakes of the shadow Chancellor when in government in the 1990s. "Businesses," he said,

"went to the wall. We broke our pledge on taxes, there was negative equity in homes."

This is the current leader of the Conservative party talking about the work of the current shadow Chancellor. He continued:

"The public felt hurt. Then we lectured them, and we seemed arrogant."—

[Interruption.]

The Opposition do not like it because it is true.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not like it either. The Chancellor must answer the questions that he was asked—*[Interruption.]* Order. Divisions within the Conservative party are nothing to do with me and nothing to do with the Chancellor in the Chamber.

Mr. Brown: When the shadow Chancellor refers to his record in the early 1990s, let us look at what he is proposing today. First, on—*[Interruption.]*

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have called the Chancellor back to the Dispatch Box. There is only one Speaker in the Chamber.

Mr. Brown: First of all, the right hon. and learned Gentleman says that we should not have gone ahead with the ACT dividend tax credit. Let me remind the Conservative party that it cut it by half during its period in office. Then he said that we should be concerned about burdens on business. I have the report of the World Economic Forum from which he was quoting. It says that the improvement in the UK's position is particularly remarkable with its jump from seventh to third this year. It is the Conservatives who must look at their record on regulation.

As for the burden on small business, we are removing the burden on small businesses of having to account for every item of VAT. We are removing the audit requirement, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman should have noticed in the pre-Budget report the consultation that is now being carried out on all the other items.

On the question of public services, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman also raised, does he not know that literacy and numeracy results, A-level results and the numbers of people who are able to go to university are the best that have been recorded in this country?

As for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's other points—[Hon. Members: "More, more."] As for his other points—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must have order in the House.

Mr. Brown: As for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's other points about manufacturing, it is growing in the third quarter of this year and business investment is 25 per cent. up on 1997, but we are facing exactly the same problems that businesses are facing around the world.

As for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's further point on crime, he should recognise that crime is down under this Government. As for his point on savings ratios, he should understand that we have the lowest savings ratio—[Hon. Members: "Yes."] The lowest savings ratio was recorded in 1988, under the last Conservative Government.

As for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's points about the downturn in world activity, let me point out to him that in 1991, the world economy was growing by 0.9 per cent. in the G7 countries and in 2001, unfortunately, it was growing by 0.6 per cent. That is the point—in far worse world conditions, Britain was first in and last out in the last recession. It is now growing and has a stable economy, and we can meet our public spending plans and have the lowest inflation and interest rates for 25 years and the lowest unemployment. That is a record that Labour Members are proud of.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): At least the Chancellor, unlike the Conservative party, knows how much he wants to tax and spend. The problem for him is that he is running out of money and ideas. It is noticeable that while he used to claim credit for everything that was going right, he now ducks any blame for anything that is going wrong.

The announcement made today involved the Chancellor in doubling borrowing to more than £100 billion over the next five years, compared to his plans in the Budget. His borrowing to cover a short-term problem is one thing—the right response to a temporary setback—but his Budget will go bust in the long term unless he tackles the collapse in British industry and stops relying on an unsustainable boom in consumer debt to keep his growth figures up.

Does the Chancellor even recognise that UK business investment has now crashed faster than in Japan, the United States, France, Italy and even, on the latest figures, Germany? It has crashed faster than at any time since records began and his latest figures today predict that it will stay lower. Even the Government's own investment in schools and hospitals is 25 per cent. below the level that they planned.

Those are not world problems. Does he know that our share of inward investment into Europe has collapsed from 28 per cent. to only 16 per cent. in a mere four years? Those are not the problems of the world economy.

Is the Chancellor proud of a manufacturing recession that is the deepest since 1981 and the longest since 1945? Is he proud of the fact that 500,000 people have lost manufacturing jobs in this country when such employment has increased in the European Union? Those are not world problems.

Is it not true that record household debt is the only reason that UK growth has held up? Does the Chancellor agree with the Bank of England that increasing debt and booming house prices are not sustainable? They are not the basis for sustainable long-term plans for investment in education and health.

Today, the Chancellor has again provided further tax complication and red tape for business. He has no new ideas for tackling the exchange rate problem that British business faces, the recession in manufacturing and the collapse of investment in this country that is far greater than that of our competitors.

What exactly is the Chancellor's assessment of the additional risk from any war with Iraq? He said that he would have to make such an assessment. We are not simply considering a world downturn. The scale of our manufacturing problems is unique to Britain and it has been engineered in 11 Downing street by meddling, red tape, tax complication and a lack of action on the exchange rate.

Unlike the Conservatives, we do not believe that the Government should cut education and health spending. *[Interruption.]* The Conservative party does not believe in anything. It has no policy on tax or on spending. Indeed, it has no policies at all, so we will take no nonsense from Conservative Members.

The Chancellor needs to mend his ways and stop passing the buck. He must cut red tape and simplify the tax system. He has to tackle the exchange rate issue or devise an alternative solution. If he does not, his long-term plans for investment in health and education cannot be realised. He risks that today with his complacent approach of refusing to accept that a single problem in the British economy can be laid at his door.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for asking about the direction and balance of the economy. However, he must bear it in mind that our economy is stable and growing, while other economies have been in recession. He cannot claim that manufacturing job losses have not hit the German, French, Italian and other economies in Europe. Unemployment in Germany has again increased beyond 4 million, and the German economy is barely growing.

The hon. Gentleman cannot disguise the fact that the slowdown and contraction of industrial activity have been happening throughout the G7 countries. A feature of that is the IT slowdown that has occurred in America and Japan as well as in Europe. That is a major reason for our difficulties because business investment in IT was a critical factor in the late 1990s. He cannot therefore ignore the world factors and the global restructuring of industrial activity.

On the balance of the UK economy, as I said earlier, we expect industrial production and manufacturing output to increase and business investment to recover next year when the housing market slows down and the pace of consumer demand is sustainable. However, I remind the hon. Gentleman that business investment is 25 per cent. higher than in 1997, and that it increased from 11 per cent. to 14 per cent. of GDP. That was partly because we changed the dividend tax credit, cut corporation tax and rewarded corporations for their investments.

The hon. Gentleman complained about the domestic balance of the British economy. We are taking steps to consult about more investment incentives for business. We shall continue to do that, and he should support us.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I associate myself with the Chancellor's congratulations to Sir Edward George, the Governor of the Bank of England, on his wise stewardship of the Bank and the Monetary Policy Committee over the years. I also welcome his worthy successor, Mervyn King.

We accept that this country cannot escape the consequences of a downturn in a global economy. My right hon. Friend should not listen to the Jeremiahs in the Conservative party. The shadow Chancellor not only knew Margaret Thatcher, but, like a lap dog, implemented her disastrous policies. May I suggest that the Chancellor stands fast on the macro-economic objectives that have provided high employment, low mortgage rates, a stable environment and, more than anything, have utilised the previously unused talents of young people?

Mr. Brown: I agree about using the talents of young people. I hope that my hon. Friend will welcome the work that we are doing, especially my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, on modern apprenticeships and training, not just college and university training, but industrial and workplace training for young people.

On the monetary and fiscal rules, I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House will agree that the monetary and fiscal rules that were established after 1997—rules that apply over the cycle, but rules that are disciplined and which must be met—are the best rules for the British economy. I hope that the House will agree that by keeping to those rules, not only shall we establish credibility, but we shall be able to keep interest rates lower than they would otherwise be.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): I add my congratulations to Sir Eddie George and welcome the appointment of Mervyn King.

Will the Chancellor stop pretending that his present situation is the result of some careful Keynesian counter-cyclical planning on his part, when in fact he has come to the House to talk his way through the collapse of those absurd forecasts that he gave us only six months ago, at the time of his Budget? When he looks back, as he keeps doing, will he realise that he runs the risk of adding his name to the list of Chancellors who, first of all, gave way to political pressure to increase public spending, then claimed that it would all be affordable by making ridiculous estimates of future

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growth of the economy, then pretended that there was no problem when unexpected borrowing suddenly surged, and claimed that that could all be accommodated, and then did nothing effective on fiscal policy until the problem turned into a crisis?

The mistakes of which the Chancellor speaks are the mistakes made by Chancellors in the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s, and not repeated by the Major Government, which is why he inherited a stable economy already achieving growth with low inflation. That economy is now being sustained by a housing boom, household debt and public spending at an unsustainable rate. Will he come back to the House, recognising the existence of the problems to which he pretends to be blind, and present some substantial measures that might tackle them and restore stability to the British economy?

Mr. Brown: I am always interested to hear the words of the former Chancellor, but they would carry more weight if he had not left debt at 44 per cent. of GDP and forced us to cut it, and if he had not left an inflationary problem that had to be dealt with by raising interest rates in the first days after we came into government. I must therefore look at his record in the context of high debt, his failure to make the Bank of England independent, and the high inflation that he left us. *[Interruption.]* That rising inflation had to be met by rising interest rates when we came into government.

On the right hon. and learned Gentleman's comments about forecasts, our forecast was 2 to 2.5 per cent. The eventual outcome that we are forecasting now is 1.6 per cent. That is a long way from Conservative Governments in the early 1990s saying that there was no recession, when there was a recession.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. Many of us who have been in the House for a wee while remember the conditions in which other economic difficulties were confronted by Governments. Given the present state of our economy and the health of our public finances, we do not need to take any lectures from the Opposition. However, I point out to my right hon. Friend that manufacturing industry looks for more assistance than it has received this afternoon. I should like to think that by the time of the Budget we will have had a proper review of the climate change levy, and I look towards an indication of a more rational form of carbon taxation in relation to energy. Finally, will my right hon. Friend try and hurry up some of the officials in his Department so that they complete the long-awaited review of the taxation of foreign nationals in this country?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The review on foreign nationals is continuing and we shall publish the documentation later.

On my hon. Friend's main points about manufacturing—I understand his long-term interest in the matter as Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, and his constituency interest as well—the measures that we have taken include a research and development tax credit to help future manufacturing, 100 per cent. capital allowances, and venture capital funds in the regions, which are of assistance to manufacturing and therefore to investment. The main contribution that we can make with regard to the costs of investment for industry is to keep interest rates and inflation low.

The issue for us is not that we stand by and do nothing when manufacturing is in difficulty; we have done what we can in terms of capital allowances and investment allowances, and of providing a stable macro-economic environment to help manufacturing industry. Of course, the changes in manufacturing industry are taking place right across the industrial world. So far as the climate change levy is concerned, we froze it this year.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): The Chancellor announced the endorsement of his pre-Budget assumptions by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Will he confirm that this is the same Comptroller and Auditor General who threw out his claim that Network Rail was a private sector company? Is it not typically disingenuous of the right hon. Gentleman to take credit for the former but to take no account of the latter?

Mr. Brown: The Office for National Statistics—

Mr. Fallon: The Auditor General.

Mr. Brown: Yes, but the Office for National Statistics makes the recommendations about off and on-balance-sheet matters. We have operated in exactly the same way as the previous Conservative Government did. If the shadow Chancellor is accusing us of Enron-style activity, which is a suggestion of corruption rather than of getting things wrong—*[Interruption.]* He is saying that Enron is not an example in which corruption was involved. If he is accusing us of such activity, he must also accuse his own Government, because we are operating under exactly the same rules. With regard to Network Rail—the case in point regarding the National Audit Office—we rigorously pursued the recommendations of the Office for National Statistics. Those are the same as the recommendations of the EUROSTAT office, and we have acted in accordance with all those rules. The same rules applied under the last Government.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Chancellor will hardly be astonished if I press him on what he said in his opening statement about the unfolding events in Iraq. What exactly are the assumptions about oil prices? Will he also clarify the reference that he made towards the end of his statement to £1 billion for terrorist contingencies? Is that supposed to cover a military operation against Iraq? Are there not two jokers in this pack? The lesser may be the cost of the war; the greater will be the consequence for oil prices of the middle east going up in flames. It would be sheer folly—in terms of all sorts of things, not least the economy—to set the middle east on fire.

Mr. Brown: The setting aside of £1 billion in the reserve is in line with previous practice, and it is to deal with eventualities if or when they arise. I know that my hon. Friend takes a detailed interest in what is happening in the middle east. As he will know, oil prices have risen partly as a result of the uncertainty. They rose

quite high, then they came down a bit. A great deal of the activity surrounding oil prices is related to that uncertainty. Our assessments of what oil prices are likely to be are independently audited by the National Audit Office. The price that we assume for oil tax revenues, for example, as well as for economic activity, is the one that is audited by the NAO. I will send my hon. Friend details of that.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Does the Chancellor deny that, at the time of his Budget last April, many Conservative Members told him that his growth forecasts were over-optimistic and unreliable? Does he also deny that we have been proved right, and that he has been proved wrong? Why should we now believe his projections for future years? Is it not the case that he has now reverted to his political ancestry of spend, tax and borrow, that he is frantically trying to weaken the European stability pact, and that he has thrown away his capacity to dominate monetary policy? In these circumstances, would it be helpful if I sent him an e-mail giving him an up-to-date telephone number on which he can get in touch with the International Monetary Fund?

Mr. Brown: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was one of the few Keynesians left on the Conservative Benches. Clearly that is not the role that he is playing today. So far as the changes since the Budget in April are concerned, I think that he would agree with me that a stock market fall of 25 per cent. in Britain, and a 40 per cent. fall in France and Germany, are significant events that not even he, with his prescience, could have predicted in April. He must realise that those events have a bearing not only on the value—*[Interruption.]* The shadow Chancellor says that the hon. Gentleman did predict this; I would be very surprised if he had actually done so in practice.

A 25 per cent. stock market devaluation must be taken into account in our calculations of corporate tax, capital gains tax, stamp duty and other matters. That is one change that has taken place since April. On other changes since April, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would have seen the German forecast at that time. Germany was forecasting far higher growth, but growth is now only 0.4 per cent.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I commend my right hon. Friend's plans to devolve the training and skills budget down to regional level, which will be welcomed in the north-west. I also commend his plans to ensure that a third of young people go into modern apprenticeships. May I bring to his attention the excellent schemes going ahead at the BAE Systems training plant in Preston whereby 300 young apprentices are getting excellent apprenticeships, which have recently received an award for excellence? That can act as a model for training and apprenticeships throughout the north-west.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that he takes an interest in the BAE development and the work being done on industrial training. Apprenticeships were virtually dead a few years ago, but there are now 200,000 modern apprenticeships, and that number will continue to rise to 300,000. We believe that it can rise substantially further, but we need to invest in modern apprenticeships and we need to encourage small firms in particular to take an interest. That is the purpose of the modern apprenticeships taskforce, which I hope will have a regional representation, which he seeks.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Among the papers published by the Chancellor today is one on protecting indirect tax revenues. I welcome the fact that it includes detailed information on the extent of oil fraud in Northern Ireland, and I hope that it conveys to Members and the general public here the extent of the revenue loss, which is given as £370 million in 2001.

I draw the Chancellor's attention to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee report published today, entitled "The Impact in Northern Ireland of Cross-Border Road Fuel Price Differentials". Will he look carefully at the report and, in particular, consider the fact that it urges the Government to study and

"implement a separate lower rate of fuel . . . duty in Northern Ireland, by derogation if necessary"?

Will he consider also corporation tax rates and the significant cross-border differential between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which has a distorting effect on investment in Northern Ireland and limits significantly our ability to attract inward investment?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. We have discussed that a number of times, and he kindly brought a delegation to see me and other Ministers on the matter. We understand the scale of the problems of oil fraud in Northern Ireland, cross-border fraud and trafficking, which is why the report has been published today. I look forward to discussing with him what it says and what we can do to take things forward. We share his aim of reducing the revenues that are lost and we are looking for solutions, which we shall discuss with him and the Northern Ireland Administration, once re-established.

On the question of corporation tax relief, I visited Northern Ireland with the Prime Minister and we made a number of proposals to inject additional resources into the Northern Ireland economy. We recognise that there is a long way to go for business to grasp the opportunities that are potentially available, but we shall continue to do what we can. The right hon. Gentleman should consider some of our proposals—for example, the extension of the business loan guarantee scheme—and I look forward to talking to him again about how we can help to expand take-up of some of those schemes in Northern Ireland.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I congratulate the Chancellor on the pension credit. He knows that the minimum income guarantee was much resented by those who had worked hard but received only a small pension that took them above pension credit level. Therefore, they did not get the benefit.

I should like to do the shadow Chancellor's job on that issue, because strangely he left the figures alone. I must press my right hon. Friend on the figures in his speech, because they are too good to be true. I seemed to catch him saying that 5 million people—almost half

[Mr. George Mudie]

the pensioners in the land—will get about £2 billion between them under that benefit. Why did the shadow Chancellor leave those figures alone—out of generosity to my right hon. Friend or because my right hon. Friend deserves double congratulations on those acts?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning the importance of the pension credit. The figures are indeed accurate. We shall ensure that pensioners throughout the country are aware of the benefits available to them, just as we shall make people aware of the child tax credit. I believe that the take-up will be high once people realise the benefits that will flow from this measure. The figure is indeed large—5 million pensioners.

I agree with my hon. Friend about the minimum income guarantee for pensioners, but our first job was to ensure that we did all that we could to eliminate or reduce pensioner poverty. That is why we tried to lift the poorest pensioners, particularly widows in their 80s or over, out of the income support system that existed under the previous Government, with a far higher minimum income guarantee. I am pleased that it is now £102; it has risen by 30 per cent. in real terms since we came into office.

We can now build further. This measure rewards savings—the works pensions and the modest savings that people have. Given that 7,000 households will benefit from the measure, I am sure that hon. Members will want to make all those pensioners who can benefit aware of it.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I compliment the Chancellor on his robust presentation. However, he would expect me to say that I am rather suspicious of its content. He failed to respond properly to the question put by his hon. Friend who chairs the Trade and Industry Committee, the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), about the impact of Government policy on manufacturing industry in particular. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the climate change levy, which damages industry even if it might assist banks, insurance companies and building societies.

Will the Chancellor direct his attention at the red tape, bureaucracy and regulation that he has imposed on British manufacturing industry, because it is making matters harder and harder? He will appreciate my lifelong commitment in this place to manufacturing industry. The Confederation of British Industry, the chambers of commerce and the Institute of Directors are not enamoured with much of what he has done.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful for the first set of remarks from the hon. Gentleman. He is indeed a supporter and defender of manufacturing industry, and throughout the time in which we have been in the House together, he has spoken up for the needs of manufacturing.

The hon. Gentleman must remember that the climate change levy was a revenue-neutral measure as far as business was concerned. We froze the levy this year. We want to meet our environmental commitments nationally and internationally in the long term.

On business taxes, as the hon. Gentleman should know, we reduced corporation tax from 33p to 30p. Small businesses will benefit from that even more this year, with the 19 per cent. rate and the 10 per cent. rate abolished so that the first £10,000 of profit are exempt from tax, so we are doing our best to encourage small businesses.

On manufacturing industry, the research and development credit has been widely welcomed. Equally, the measures that we announced today to expand the advisory service for manufacturing industry in every region, are welcomed too. The hon. Gentleman knows that what manufacturing industry wants most are favourable trading conditions, low interest rates and low inflation. We have low inflation and low interest rates; we want to create favourable trading conditions for that industry.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the Government's achievements and objectives in international development are outstanding in every sense? Could that be why the shadow Chancellor and the former Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), did not say a word about the Government's policies?

Will my right hon. Friend, based on his successes and those of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, continue with those policies, particularly in debt relief, humanitarian aid and fair trading? Will they find themselves in a position, if not today then later, to tell us when we might achieve the United Nations targets?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He has been a lifelong proponent of greater aid and investment in the poorest countries of the world so that we can tackle their poverty. The whole House knows his contribution.

I believe that we can have the support of all parties in the House for the policies that we are now pursuing, and I appreciate the fact that all Opposition parties have said that they wish to support that initiative. Our aim is 0.7 per cent. The initial measures that we are putting forward for a £50 billion increase to £100 billion of development aid by the developed world involves a compact whereby, in return for the developed countries insisting on corruption-free policies for stability, better conditions for trade, which require the Doha talks to have been successful, and a more conducive environment for investment, we should in return be prepared to put in the additional development aid. That is why we are proposing the new international finance facility. I believe that the response from other countries will encourage us to move ahead. I chose to end the pre-Budget statement with international development aid. If we are to tackle the insecurities and inequalities of globalisation, we as developed nations will have to do far more.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Why has the enterprise culture, which the Chancellor inherited, been replaced by one that is dominated by trade union activity, regulations and high taxation, and why in particular has investment collapsed?

Mr. Brown: The enterprise culture is being encouraged in the schools with the measures that we are putting forward today, in high unemployment communities with the 2,000 new enterprise communities, in our work with Young Enterprise, the inner city 100 and all the enterprise agencies, which we have tried to encourage over the past few years. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that, if an enterprise culture can be built in each region and in each community, from the school classroom to the boardroom, it can make a huge difference to the chances of creating businesses and jobs. I should have thought that he would have been at one with us on that.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the robust strength of the economy, despite the uncertainties and difficulties in the rest of the world. What steps have been taken to encourage business investment and innovation, particularly in manufacturing industry?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a member of the Treasury Committee and is extremely interested in that matter. As he knows, the main measures that have been taken over the past few years are the research and development tax credit and the raising of capital allowances for small and medium businesses, but in addition the creation of regional venture capital funds, where the European Union has given approval to go ahead, provides additional funds that are put at the service of business. The university challenge fund and the higher education innovation fund are a means by which to link ideas coming out of universities to the creation of new businesses. In each region, we can see more opportunities for business to benefit from new ideas and new insights. If we are to win in respect of the high value-added, technology-driven products of the future, it must be part of the Government's job to encourage science, innovation and research, and to put that more at the service of successful businesses.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Chancellor knows that he will get support from these Benches on international aid initiatives, but can he confirm that his growth forecasts are down, his borrowing forecasts are up, he has created a bust out of boom in the oil industry and is now trying to repair the damage, and he has scuppered a settlement in the firefighters' dispute because of pressure on the public finances? Given that for five years in a benign international environment he claimed the credit for every single success, is there any measure—even one—that, on reflection, he will want to point to that may have contributed to him being blown off course?

Mr. Brown: On the oil industry, we were right to raise the supplementary corporation tax for an industry that had made very substantial profits, but in return for that we increased investment allowances to 100 per cent. and we have now abolished North sea royalties. The hon. Gentleman's political party opposes the tax rise for North sea oil but has no means of raising revenues for the measures that it is proposing in every other sector. On the economy, I think that he would agree that the Scottish National party could never deliver low inflation, low interest rates, high employment, stable growth and continuing investment in public services.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I congratulate the Chancellor on being open about the downturn in the global economy and the dangers of accelerating the problems were we to cut public spending. I come back to some of the key points in his statement. There are dangers in cutting benefits to the young unemployed who are most marginalized—it is more likely to turn them towards drugs and crime than jobs and prospects. The schemes that have worked have stuck with the most marginalised long term, rather than sought to penalise them short term.

For the past 20 years, the problem for public services has been the absence of real structural investment, rather than a shortage of private tendering. We must be careful about going down that path, and trying to sell to the electorate the virtues of a tax credit in exchange for a pay cut. In relation to the £20 billion of borrowing—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman must conclude his remarks.

Mr. Brown: Long-term youth unemployment reached nearly 500,000 at one stage in the 1980s, but is now around 5,000. My hon. Friend will acknowledge that that is a singular achievement, which was made by giving young people rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Those opportunities involved a lot of expense in training and advisory services, and young people had an obligation to take them up. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that that is the right way to proceed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South is right to say in connection with the PFI that there has been a low level of public investment in our vital public services. We are trying to correct that. However, the need to ensure better value for money and more investment in the short term in our hospitals and schools has required us to use the private finance initiative.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): According to figures from the House of Commons Library, the tax burden next year will be £153,000 million more than it was when Labour came to power. If my calculations are right, that means that on average every man, woman and child in the country will pay £2,600 a year more in tax. Are those figures correct?

Mr. Brown: The figures that we are publishing today show that the tax burden is 37.1 per cent. of national income, which compares with the peak under the Conservatives of 38.9 per cent.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): The House will have enjoyed the shadow Chancellor's efforts at singing, and will wish him a great career on "Pop Idol". He criticised my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for excessive public spending, but the Governor of the Bank of England told the Treasury Committee yesterday that the contribution of public spending to the economy at this point is very important to stability and growth in Britain. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding us of that. Like the rest of us, the shadow Chancellor may wish to thank the Governor of the Bank of England for the work that he has done. However, the Governor pointed out yesterday that the best way forward for the economy is borrowing. That contrasts with the policy of cutting public spending put forward by the shadow Chancellor, who has absented himself from the House.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Why have the Government failed to meet 40 per cent. of the public service agreement targets set in 1998? Why does the Chancellor not recognise that, while failing to meet targets set by independent experts would be disappointing, failing to meet his own requires incompetence on a truly spectacular scale?

Mr. Brown: We met 87 per cent. of the targets in time. Subsequently, we have met another 6 per cent., which means that we have met 93 per cent. of our targets. The hon. Gentleman should congratulate us.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. In the time remaining, I intend to try and call all hon. Members who want to contribute to the debate. However, I urge hon. Members to ask short questions and, perhaps, offer short answers.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson), my right hon. Friend the Chancellor mentioned the benefits of PFI. However, are they not rather short term and illusory? In the medium and long terms, will not PFI be shown to be prohibitive in cost, flawed in concept and intolerable in consequence for taxpayers, citizens and workers in our country? The figures that my right hon. Friend published in the House today show that public projects could be financed in a traditional way. We do not need the PFI. It does not wipe off figures from the public balance sheet.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend, who takes an interest in these matters, should look at some of the public sector projects undertaken without PFI projects. For example, the Jubilee line was two years late and 50 per cent. over budget. That was one example of the many public sector projects that did not work as well as they should have. The lesson that we learn is that it makes sense to use the private sector when one seeks to combine the transferred risk with management expertise in transport, infrastructure and the building of hospitals and schools. After all, private sector companies construct the buildings. The means by which we bind them in and ensure that the buildings are well constructed and managed is the means by which we have secured greater value for money in the public sector.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): With falling investment in both manufacturing and, equally worrying, the service sector, it is evident that a number of the fiscal measures enunciated by the Chancellor a few moments ago, which were said to benefit business, have not been working. May I inquire, in the interests of transparency, whether the Chancellor would be willing to ask the National Audit Office to evaluate the effect that his fiscal measures for business have had, so that we might at least on that occasion see the wood from the trees?

Mr. Brown: We are continuously evaluating the effect of our measures. That is what the pre-Budget and Budget processes are for. But is the right hon. Gentleman against the 30 per cent. corporation tax? Is he against the 3 per cent. cut that we introduced? Is he against the cut in small business tax from 23p to 19p? Is he against the capital gains tax cut from 40p in the pound to 10 per cent., which is helping many companies with business assets? Is he against those measures? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Well, if he thinks they should be evaluated he must have some doubts about their effectiveness. I believe we have proved that those are the right tax cuts for British business.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): As he surveys the circumambient economic gloom, does my right hon. Friend share my relief that we in this country have been prudent enough not to go into the euro, and not to subject the United Kingdom economy to the deflationary pressures of the growth and stability pact? Does he endorse the calls made this week by the Governor of the Bank of England and the United States Treasury Secretary for the European Commission and the Eurozone countries to buck up, reform the system and make the contribution that they should make to economic growth?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend has strong views on these matters. I can remind him of what I said: the assessment of the euro will be made by June next year, and will take all such factors into account.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Earlier this week, the Chancellor berated the Confederation of British Industry and told it to stop whingeing about the likely impact of the extra £8 billion in national insurance contributions. He said that it was the CBI's duty to make its contribution to the NHS, because healthy workers helped their businesses. What has he to say to employers who already fund more than 2 million employees with private medical insurance, which in turn is contributing £390 million in benefit-in-kind taxation to his Exchequer this year? Is it right that they should suffer a double whammy, paying to keep people away from the NHS while at the same time paying tax in the form of additional national insurance payments?

Mr. Brown: But private insurance schemes need the national health service—for accident and emergency treatment, for the training of doctors, for public health and for so many of employees' health needs.

As for business costs in health care, in America many employees cost their employers about $100 a week in health insurance charges. In France the figure is about £60 a week, and in Germany it is about £30 a week. Those are the average social insurance costs. In every industrial country employers are paying in one way or another, while health care costs are going up. I believe

that the national insurance charge for employers is less than anything being paid in France, Germany or America to cover employees for health insurance.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I welcome the Chancellor's statement, which I saw as—in the words of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)—a cunning Keynesian plot to counter the effects of the economic cycle. I admire my right hon. Friend's surefootedness in responding quickly to pressures on huge increases in companies' insurance costs, and look forward to learning the details; but may I contrast that with the absence of any comment on the crisis in university funding? If we do not act quickly, we will further erode the science base, to which my right hon. Friend made an important reference.

Mr. Brown: The inquiry into employers' liability insurance will go ahead under my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I recognise, as he does, the concern that is felt.

As for universities' finance, under the spending review a considerable extra sum, about £1.25 billion—some in association with the Wellcome Trust—is being put into science in the universities, and the rebuilding and modernising of the science base. And as for university funding in general, my hon. Friend may not know that in the spending review we allocated considerable sums to education. The specific allocation for universities will be made in due course.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): From 1 May 1997 until yesterday, the British stock market underperformed the American stock market by 30.24 per cent. Why?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman knows that the balance between the companies involved in the British stock market is quite different from the American stock market. Most of what has happened has been effect of what has been happening to the IT sector. The hon. Gentleman should also know—and this is in reply to the shadow Chancellor's point—that since April there has been a 25 per cent. in the British stock market but a 40 per cent. fall in Germany and France.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The Chancellor gave a figure of 37 per cent. for the proportion of GDP taken in tax. Does expenditure on working families tax credit, which used to be called family credit, count as public spending, or does it reduce the figure? If it is the latter, does that not make nonsense of all the right hon. Gentleman's figures?

Mr. Brown: We use all the internationally agreed assumptions about this. The position adopted by the previous Conservative Government on mortgage tax relief was at odds with the international conventions. I have given a report on this matter to the Treasury Committee and I am happy to pass it to the hon. Gentleman.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Can the Chancellor rule out further rises in personal or business taxation during this Parliament?

Mr. Brown: We made our commitments in our manifesto at the general election that we would not raise the basic rate of tax or the top rate of tax, and we stand by those commitments.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The part of the Chancellor's statement dealing with public investment contained a tantalising reference to the importance of recognising the limits of markets in areas such as health care. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us what he meant by that statement, and has he told the Secretary of State for Health or the Prime Minister?

Mr. Brown: We believe in the national health service, as I hope all right hon. and hon. Members do. That is what I mean about the limits of markets in health care.

Points of Order

5.11 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are shortly to discuss the Health (Wales) Bill, and the Order Paper says that the third report from the Welsh Affairs Committee and the Government's response thereto are relevant. I am sure that they are, but it is also relevant that the Bill has been subject to considerable pre-legislative scrutiny by the Welsh Grand Committee, which consists entirely of Welsh Members, whereas, in theory, members of the Welsh Affairs Committee may be from any part of the United Kingdom and not from Wales. If future Bills relating to Wales are subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by the Welsh Grand Committee, can that be referred to on the Order Paper? It is important that right hon. and hon. Members know that the Welsh Grand Committee plays an important role in the pre-legislative scrutiny of legislation that relates only to Wales.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): The reference is usually to Select Committees, but if there has been an error on this occasion, the matter will be looked into.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will be aware of the need for Members of Parliament to respect each other's parliamentary boundaries. You will also be aware of "Erskine May", page 123, which says that to intimidate a Member in his parliamentary duties by threats is a contempt. Mr. Speaker has been helpful—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the hon. Lady, but this kind of complaint must be issued in writing, so it would be most helpful if she could do that.

Miss McIntosh: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it a different point of order?

Miss McIntosh: May I request that following the written response to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), the Speaker will take into account all instances going back to 1997?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have no doubt that the Speaker will take the necessary steps when he responds to the hon. Member.

Orders of the Day

Health (Wales) Bill

[Relevant documents: The Third Report from the Welsh Affairs Committee, Session 2001/02, on The draft National Health Service (Wales) Bill, HC 959, and the Government's Response thereto, HC 1215, Session 2001/02.]

Order for Second Reading read.

5.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

May I say what a pleasure it is having you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you are a Welsh girl yourself?

The Health (Wales) Bill builds on the reforms introduced in the Government's National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002. In bringing it forward, the Government are supporting the efforts made by the Welsh Assembly to improve the health and well-being of the people of Wales and to strengthen patient power in the health service. It is the first Wales-only Bill to be brought before this House, fresh from and improved by the process of pre-legislative scrutiny carried out not just by Members of this House but by Welsh Assembly Members, as well as by health professionals and patients. As such, it is an historic measure that marks another chapter in the process of constitutional change initiated by the Government with the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales.

The Bill achieves three purposes—

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): May I refer to a general issue that is not in the Bill but relates to the Secretary of State's comment that this is all about patient power? Is he willing to think back to the time when he and others were heading the referendum campaign for a Welsh Assembly? They were saying that, in order to have patient power, they would have a bonfire of the quangos. Can he tell me when that bonfire will happen, as I have not noticed it yet?

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend feels very strongly on these matters, as we all do. As he knows, a number of quangos have been abolished—

Llew Smith: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Peter Hain: I will give way in a minute, but I want to answer my hon. Friend's point by explaining how the Bill achieves the purposes that I set out—including a reference to independent public bodies—with which I do not think he would disagree.

Let us consider, for example, the proposals, first, to establish an independent Wales Centre for Health to disseminate research and provide multi-disciplinary advice and evidence to support decision making, and, secondly to establish Health Professions Wales, a body to quality-assure the training and education of health care professionals. I am sure that my hon. Friend does not think that those two bodies should not be established. I am sure that he supports an independent

Wales Centre for Health providing the necessary research into health needs in his constituency and mine. I am sure that he also agrees with Health Professions Wales, and that he does not think that quality assurance of the training and education of health care professionals should be conducted by a body other than one that has the confidence of those professionals.

Llew Smith: The Secretary of State referred to the abolition of many quangos. Will he accept that there are as many quangos in Wales now as there were when the Welsh Assembly was first set up? Will he also accept that, under the new proposals, there will be even more quangos in the health service than previously?

Peter Hain: I think that my hon. Friend will recall that, when there was tremendous public opposition to quangos in Wales, it was partly because—I would argue that it was exclusively because—they were packed with Conservative place people. Because of that, they were not accountable in any way.

Two independent institutions will be established by the Bill. My hon. Friend has not told me yet whether he agrees with the establishment of a Wales Centre for Health or Health Professions Wales. I am sure that the whole House agrees with that, as all the pre-legislative procedures have endorsed precisely those new independent agencies, because they strengthen the health service in Wales and provide us with a platform for creating a genuinely world-class health service in Wales.

The third purpose—other than establishing an independent Wales Centre for Health, and the Health Professions Wales body—is to reform and strengthen community health councils in Wales and establish a statutory association that will support community health councils and have a performance management role. I am pleased to say that the Bill implements a commitment made in our Welsh manifesto last year to reform the CHCs in Wales to strengthen their role as community watchdogs.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment, and I have placed a bet on him to become a future leader of his party—but that is enough niceness for one day. Can he tell the House what is the total number of public service agreement targets set for the health service in Wales; how many have been met; how many have been missed; and what is he doing about the latter?

Peter Hain: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the debate on Wales. He is an articulate parliamentary performer.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): And he is on your campaign team.

Peter Hain: Indeed, he is on my campaign team. However, his bet is not very welcome, as I am happy doing this job and will do any other job that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would like me to do. The hon. Gentleman is a talented youngster, and it is a shame that the Conservative Front-Bench team is all the less talented for his absence. The Bill does not cover the specific matter that he raised.

In our manifesto, we also pledged to build on the already successful legislative partnership with the Assembly and to continue to enact specific legislation for Wales where appropriate. That is precisely what the Bill does. It is yet another example of a Labour Government working in partnership with a Labour-led Assembly to deliver the means by which the national health service in Wales can be modernised and improved for the benefit of the people of Wales.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The Secretary of State visited the National Assembly on Monday or Tuesday and he heard the complaints from all parties about the narrow gap for Welsh legislation. He has just talked about partnership, but why can we get through only one Welsh Bill a Session? This Bill is the one for this Session. Will the right hon. Gentleman work harder to see whether he can widen the gap and will he work with institutions in this Parliament, such as the Welsh Grand Committee, so that we can fast-track legislation and create an even better partnership between the National Assembly and the House of Commons?

Peter Hain: We do not need to measure the extent of Welsh legislation by the number of Welsh-only Bills in the Queen's Speech. A whole number of pieces of legislation have Wales-specific clauses in them—on planning, local government and several other matters. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the Licensing Bill, which deals with the costly and mischievous referendums that are called even though Sunday drinking and Sunday licensing are widely supported across Wales. He is a diligent Back Bencher, so I urge him to look at the clauses in all the Bills that have been drafted at the request of the Assembly. With the support of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who was the previous holder of my post, and the excellent assistance of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales, they design into a raft of Bills coming before Parliament this Session provisions that cover the need that Wales has for Welsh-only clauses in general Bills that also apply to England. In this case, we have a Welsh-only Bill. I ask him to consider the facts rather than stick to the dogma.

When we came to office, the health service was crying out for a programme of sustained investment. The hospital-building programme had almost ground to a halt, and nursing shortages had resulted from cuts in training in the mid-1990s. The budget recently published by the Assembly, which draws on resources made available by the outcome of the Government's spending review and confirmed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon, will see the health budget in Wales rise next year to £3.8 billion. That is nearly £1,300 for every man, woman and child in Wales, and an increase of more than 70 per cent. since we came to power in 1997.

The number of staff employed by NHS Wales has risen by more than 12 per cent. since 1997, and the Assembly has announced plans for 6,000 extra nurses, 700 more consultants and GPs and 2,000 more health care professionals over the coming years. During the last five years, the number of medical students in training has increased from about 970 to 1,104. By 2004—in a couple of years' time—the number will have increased to

[Peter Hain]

1,385. They are all important increases in staffing in the health service in Wales and compare with the background of Conservative rule when there were cuts, after cuts, after cuts.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that, given the impressive list of inputs in the health service that he has mentioned, it is all the more important that we have a rigorous and independent audit structure so that we measure outputs and ensure that they are commensurate with the input that the management of our economy under a Labour Government has managed to provide for the health service?

Peter Hain: I very much agree, and the proposals provide for an independent inspection audit. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's contribution towards creating the foundations of the success on which the Assembly is now building when he was Minister for health in the then Welsh Office, succeeding another good Welsh health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths).

The recent opening of the Swansea clinical school, the proposal for clinical schools in north Wales and at the Royal Gwent hospital, together with a graduate entry scheme to medicine also planned for Swansea, are significant stages in the Assembly's plans to increase the number of doctors in Wales. There are 700 specialist registrar training posts in Wales and there will be 60 extra posts by next year, with particular emphasis being placed on areas with shortages. We have also pioneered innovative ideas to improve services for the public. That includes NHS Direct Wales, a 24-hour helpline staffed by nurses which is available throughout Wales. It took nearly 239,000 calls in the 12 months to September 2002, an increase of more than 40 per cent. on the previous 12 months.

The NHS in Wales is treating more patients than ever before, and I salute the dedication of NHS staff in Wales—doctors, nurses and many others—as they cope with the ever-increasing demand for treatment and care. After decades of underinvestment, there can be no quick fixes on waiting times. Significant progress has been made, however. The target to reduce waits for cardiac surgery to a maximum of 12 months has been met in full and the challenging target of reducing waits for orthopaedic surgery to a maximum of 18 months has been broadly met. The latter target is especially important for those of us who represent constituencies in Wales with a long legacy of industrial disease. The waiting lists for people who need hip or knee operations, for instance, are coming down, and they are on target to reduce even further.

Mr. Evans: The Secretary of State pays a glowing tribute to the reduction in waiting lists. In 1997, 378 people waited for more than 12 months for out-patient treatment. The figure for 2002 stands at 36,302. How does he account for that enormous increase?

Peter Hain: I do not gloss over the fact that the waiting list situation in Wales is not as good as it should be. The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to that. Two factors primarily account for the difference. The first is the increased demand for the use of the NHS in Wales. That is a sign of increasing excellence in our hospitals and health services in Wales. The second factor is best demonstrated by the example of turning an oil tanker around. That tanker was going in wrong direction under his Government, and it takes time to change its direction.

Waiting lists for orthopaedics fell by more than 36 per cent. last month. That is good news for patients because most trusts in Wales now have no one waiting for more than 18 months for orthopaedic operations. Progress has also been made on cataract waiting times, with the number of people waiting for more than four months falling by more than 10 per cent. The waiting time target for cardiac surgery has been sustained with no patients waiting more than 12 months.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point. One of the greatest health challenges facing the Assembly is the length of time that many patients have to wait to receive treatment or to see a consultant. We all recognise that too many people have to wait far too long. There are no quick fixes. The reasons behind that are complex. They relate to the legacy that we inherited from the hon. Gentleman's Government and to increasing demands on the system. There is no doubt, however, that substantial progress has been made, especially in the priority areas targeted by the Assembly. We are on target to improve the quality of health care in respect of waiting times and other matters.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Does the Secretary of State agree that the level of funding for the NHS in Wales is already at a European level, where there are no waiting lists, and that the over-18-month waiting list has increased by more than 1,800 people since the pledge was made when the Assembly was established?

Peter Hain: I have partly answered that point. I do not think that we have yet reached European average levels. Getting there will take time, and the money to achieve that objective is being made available. Turning the NHS around from its state when we inherited it a little over five and a half years ago will be a long job.

The difference between us is that we are willing to put in the investment while the Conservative party would cut that investment. Indeed, its Front-Bench spokesmen have repeatedly said that they oppose our public spending plans, and they have confirmed that this afternoon. We are able to maintain public investment at record levels and, in the health service, to increase it every year until 2008. Those are long-term plans enabling hospital managers, consultants, doctors and nurses to plan ahead. The quality of care, with the NHS treating more people all the time, is steadily going up.

The NHS in Wales is treating more patients than ever before, and I salute the dedication of all its staff. In contrast to the Conservatives, who closed 17 hospitals between 1979 and 1997, we promised in our general election manifesto last year to open 10 new hospitals in Wales over 10 years. The latest steps in the capital programme were announced in the Assembly budget last month and include a replacement for the cottage hospital in Tenby and new community hospitals in Merthyr and in Ebbw Vale, in the constituency of my

hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith). I am sure that he endorses that decision by the Assembly, if few others.

Both the Government at Westminster and the Welsh Assembly Government in Cardiff believe that the future of the health service in Wales depends on a process of investment and reform. That is why the Bill builds on the measures in the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002 which remove an unnecessary tier of bureaucracy in the health service in Wales and introduce greater local accountability, placing local decision making in the hands of local communities, health professionals and patients. The proposals build on earlier restructuring by the Welsh Office, which reduced the number of NHS trusts—they might be described as quangos—from 26 to 15.

The Assembly has been working hard to increase the responsiveness of the NHS to patients and the public and to strengthen the public's influence over the running of the health service. Proposals in the Bill will involve the people of Wales in their health service more fully than ever before. Already, strong relationships are being built between health and social care, and the Assembly has been at the forefront of bringing the patient's voice into decision making. The strengthening of that voice through the enhanced community health council structure, which is largely co-terminous with the local authority and local health board structures, will give the people of Wales an unparalleled, strong and meaningful local structure that will deliver for them, provided that the investment continues as we intend it should.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the continuing existence of community health councils in Wales will be of great assistance to the new health boards, enabling them to fulfil their remit of developing health, social care and well-being strategies for their communities, thereby enabling Wales to make progress in preventive health care strategies? It will also enable the health service to play the part that it ought to play with the crime and disorder reduction partnerships. In those respects, Wales will be leading the United Kingdom.

Peter Hain: And not for the first time. I agree with my right hon. Friend that the retention of community health councils in Wales provides the bedrock for community involvement. Wales is leading England in that matter just as it is leading England by introducing free bus passes for pensioners and disabled people and by introducing Assembly learning grants, and so on.

Further evidence of the importance of the reform process in Wales and of our commitment to ensure that the extra resources allocated to health in Wales are spent in the most effective way came with the welcome recent announcement by the Assembly Finance Minister, Edwina Hart, that Derek Wanless, who advised the Chancellor on the funding of the NHS at a UK level, has agreed to act as an advisor to a review of health and social care in Wales.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his generosity in giving way. He will recall that the Wanless report stated clearly that public investment in health care was the best and most effective and efficient way forward, and I am sure that he, like me, supports that. Will he therefore take this opportunity to support all those in the National Assembly who want to rule out the introduction of foundation hospitals in Wales?

Peter Hain: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the stance adopted by Derek Wanless. It was on the back of his report to the Chancellor that we as a Government made a clear decision earlier this year that we would go for increased publicly funded health investment—

Mr. Thomas: We voted for it.

Peter Hain: It is good to know that, for once, the nationalists voted for a socialist measure. The more that happens, the better for us—if not for them.

Returning to the Wanless report and the application to Wales of foundation hospitals, the National Assembly has made it clear that it sees Wales' needs as being completely different from those elsewhere in the United Kingdom; therefore it will not introduce foundation hospitals. I support the National Assembly in that decision. That is precisely what devolution is about—it was so that different decisions could be made according to different circumstances and different needs that we established the National Assembly for Wales, and a far better model for decision making it is than an independent Wales, which the hon. Gentleman's party supports. An independent Wales under the nationalists—Mr. Speaker, I will not go too far down this road—would be stricken with poverty, and there would be health service cuts as well as all the other difficulties that the nationalists would bring to Wales.

The Wanless report that the Assembly will commission will both help to guide the reform and modernisation agenda for the NHS in Wales, and provide valuable evidence in allocating resources beyond the end of the next financial year. There are now clear dividing lines between the Government and the Opposition, between Labour and the Conservatives, on health. Labour stands for investment and reform, the Conservatives for cuts and privatisation. Earlier this year the Opposition voted against the Budget that released the extra resources that the Assembly is now investing in the health service in Wales. They toured the world in search of a policy on the health service, only to come up with the same old Conservative nostrums of privatisation, making patients pay for their own health care, and subsiding those who are able to pay for treatment.

As for Plaid Cymru, it would not introduce the necessary reform and it could not afford the necessary investment. I make no apology for again asking the question that Plaid Cymru Members never want to answer: in an independent or self-governing Wales, how would they finance the record levels of public investment in the national health service that we are delivering? The answer is they would not, because an independent Wales could not.

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the nationalists have never satisfactorily answered this question about separatism: where would the money come from, bearing in mind that there is a significant difference between

[Mrs. Jackie Lawrence]

taxes raised in Wales and public spending in Wales—a difference that could mean a 30 per cent. cut in public services, or a 50 per cent. tax increase?

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend makes a valid and wholly convincing argument. If the nationalists ever got their way, health services in Wales would be cut and hospitals would be closed, because they do not have the ability to finance the health investment that we are providing in record amounts, which the Bill is designed to underpin.

Part of the Bill can be traced back to the policy document "Better Health—Better Wales" issued by the Welsh Office in 1998, under the leadership of the then Welsh health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), and to the Assembly's ambitious and wide-ranging national plan "Improving Health in Wales—A Plan for the NHS with its partners", which was issued in 2001 and which set out a 10-year programme of renewal.

Last year, we announced our intention to introduce legislation to reform the provision of health services in Wales by establishing local health boards, strategic health partnerships, the Wales Centre for Health and Health Professions Wales. I am pleased that we have been able to establish local health boards and strategic partnerships through the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002, which went on the statute book on 25 June this year. That Act is important, as it provides the Assembly with a foundation on which to begin delivering the reform agenda that it and the Government want to carry through.

However, we still needed to reform and strengthen community health councils and establish the Wales Centre for Health and Health Professions Wales. We therefore published the draft National Health Service (Wales) Bill—now called the Health (Wales) Bill, which we are considering this evening—on 17 May this year, to include those remaining three elements. Publication of the draft Bill signalled the beginning of an intense three-part scrutiny—by Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the public and those with a direct professional interest in the Bill. Pre-legislative scrutiny is an innovation introduced by the Government to elevate the quality of draft Bills, obtain greater involvement by people likely to be affected by proposed legislation, and improve the planning of the legislative process. The Health (Wales) Bill is one of the first measures to benefit from that innovation, and has been much improved and refined by the valuable contributions of a range of institutions, professional bodies and individuals. I pay special tribute to the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs and its Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), for their contribution, and to hon. Members from all parties, but especially my own, representing Welsh constituencies.

Mr. Wiggin: And me, I hope.

Peter Hain: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman made a valuable contribution, but as I am a generous soul, I will take it on trust.

So thorough was the process of refinement that not even the title of the Bill remained untouched. We therefore have before us today not the National Health Service (Wales) Bill but the Health (Wales) Bill. Pre-legislative scrutiny involved three parallel activities. Parliamentary scrutiny in the House was conducted by the Welsh Affairs Committee, and its report was debated by the Welsh Grand Committee. In the other place, Members were briefed on the Bill by both Government and Assembly Ministers and invited to register any concerns. The Assembly's Health and Social Services Committee undertook scrutiny of the draft Bill on behalf of the Assembly and there was also a public consultation.

It is a testament to the robustness of the original policy that the draft Bill attracted widespread support. Indeed, the process of pre-legislative scrutiny revealed no significant concerns about the policy. In all, 45 recommendations for change to the draft Bill were made—some to remedy omissions, some to clarify the powers both of bodies dealt with in the Bill and the Welsh Assembly, and others to extend its scope. We decided to consider 17 recommendations further. In only one instance did we find that there were legal or technical reasons why it was not necessary or possible to amend the Bill as suggested. In the remaining 16 instances, it was appropriate to amend the draft Bill to achieve what was intended, and we did so.

The changes have definitely improved the Bill. Some acknowledged omissions have been rectified and the powers and independence of community health councils, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) referred, the Wales Centre for Health and Health Professions Wales have been clarified. By retaining CHCs and making their membership a better reflection of the people whom they represent, by providing complaints advocacy services independent of the NHS in Wales, and by giving CHCs powers to inspect premises providing NHS services, we will build on the strong local relationships, which already exist within the health service in Wales. By establishing a statutory association of Welsh CHCs that will not only advise and assist CHCs but have a performance management role, we will guarantee the people of Wales a consistent service of the highest standard across Wales.

By establishing the Wales Centre for Health as an independent body, we shall ensure that the people of Wales have the best multidisciplinary advice on health hazards, that risks to health are properly assessed and that research and other evidence is made available to support effective policy making and decision taking. By establishing Health Professions Wales as an Assembly-sponsored public body, we shall provide quality assurance for the training and education of those in the health care professions in Wales. Its remit will be extended to cover not just nurses, midwives and health visitors, but allied health professionals and clinical scientists.

By 2004, there will be more than 4,300 nurses in training in Wales. That is more than double the number in 1997, when 2,029 were in training. The annual allied health professions training intake has been increased from 494 in 1999–2000 to 649 in 2001–02, and will have been increased by a further 681 by 2003–04. Among the increases in recent years, the occupational therapy

intake has risen from 161 when we came to office in 1997 to 219 this year. In physiotherapy, there has been a rise from 168 in 1997, when the Conservatives left office, to 288 this year.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that there has been an increase in the number of occupational therapists, but unfortunately, it is not sufficient. Will he please look again at the provision of bilingual occupational therapists, which is important in relation to speech therapy and so on? Furthermore, what will the Bill do about the dental crisis in Wales?

Peter Hain: I shall certainly look at the hon. Gentleman's question, because I agree that that is an important aspect of providing a high-quality health service for all the people of Wales.

The Bill is designed to improve the health care targets and areas that it is explicitly set up to deal with. Health Professions Wales will set clear standards at an all-Wales level for the continuing personal and professional development of all sectors of the work force. The Bill will give the body a proper statutory footing. It is an enabling Bill that devolves powers to the Assembly to determine through its own secondary legislation the detail of the new arrangements. That is another example of the truism that the Assembly is a powerful body. It has enormous powers to influence and shape policies as it determines they should be for the needs of Wales.

That is as it should be. The devolved Assembly will work in partnership with the health service in Wales and the people of Wales to determine what is right for Wales. That demonstrates once again that, through the devolution settlement, we can deliver policies adapted to the particular needs of Wales. The Bill follows previous legislation such as the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001 and the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002, all of which had specific Welsh clauses. It represents devolution in action and progress through partnership.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for generously giving way again. Given that health inequalities are often income related—to put it bluntly, poorer people are more likely to become and remain ill—will he point to what provision there is in the Bill or will appear subsequently in secondary legislation to tackle that disturbing phenomenon?

Peter Hain: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that income inequalities are a tremendous source of health inequality and are a particular problem in Wales. In valley constituencies such as those that I and the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), represent, that is a curse and a legacy of our industrial history. On the help provided by the Bill, the Wales Centre for Health will ensure that those inequalities are monitored and that the policies that are designed by the Assembly and, where necessary, implemented through primary legislation here are tailored to deal with them. Health Professions Wales will also ensure that the professions in Wales are trained to a standard that is sufficiently high to address those inequalities.

Before I gave way to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), I was about to say that I commend the Bill to the House.

5.49 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The debate is important because it gives hon. Members an opportunity to discuss issues that relate to the national health service in Wales. Post-devolution, the ability to ask questions on health is somewhat constrained. That is a pity. Members of Parliament with an interest in Welsh affairs must be aghast at what the NHS has become for far too many people in Wales.

I welcome the fact that the Bill was published in draft. As the Secretary of State said, many observations and comments were received before it appeared in its current form. I believe that we have fewer opportunities to debate issues fully now than when I was first elected 10 short years ago. Most of that change has occurred in the past five long years.

The Bill is another stepping stone in the troubled waters of the NHS that leads to yet more change.

"The National Health Service is safe in our hands."

"You only have 24 hours to save the national health service."

Those statements must ring loud and hollow in Wales. I have used the NHS in Wales. I lived in Swansea for 33 years; my brother worked as an electrician on Singleton hospital when it was built, and my other brother, Anthony, had an operation for cancer at that hospital in January 1998. I cannot pay great enough tribute to the staff at every level who gave my brother back his health. I pay tribute generally to the hard-working staff of the NHS. They work under enormous pressure and constant change.

Our health service has genuine problems, despite the extra revenue that has been earmarked for the service and that the Secretary of State mentioned. Sadly, for far too many people, the extra expenditure is not reaching the right parts to ensure an improved service. Some of the biggest complainers about that miserable fact are those who work in the NHS.

I want to make several points about improving the service for our patients. The retained community health councils, which the Bill covers, will want to consider many deficiencies. Do hon. Members remember the following pledges:

"By the end of a Labour Assembly's first term no one will wait more than 18 months for inpatient treatment";

"By the end of a Labour Assembly's first term no one will wait more than 6 months for outpatient treatment"?

What has gone wrong?

The Labour party could state that the Administration in Cardiff are not technically Labour; they are a Lib-Lab Administration. Technically, that would be correct. The Labour party could therefore try to blame the Liberal Democrats for the awful state of waiting lists in the NHS in Wales. Much as I dislike the Liberal Democrats, that would be dishonest. Although they will have to take their fair share of the blame, the Labour party would not have behaved differently if it had been able to muster sufficient votes to avoid having to rely on the Liberal Democrats to retain power.

Let us consider the size of the problem: 4,335 people have been on the in-patient waiting list for more than 18 months—1,810 more than when the pledge was

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

made. In 1999, when the pledge on out-patients was made, 25,676 people were on the waiting list. Today, the figure is 83,443. When we left office in 1997, the figure was 5,956. What would Labour Members say if we had presided over that appalling state of affairs? It is a scandal.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the 18 years of total under-investment in the health service led to the current waiting lists? We do not have sufficient doctors and consultants because it takes time to train them, and the Conservative Government were not prepared to do that.

Mr. Evans: I wonder how many more years the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind hon. Members that we are not holding a general debate on the health service in Wales; we are discussing the Bill. It would be appropriate if hon. Members confined their remarks to that.

Mr. Evans: I am answering the Secretary of State's points. I listened to him carefully. The CHCs, which the Bill will retain, will also consider aspects of his speech.

For how many more years must we listen to excuses? The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) has to accept that the Labour party has been in power for more than five years. The statements that the Labour party made during the 1997 and 2001 general election campaigns—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Again, I remind the hon. Gentleman of the parameters of the debate. We are considering the Health (Wales) Bill.

Mr. Evans: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you know, the Bill deals with the retention of the community health councils, which will consider the aspects that we are discussing. We want to ensure their independence so that they can expose the issues that many hon. Members will doubtless raise today.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): The hon. Gentleman mentioned five years. How long does it take to train a consultant?

Mr. Evans: Part of the problem is retention after training. I have spoken to the Royal College of Nursing, which states that there are 30,000 registered nurses, but that more than 8,000 do not stay in the NHS. The hon. Gentleman also knows that the Government have scoured the world for extra nurses and consultants, yet shortages remain. They must accept that there is a problem.

Mr. Wiggin: My hon. Friend knows that consultants, especially in Wales, have not agreed a settlement with the Government. There is no point in Labour Members shouting abuse when the Government have failed to agree a deal with consultants on funding.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right. The statistics that we use in today's debate have a genuine impact on patients in Wales. People are suffering because of the deficiencies. That is the real problem.

When I mentioned waiting lists to the Secretary of State earlier, he compared the NHS with an oil tanker and said that it had to be turned around. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) once described the NHS as an oil tanker when he was Secretary of State for Health. Many Secretaries of State have passed under the bridge since then. The NHS now resembles the Spanish oil tanker that has sadly run aground and is currently spilling oil. Something must be done about the waiting list problem in Wales for the sake of all the patients in Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): The hon. Gentleman must acknowledge the distance that we have had to travel in rebuilding the health service. Does he recall that under the Conservative Administration, 70 hospitals were closed, 8,000 general beds were removed from use and there was a 25 per cent. cut in nursing and midwifery training? We have had to travel that distance to start putting things right.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Again, I remind hon. Members that we are discussing the Health (Wales) Bill, not the national health service in Wales.

Mr. Evans: In that case, I shall respond to the Under-Secretary only briefly. Many people will look back on 1997, when waiting lists were much shorter, and wish that the Conservatives were still in power.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: No. I have given way often, and I want to move on.

Community health councils will want to consider in detail the issues that we are discussing and expose some of the problems. I therefore believe that we should examine carefully CHCs' independence from the Assembly.

I spoke about the professions that the Bill covers, including GPs. Let us consider some of the comments of Dr. John Chisolm, chairman of the BMA practitioner committee, who published a book entitled "Crisis in Care: A GP dossier". I heartily recommend it to all hon. Members who are present. They should examine the Welsh sections if nothing else. It is a harrowing read. He comments on some of the GPs who work in Wales and will be covered by the CHCs. One is Andrew Dearden, a doctor from Cardiff. He says that some people wait as long as six years for hip replacement operations.

He states:

> "I have many patients who are crippled by arthritis and need hip replacements. The word 'crippled' is not an exaggeration for many of them—some are completely housebound and do not go out of the house except to attend hospital appointments. They are often on multiple painkillers, none of which are controlling most of the pain."

While we debate the Bill today, let us keep in mind the people to whom it relates: the patients facing lengthy waiting lists with GPs. The GPs are hugely frustrated by that.

Gareth Thomas: Can the hon. Gentleman tell us whether his party supports the Bill? Does he agree that rather than embarking on a regurgitated rant, he would do the House a greater service if he told us whether he supports the technicalities of the Bill—yes or no—and why?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman will have to be a little more patient. We support some aspects of the Bill, and we will wish to improve some aspects of it when it reaches Committee. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will serve on that Committee. No doubt we will then be able to debate at length improvements to the Bill. The hon. Gentleman may be surprised to find that amendments are tabled even by his hon. Friends.

The Secretary of State said that the Opposition did not want a national health service, and that under the Conservatives only the rich would get treatment and those who were poor would not. It is a chilling fact that 250,000 people last year used their own money to have operations. That is the figure for the whole of the United Kingdom, and some of those cases would have been in Wales. People withdrew their life savings or borrowed money because they were in pain and the waiting lists were far too long.

We must focus carefully on what the Bill is about. We all want an improvement to the service provided to the people of Wales. That is why we want to ensure that the Bill is improved in Committee.

Mr. Bercow: Is my hon. Friend aware that a cursory study of the Bill suggests that it contains no fewer than 18 references to orders and regulations, rendering it something of a parliamentary eunuch? Does he agree that it is therefore essential that we are told tonight by the Government whether the regulations will be subject to the negative or to the affirmative procedure, and that the National Assembly for Wales publishes draft intentions of what it plans to introduce?

Mr. Evans: I agree with my hon. Friend. That would be an informed position for the Assembly to take. As we see from the Bill, many powers are to be devolved to the Assembly. I want to know what consultation the Assembly will have with various bodies before it introduces regulations that will impact on the whole of Wales.

I read the second report of the so-called First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, for 2001–02. I wanted to see what he had to say about the NHS, because it is devolved through secondary legislation. Only three of the 35 pages are devoted to the NHS. The First Minister sets out some of the targets. One of those strangely and boldly states:

"In the main, the maximum waiting times for orthopaedics have been reduced to 18 months."

I do not know what is meant by "in the main". I do not see that as a target, but there we go. I then looked at the statistics made available by the NHS in relation to orthopaedics. It is clear that in most of the health authority areas, the waiting time for orthopaedics is more than 18 months—that is, more than 72 weeks.

Mark Tami: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that all his arguments show the need for investment in the health service—investment that his party opposes?

Mr. Evans: I agree that investment is needed in the health service, but it must be investment in the right areas. Clearly, the investment is not going into the right areas at present. I hope that with his interest in the health service in Wales, the hon. Gentleman would want to ensure that the extra national insurance—the extra taxation—that everyone is paying goes into the right areas. When people are taxed to the hilt and receive the sort of service that we are discussing, they feel aggrieved.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Which areas of the health service would the hon. Gentleman not invest in? Out of which areas would he take money?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman, as a Liberal Democrat, is part of the coalition, or the official irritation, as I prefer to call it. His party is just a poodle for the Labour party in the Assembly, and Labour's little helpers at Westminster. When there are more managers than nurses in the NHS, we must refocus on where the money should go.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: No. I must make progress.

Will the Secretary of State please look again at the waiting lists for orthopaedics and see how many people have been waiting for way over 18 months? That is a real problem, which must receive the proper attention. It is pointless having targets if they are not likely to be met. Why does the Assembly promise what it cannot deliver, and why does it claim credit for what it cannot achieve?

Why did Rhodri's second report, if it was to be honest and transparent, not give us all the figures for waiting times so that everyone could judge what the Administration had promised and what they had achieved? The document is spin. Unless the Administration are fully truthful about the position next year, I suggest that they do not bother to produce a report next year, and instead put the money saved towards employing an extra nurse. I suggest an extra nurse because, despite all that the Secretary of State said earlier, there are still 700 vacancies in the NHS for nurses, even though there are 1,000 Filipino nurses working in the health service in Wales. Thank goodness for the job they are doing, but there are still almost 750 vacancies.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Has the hon. Gentleman's party estimated how much money would be saved by cutting the administration of the NHS in Wales?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman should know that we would at least examine the areas in which the bureaucracy has grown, where the number of managers has grown and where there are inefficiencies, instead of making excuses all the time to explain why more money has to be pumped in while services are deteriorating. The sad thing for him and his constituents is that they are getting a worse service at the same time as they are paying extra taxes.

Huw Irranca-Davies *rose—*

Mr. Evans: No. I must make a little more progress. I know that other hon. Members want to take part in the debate.

[Mr. Evans]

Part of the Bill deals with Health Professions Wales and the directions that the Assembly may give to health workers, including nurses. Part of its function must be to ascertain that newly qualified nurses earning £15,000 feel properly valued in their roles. How can we retain them when they are qualified, and how can we encourage more of the newly qualified nurses to go into nursing? Pay is vital, and we all await the outcome of the Agenda for Change at the end of the year, and the impact of Health Professions Wales in ensuring training for our nurses, and ensuring that the training will come to something. It must be a matter of deep concern that so many of those who are trained do not go into nursing at the end of their training.

All of us who read the *Western Mail* today saw with great delight that £14,000 has just been spent on a new logo for the Welsh Assembly—£14,000 on a new dragon. What a waste of money. The patients waiting for operations could not care a jot about such expensive trivia. If a new logo costs £14,000, and a nurse costs £15,000 a year, on what would hon. Members prefer the money to be spent?

We all want an improved national health service in Wales. Will the Bill deliver that? It contains no reference to foundation hospitals, which were mentioned by Plaid Cymru Members earlier. The Government believe that foundation hospitals are the answer for England, but not a mention of them for Wales. I wonder why. The retention of community health councils is to be welcomed, as are their enhanced powers, but the power given to the Assembly to decide whether they could be abolished in the future—indeed, the very name could be changed by the whim of the Assembly—is over the top and unacceptable.

Yes, it is right to ensure that the whole of Wales is covered by CHCs, but we need to examine ways of giving the CHCs greater autonomy, away from the Welsh Assembly. They could fall foul of the Assembly by exposing many of the deficiencies in the health service in Wales, some of which I have highlighted. The CHCs could then face the bullet; they could be abolished, just as has happened in England. Many hon. Members here today helped to bring that about by not supporting the retention of English CHCs. Only one Member from a Welsh constituency voted against their abolition.

Part of the CHCs' remit is to be the patients' champion. When the newly reformed national health service in Wales gets off the ground in April of next year, we know that it is going to be hugely bureaucratic. We also know that it is going to be expensive. Even a former Welsh Office Minister has termed it "unworkable". A leaked report presented to Rhodri Morgan, Jane Hutt and the Secretary of State for Wales by the senior civil servant, Bryan Mitchell—the man overseeing the reform—stated that there were major risks involved in the reorganisation. We were told that it was going to be cost-neutral; we now know that it is going to cost £15 million. The Secretary of State for Wales assured me in the Welsh Grand Committee that this was a one-off payment. We will compare the costs after the 22 local health boards are up and running, to see whether the change has been cost-neutral. People should have this kind of information before they vote these measures through. There are also a number of other concerns relating to the reforms. Let us suppose that the CHCs blow the whistle on all this, when the new organisations are up and running. What protection will there be for them?

We know that Jane Hutt receives a lot of criticism—all of it fair, in my book, yet she hates it. She has stated that

> "people don't want to hear the media bashing politicians. They want to know about us driving waiting lists down".

Well, there is not much chance of that, is there? What she fails to recognise is that the reason she is being bashed is that she is signally failing to do as she promised. No doubt the Assembly would like to have the same powers over the media as they are being given over the CHCs. In the Bill, it can decide the membership of the councils, the means by which the chairman is elected, the proceedings of the councils, and the discharge of any function of the councils by a committee of the councils. The Assembly will also be able to decide who consults the councils, the payment of councils, the preparation and publication of reports by councils, matters to be included in any report, what the councils may receive from health authorities, local health boards, strategic health authorities, primary care trusts or NHS trusts, what sort of information they can give out to other people or other councils, and anything else that takes its fancy.

Gosh! If only the Assembly had such powers over the media! It could appoint editors and journalists, decide what goes into the newspapers, what information the public could and could not read, and who that information went to. What sort of far-reaching, searching publication would that produce? Well, it would be a bit like Rhodri Morgan's report to the Welsh Assembly and the people of Wales: wholly spun, wholly disinfected, wholly engineered and wholly useless. Anyone who believes that the Assembly would not use its powers unreasonably should remember that it abused its powers by delaying the local elections from 2003 to 2004 so that they did not coincide with the Assembly elections. That was a complete disgrace, but it is going to happen.

We need much more protection and independence for the CHCs. If we want them to be a whistleblower and a champion for the people of Wales, let us give them some independence from the body that might well be on the receiving end of some of their criticism. I want the CHCs to be empowered to check on all the organisations giving health services to patients in Wales, but I want them also to liaise with other bodies in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, so that complaints may be taken up from any patients receiving care in facilities in Wales. I would like similar rights to be afforded to Welsh patients receiving care in institutions in other parts of the United Kingdom.

I also wish the CHCs to be consulted and involved in any name changes, abolitions or mergers. More autonomy and independence for CHCs will be important. It is also important that CHCs should consult the people of Wales and issue an annual report on the people's views on the service that they are receiving. Those views will be positive in many regards relating to the people working in the NHS, but I receive letters on a regular basis about the state of health provision in my own area, and it is not always so

positive. Only if we encourage this sort of publication will we all learn about any deficiencies, and I am sure that best practice would lead to fundamental changes being made throughout the whole of the NHS.

The Wales Centre for Health has been widely welcomed, and we will be looking for ways in which it can engage in a constructive dialogue with comparable bodies elsewhere in the UK. One of its remits is to keep people in Wales informed on matters that affect their health. That is right, but much of the information gathering and research could well be carried out elsewhere. Furthermore, it could be pioneering an area of health concern and be way ahead of what someone else is doing—on certain aspects of drug abuse, for example—and, in such circumstances, it would only be right for the information involved to be shared and for collaboration to take place, to give any information campaigns the greatest effect.

I see that the Assembly is to give itself the power to appoint the chairman of the Wales Centre for Health. I hope that that will be done in an open and transparent way, and we will look for ways of ensuring that that is the case. Evaluation of the centre's work will also be important, in terms of assessing how effective it is in getting positive health messages across. We will examine how that can best be achieved. I see that the Auditor General for Wales has responsibility for this provision in the Bill. There will be budgetary implications for this body.

Today's report that parents in Neath, Port Talbot and Swansea are shunning the measles, mumps and rubella jab in increasing numbers must be of concern to the Government. More than 25 per cent. of children have no immunisation at all, and the fear is that this could lead to an outbreak of measles, mumps and rubella. The Wales Centre for Health may well be involved in research into the fears of a growing number of parents about autism. Indeed, it may wish to make recommendations on single jabs being made available.

Health Professions Wales will work closely in liaison with a number of other bodies. We will wish to see that it works closely in consultation with the bodies and professions that it covers, especially nurses. I have a concern about the training and qualifications necessary to work in the Welsh health service, and I would like to see training and regulations there that are very similar to those that exist in the rest of the UK. Wales is a small country, and nurses might find themselves unavailable for work in Wales if they had been trained in England or, for example, if they were agency nurses who could not get work in Wales if they lived in Bristol, because a wholly different system was operating in Wales. Given the nursing shortage to which I referred earlier, I would have thought that flexibility and ease of working in Wales would be the byword, as opposed to seeing how different from England or Scotland we can make the system.

I wish to see a world-class health service in Wales, with our dedicated staff receiving the best support and our patients receiving the best care. I am angry that this is not happening after more than five years of a Labour Government and three years of a Welsh Assembly. The number of promises was high. The criticism of the NHS under the previous Conservative Government was constant, but I do not remember Labour Members ever rebuking themselves in those days for talking down the NHS by making constant criticisms or by pointing out where things were going wrong.

The Government are embarking on further change, on top of other changes, and this constant change cannot be good for the system. After all the changes that have been made—and with the differences from other parts of the country—it will not be a case of not knowing where the buck stops for most people; it will be impossible to work out where it starts. We have massive fears about the changes contained in the recent health reform legislation, as it affects Wales. I believe that they are going to cost a fortune and will be unworkable. Mergers will be almost inevitable as local health boards find that they have to join up with others to make a go of the new provisions. The changes mentioned in the Health (Wales) Bill could lead to progress, so long as we can ensure that these bodies have some independence from the Assembly and are given teeth.

We want to see a better health service. The people of Wales were promised that, and they do not deserve what they currently have. Jane Hutt, the Health Minister in the Welsh Assembly, is drinking at the last chance saloon, and—even with the prospect of licensing reform and the possibility of 24-hour drinking—the bell for last orders should be ringing long and loud in her ears.

6.19 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): I would be grateful if I could take some time to discuss the background of the Bill, before considering the principle that we are discussing on Second Reading. I would like to do so because it was the Welsh Affairs Committee, of which I am proud to be Chair, that was charged with the responsibility of providing the main pre-legislative scrutiny on behalf of the House. Likewise, the mirrored responsibility from the perspective of the devolved National Assembly for Wales fell to the Health and Social Services Committee of the Assembly in Cardiff.

There was, of course, an input to the draft Bill process from the Welsh Grand Committee, under the excellent stewardship of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), and that provided a useful Third Reading-style stage of the pre-legislative process, throughout which, I believe, only one voice expressed concern that the scrutiny by the Welsh Affairs Committee was somehow a bad precedent to set. The reason given was that not all members of the Committee represent Welsh constituencies. That is a fact, but it is hardly the fault of the House that the Welsh people do not elect a single Welsh Conservative Member. In any case, that is no excuse for precluding the Welsh Affairs Committee from repeating its scrutiny role and the process would be fundamentally flawed if the official Opposition were effectively excluded.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Although I was not named, I must speak in my defence. I believe that we have set a bad precedent, because in the event of another Government—possibly a Tory Government—being elected, the Select Committee could have a majority of members from outside Wales. We have set a poor precedent, because it will be used against us when we have another Government. I do not believe that the Labour party will be in power constantly.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I am shocked by that suggestion, but I must point out to my hon. Friend that, in any case,

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

the Standing Orders of the House say that every Committee of the House will have a Government majority. Whatever Committee considered such a matter, it would, dare I say it, have a Tory majority were the Tories to be elected.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I am thankful to be allowed a second go. To correct my hon. Friend, Standing Order No. 86, which we must set aside at the end of the debate, allows Bills exclusively about Wales to be debated by a Committee whose members are all Welsh Members. That is in the existing Standing Orders.

Mr. Martyn Jones: A Government who are not a Labour Government could change that Standing Order overnight, as my hon. Friend is well aware. Yes, that Standing Order exists, but if a new Select Committee were set up to discuss Welsh business it would have a majority from another party should such circumstances arise. I am sorry, but that has to be the case, as no Government will ever set up a Committee with a majority of Opposition Members.

By the way, my hon. Friend may not be aware that another Member made such a suggestion in the debate, so the cap that he takes up may not fit him. He may recall that a Member on the other side of the House said something along similar lines about the Welsh Grand Committee. That said, if the cap fits Members on either side of the House, whoever wants to can wear it. I sincerely believe that the Select Committee represents the best process under the rules of the House.

My hon. Friend may or may not agree with what I shall say next: a better change may be to alter the Standing Orders to allow joint working with Assembly Committees.

Mr. Roger Williams: I compliment the hon. Gentleman on his work with the Welsh Affairs Committee. Does he agree that one benefit arising from the process is the enhanced legislative understanding and trust that developed between the Assembly and Westminster?

Mr. Martyn Jones: Absolutely. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who is a valuable member of my Committee, endorses the process, which I have adopted since becoming Chairman of the Committee and since the Assembly was established, of keeping Assembly Members on board at all stages and at no stage, I hope, treading on their legislative toes. That is a self-denying ordinance, but one on which there is general consensus in our Committee.

The Select Committee greatly welcomed the opportunity to take the lead on the draft Bill, which, from a public consultation perspective, was a huge success. In total, 307 organisations and individuals were consulted and, as the Wales Office website rightly boasts:

> "This is the first piece of Wales-specific legislation to be subject to public consultation in draft form and pre-legislative scrutiny by Parliament and the National Assembly."

I can assure the House that the process was extremely successful, and I am therefore delighted that the Queen's Speech contains the pledge that the Government intend to publish even more draft Bills to give Parliament and the wider public a greater opportunity to scrutinise proposals before the more formal legislative process takes place in the House.

I thank the previous Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary for their work and, indeed, the spirit with which they entered into the draft Bill process. I also place on record my sincere appreciation of Jane Hutt, the Minister for Health and Social Services in the Welsh Assembly Government in Cardiff, who provided leadership in making the draft Bill process the success for Wales that it has proved to be. However, I add one general suggestion, which I hope is helpful, on the legislative process in relation to the Bill and, indeed, future draft Bills: why does not the House consider holding truncated debates on Second Reading? Members will probably fill the time allotted tonight, in good old Parkinson tradition. However, given that we have had one crack of the whip, perhaps we should cut down debates on Second and Third Reading.

The Government have accepted most of the technical amendments proposed by the Select Committee and the Welsh Assembly during deliberations on the draft Bill, so we should be discussing only parts of the Bill on which amendments were not accepted. In the light of the Government's promise in the Queen's Speech to present further Bills in draft before the formal legislative process begins, I urge them to re-examine the necessity for full Second Reading debates so as to save valuable time in the House. Briefer consideration in Committee will come naturally, but perhaps debates on Third Reading could also be shorter.

When the draft Bill was published in May, it was a good day not just for health in Wales, but for Wales's democracy and parliamentary accountability. I am proud of the Government's commitment in creating that groundbreaking precedent. The real benefits of presenting the Bill in draft have come to fruition, as it offers legislation for Wales that was consulted on and debated in Wales before the House began its deliberations on the details. This is truly "home-grown" legislation. Importantly, the Bill is also testimony to the fact that devolution in Wales and the relationship between this place and the National Assembly in Cardiff have come of age. The Bill proves, conclusively in my mind, that London and Cardiff can and will work together for the benefit of the people of Wales.

The Bill will deliver huge benefits for patients in Wales by giving them a much stronger voice, not only in improving the NHS in Wales, but in running the health service. Patients will be empowered, and I am proud that it took this reforming and imaginative Government to find the way to enable patient power to come into being. They are to be congratulated on that.

The Bill is an important step in the revitalisation of the NHS and it cannot be viewed in isolation from the massive increase in investment that has been injected into the NHS in Wales over recent years. I believe that, today, an extra £1 million has been allocated for the ambulance service in Wales. I hope that the Under-Secretary mentions that in his winding-up speech, as it needs to be put to the public.

When the Government talk of reform, they mean reform, and the Bill is an intrinsic part of that strategy in Wales. It is designed to ensure that the patient's voice

is central in the creation of improved services right across the board, and in accepting pre-legislative responsibility the Committee recognised and, I hope, built on that important factor.

Underpinning that empowerment of the patient is the progressive transformation of community health councils across Wales. That crucial strand of reform is to be enhanced by their taking on the new role of being responsible for nursing homes and primary care. CHCs across Wales perform excellent and dedicated work, not just in terms of their quasi-inspectorate role, but through advocacy. The Welsh Affairs Committee wanted CHC members to have a statutory right to take time off work to attend CHC meetings and formal visits. I would like the Government to return to the matter and amend the Employment Rights Act 1996 to include CHCs in the list of approved public bodies.

Another recommendation that the Government did not accept in their response relates to a review in respect of Welsh CHCs not being constrained by the borders of Wales when acting on behalf of Welsh patients who are receiving treatment outside Wales. Wales is in a unique position, particularly the more rural parts of mid and north Wales, where many patients have to travel to Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Telford and even Manchester for treatment. I would have liked to see this uniqueness addressed. Again, I would ask the Government to reconsider this matter in Committee.

The Bill also advances the setting up of a brand new and encompassing health professions body for Wales, which would in future include health specialities such as physiotherapy and speech therapy. Health Professions Wales—HPW—will also replace the functions previously carried out by the Welsh National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting, which is to be abolished in the near future.

In evidence sessions, the Select Committee quickly formed the view that the proposal to set up Health Professions Wales has been broadly welcomed. However, the Committee expressed concern about the independence of HPW in relation to staff and funding issues. We are pleased that the Government clarified the extent of the powers in their response to the Committee and in the Bill.

The Bill offers to Wales a bold change of emphasis from just treating disease to looking at the "big picture" of setting out to improve the general health of people in Wales. I believe that that will be greatly helped by the establishment of the Wales Centre for Health, which will offer support training and share advances in cutting-edge medical research throughout Wales. On the independence of the WCH, I am pleased that the Government accepted the Select Committee's recommendation that the Assembly's powers of direction over the WCH should be limited to

"the exercise of its administrative or financial functions"

and that the Bill is specific on that matter.

In the evidence sessions, the Select Committee highlighted, but did not submit as a specific recommendation, the evidence of some witnesses who wanted the WHC's remit widened to enable it to be more proactive in offering advice and information to the public. Again, we are pleased that the Government recognised the matter and elaborated in the Bill on the WCH's role in relation to that function. The Government also responded positively to the National Audit Office query about the role of the Auditor General for Wales to carry out value-for-money investigations into the WHC's work. That is now included within the Bill.

The Bill, which was brought to the House via the route of pre-legislative scrutiny, has been a resounding success. Not only has that process marked a progressive and organic approach to drafting legislation but, more importantly, as the Bill demonstrates, it has delivered good legislation. In this case, that is good news not just for the NHS in Wales, but for the standing and reputation of this House.

6.32 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The Secretary of State correctly said that many hon. Members would welcome this Second Reading debate. It is always pleasing to see people from all over the world celebrating our deliberations on what I like to think is, by and large, a Bill arrived at by consensus. As the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) said, it is a credit to the pre-legislative scrutiny that so many people have been involved—Members of this House, Members of the Assembly and health professionals. In the past, we have not always realised the importance of working closely with the Assembly. Let us hope that this useful precedent will lead us towards more effective representation of the people of Wales in the future.

The Secretary of State also said that the Bill is about patient power. Actually, I think that it is about patient health. We must make sure that we do not become obsessed with process. All four parties present want to ensure that we maximise the effectiveness and value for money that the public get from the system. In that sense, the consultation process has, one hopes, been all to the good, because it has made stakeholders out of individuals who are on the front line trying to deliver the service.

I was, as ever, entertained by, and delighted to listen to, the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). Most Welsh Liberal Democrats were grateful that he did not put all the blame on us for the problems of the health service. He is a very nice man—most Liberal Democrats think that, with the possible exception of Michael Carr. The hon. Gentleman got some considerable heat for the 18 years of underfunding which many believe were instrumental in causing the problems in the run-up to 1997. I noticed the relief on his face when Madam Deputy Speaker intervened to protect him, giving him a lucky escape, lest people were reminded of the 70 closed hospitals and the 8,000 lost beds. I agree that the hon. Gentleman's swingeing attack on the Government had about as much relevance to this debate as improving standards in the Estonian health service. In fact, those improvements are impressive and I would recommend that hon. Members go to Estonia to see how it is dealing with its outstanding health problems.

Mr. Wiggin: Is the hon. Gentleman proud of the current state of the NHS in Wales?

Lembit Öpik: I can honestly say that I am. I think that the health service does a damn good job. I shall return to that matter in a moment. We must all celebrate the

[Lembit Öpik]

fact that the United Kingdom is extremely fortunate that, despite all the issues, we still enjoy some of the highest health standards enjoyed by any society at any time in the history of the planet.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I would join the hon. Gentleman in celebrating the standards in the national health service. When my mother was taken into Morriston hospital in an emergency last weekend, the quality of care that she received was first class. She spent two days there and now, thank goodness, she is back home. That was not the first time that she had been taken into hospital; it was the third occasion. Each time, she has been dealt with admirably, so let us not slate health service in the way that it is so often slated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) responds to that, may I say that this is not a general debate about the health service in England or Wales, and I should be grateful if hon. Members would confine their remarks specifically to the Bill before the House.

Lembit Öpik: I certainly will, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I apologise for bringing Estonia into the debate as well.

As I listened to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley discussing the Bill, I became increasingly nervous because I simply did not know whether the Conservatives were supporting the Bill tonight. At one point, I almost intervened on a point of order to ask whether it was in order for the hon. Gentleman to expose us to such stress. In waiting for the answer, we may have developed some stress-related disorders.

The hon. Gentleman explained on behalf of the Conservatives where the money should come from to improve the health service. In answer to my question to him, we received only one figure: he would save £14,000 by abandoning the logo project. That would pay for almost a year's worth of nursing—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lembit Öpik: I believe that my point is almost in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so on that basis I shall give way.

Mr. Evans: I said that £14,000 was being wasted on the logo. I could have gone on to give a whole list of ways in which the Welsh Assembly is mis-spending the money, including the new Assembly building, but I did not mention that in case Madam Deputy Speaker ruled me out of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I fear that hon. Members are starting to stray again and I must insist that they do not.

Lembit Öpik: The point just made by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley brings me right back to the research paper published on 20 November to explain various aspects of the Bill. It says on page 16:

"The draft Regulatory Impact Assessment, published by the Wales Office to accompany the draft NHS (Wales) Bill, estimated that CHCs' enhanced visiting rights would cost around £100 million a year across Wales, while the enhanced advocacy role would cost £480 million per year. The cost of putting the AWCHC on a statutory footing and increasing its responsibility and powers was estimated at £10 million per year in additional rates and rents and £70 million a year in additional staffing."

The estimate for the cost of all the measures in the Bill therefore comes to a substantial £660 million a year.

We did some investigation in the House, however, and it transpired that it comes to £660,000 a year, so in one fell swoop the Welsh Liberal Democrats have saved Wales £659,340,000 already, while the Conservatives could come up with only £14,000.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Does the hon. Gentleman therefore welcome the fact that the National Assembly Government have already publicly announced an extra allocation of £550,000 for the enhanced role of CHCs in Wales?

Lembit Öpik: Indeed, that shows that we are quite close to the estimate within the research document.

The Bill has attracted an encouraging degree of consensus in the Chamber, because much of it has been fashioned on a cross-party basis. Crucially, it has been fashioned with outcomes in mind. The proof of the pudding will be in how it is implemented but in my judgment this is an evolutionary step. Those who were in favour of devolution wanted the Assembly to have greater autonomy in defining how the many different elements of health were provided in Wales.

One of the Bill's crucial elements is the Wales Centre for Health. If it is handled correctly, it could provide a powerful strategic drive to the work and thinking of the Assembly in defining what the Secretary of State said he wanted: a health service specifically tailored to Wales. He mentioned plans for thousands of extra nurses and hundreds of other staff in the health service in Wales, which is to be welcomed. It is a credit to the Welsh Liberal Democrat-led coalition with Labour in the Cardiff Assembly that so much has been achieved.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lembit Öpik: I knew I would not get away with that.

Mr. Jones: If the Liberal Democrats claim so much credit for leading the Welsh Assembly on so much, why is it that the Welsh Assembly intends to renege on a commitment to rebuild Cardiff royal infirmary in my constituency and that of the former deputy leader of the Welsh Assembly, Jenny Randerson? Although Ms Randerson, the Member for Cardiff, Central in the Assembly, has condemned that decision, she apparently is powerless to do anything about it. The Liberal Democrats cannot have it both ways.

Lembit Öpik: I shall save you the bother, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of ruling me out of order for attempting to reply to that intervention. I will be happy to discuss that matter with the hon. Gentleman later. I assure him that, as the Secretary of State said—I think that it was a sincerely held point, made in the spirit of the debate—there are still lots of problems in the health service in Wales.

To be a little more serious about the coalition, what is interesting is that the Welsh Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition is working hard to achieve the consensus out of which this Bill has been born. What is even more interesting is that there has been constructive input on the Bill from four parties. As I have said—I will not dwell on it particularly—the kind of new politics that we promised a few years ago when we were campaigning for a Welsh Assembly has probably led to a Bill of this sort coming before us now. I am greatly encouraged by that.

There is one risk associated with the Wales Centre for Health. If, in working and offering guidance to the Welsh Assembly, it becomes the strategic driving force that I believe it can be, it is likely that there will be increasing divergence between what happens in Westminster for the English health service and what happens in Wales. That would be a healthy development for Wales but I imagine that it could cause strains between what we discuss here for England and what is discussed in the Assembly for Wales. I hope that the potential resistance of the Government in Westminster, who could be uncomfortable about the guidance given by the centre, will not come about.

For that part of the Bill to work, there must be some tolerance in terms of the divergence, which could put a strain on other health-related debates here. There must be an acceptance that we are trying to find, to use the sort of language that the Secretary of State used before he left the Chamber, Welsh solutions to Welsh health issues.

If the Wales Centre for Health does its job well enough, current best practice could be imported from Wales to England. Again, it requires a new kind of politics, enabling Ministers to take the opportunity, without loss of face, to look at the devolved institutions and to say that the Westminster Government can learn something useful from what has happened elsewhere.

The issue of foundation hospitals and whether they should have been included in the Bill is a good example of divergence. I am not convinced by some of the statements by the Government for England with regard to health provision. I agree with what the hon. Member for Ribble Valley said about divergence.

The Government's language on the health service now seems to include creeping terminology about failing institutions. That sort of psychology has done a lot of damage in the education sector. The Bill may help to protect us from the same danger creeping into Wales.

Certain specific points relate to cardiac and orthopaedic services. While I am very happy with the service that I and my mother, who has had various health problems, have received, again, the strategic approach that the Wales Centre for Health and the community health councils could provide across Wales could deal with the issues that we are all concerned about. Waiting lists concern me—I think that they concern us all—but by working together we can perhaps get those down.

I was heartened by the fact that the Conservatives have travelled around various parts of Europe to see best practice. It is ironic that they are so pro Europe in that respect but not quite so keen on other aspects of harmonisation.

On the question whether the Bill can save money, we need to be honest. It is very difficult to save money in the health service because, ultimately, when people feel better, they live longer. The quality of life improves but the health bill does not reduce. The NHS was originally set up in the belief that it would save money for the Government by reducing illness. It has improved life expectancy and the quality of life of individuals but that has come with a large price tag, not least because technology costs a lot more. Often, technology costs increase at a higher rate than the underlying inflation rate in the health service. This is not the place to discuss that but we should not pretend to anyone that by supporting and passing the Bill anyone will save a significant amount of money in the health service.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) said, with insight, that he did not believe Labour would always be in power. How right he is. He knows that the Liberal Democrat Government are just round the corner and already operating effectively in Wales.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Round the bend.

Lembit Öpik: That was quite good.

Since we intend to govern responsibly, we need to pave the way now so that we do not have to pick up problems.

On other key points, we need to understand exactly the role of the community health councils. That is fairly clearly laid out in the document but there is a side issue about boundaries and co-terminosity. Kirsty Williams, the Welsh Liberal Democrat Assembly Member, who has done a lot of work to help to construct a modern health service in Wales, has pointed out that, although we should respect natural boundaries for local authorities, there may be occasions when having more than one community health council will be effective in the Wales environment. Being parochial for a moment, Powys, for example, has two community health councils; one would be unmanageably big and it probably would not be reasonable to expect one individual community health council to do the work.

Many of the figures cited have come from independent advocacy services. A rough figure of £500,000 has been mentioned, but we must be careful to recognise that the costs are estimates and while those estimates sound okay, it would be a great shame if the intention of the Bill were thwarted by the fact that the community health councils did not have the necessary resources. Even £1 million is not a huge proportion of the Welsh health budget. We back the principles in the Bill, based on an acceptance of flexibility. We should work reasonably with the Assembly, ensuring that it does not end up in an impossible position by trying to fund something from its existing budget that is unfundable, given that it is primarily a Welsh Assembly responsibility.

It may sound like a detail but it was suggested by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs that prisons be transferred into the ambit of the Bill. Hon. Members will correct me if I am wrong, but I do not believe that that has been done. I think that it is unfinished business. It would be strategically more sensible to do that now, rather than to return to it in future.

The next steps are fairly clear. We will need a constructive Committee stage but, as has been noted, it is likely that our proceedings will be relatively uncontroversial, as many big issues have been resolved. However, various amendments will have to be tabled.

[Lembit Öpik]

The Welsh Liberal Democrats in particular will want to deal with matters that might fall outside the Bill. We have talked about free, long-term personal care for many reasons. Lloyd George said that the measure of a civilised society is how it treats its elderly. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) has worked in that sector, and has suggested that tomorrow's debate on community care might be a better opportunity to discuss legislation to achieve that goal. However, I raise the point now as these matters are interrelated.

Much research suggests that the introduction of free dental and eye tests

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can return to the Bill.

Lembit Öpik: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I was deviating. I recognise that, to include provision such as free dental and eye tests, the long title of the Bill would have to be changed. That is unlikely to happen in Standing Committee, but it is ironic that the matters to which I have referred could come back to the Floor of the House for discussion, given the advice that I imagine that the Wales Centre for Health will come up with once it is established.

The constructive debate tonight has been encouraging, and I think that the Standing Committee deliberations will be constructive too. I hope to hear the useful and ever friendly criticisms from Tory Members.

Mr. Evans: Earlier, the hon. Gentleman mentioned orthopaedics, for which waiting lists are way above the 72-week target. Does the hon. Gentleman consider that a useful role for CHCs could be the production of annual reports detailing the views of patients in each area? That would highlight where the real problems are, and thus enable a focus on solutions to reduce waiting lists.

Lembit Öpik: That sounds like the sensible sort of role envisaged in the Bill. I am concerned about tying CHCs into too much repeating bureaucracy, as I believe that they will operate best on an ongoing and proactive basis. They should identify and deal with local issues, without having to go through an eternal cycle of preparing reports. However, that is an important matter for consideration in Committee.

Another such matter is whether CHCs should be authorised to go into private health providers, even when there are no NHS patients in them. There is no point in rehearsing the various principles at stake, but I hope that we can discuss the possibility. More encouraging is the way in which the CHCs will have pretty wide powers to investigate the general quality of provision. If we work on the basis of success rather than failure, the CHCs could be critical friends for the institutions that they inspect.

I hope that a reasoned debate in Committee will help build relations between Westminster and Cardiff. After a slow start, that relationship is fast improving. It could also help create a healthier health service. If that leads to a healthier Wales, it would be a credit to the Bill and all those involved in it.

6.54 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): I am pleased to contribute to this debate, as I was when the Bill was discussed in the Welsh Grand Committee in the summer. I have read the extensive work done by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs on the Bill, and I pay tribute to that.

The Bill is a modest but important step towards increasing joint scrutiny of draft legislation by the National Assembly for Wales and this House. Such parallel scrutiny sets a good precedent, and I am glad that the Government are committed to ensuring that more Bills are handled in that way.

The diversity to which devolution has led is relevant to the Bill. For those who, like me, are powerful supporters of devolution, it is a recognition that different solutions may apply in England and Wales, and that there may be learning experiences to be derived from both. That is to be celebrated, not scorned. We are aiming to secure good health care provision for all communities on either side of the border. If a different approach is adopted in Wales, so be it: results are what matter.

The Bill will establish the Wales Centre for Health, which will gather and disseminate information on health provision in Wales. That is a vital and long overdue function. The Assembly has made great strides in that direction already, especially in recognising the problems of prevention as well as repair when it comes to health. A great tragedy of many Welsh communities—especially where there are high indices of multiple deprivation—is that chronic and long-term health problems are exacerbated by poor housing, low aspirations and so on. That is something to which the Wales Centre for Health can turn its attention and for which it can work proactively to find solutions.

I also welcome the proposed centre's ability to undertake and commission research. It is right that, under the devolution settlement, that research should be passed down to the Wales Centre for Health. The centre will look at where research is needed, seek solutions and put forward proposals, instead of everything being steered by Westminster. That shows a level of trust in the Assembly and the process of joint scrutiny. The centre will also provide Welsh solutions in matters such as the development and provision of training in the health sector, and that is to be greatly welcomed.

The Welsh Centre for Health will face great challenges. In many of our communities, health problems are huge, long-term and entrenched. In Bro Morgannwyg, for example, heart disease affects more than 20 per cent. of the community. The figures for respiratory diseases, asthma and arthritis are 25 per cent., 12 per cent. and 26 per cent., respectively. Mental illness, the constant Cinderella of health care, affects 13.7 per cent. of the people in my area.

The Welsh focus that a Welsh Centre for Health will provide can really tackle such problems, by developing research and making good proposals that tackle local needs.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned a number of problems, but was he alarmed to read today that people with Alzheimer's disease in certain parts of

Wales are not getting access to drugs that may help them and which are more readily available elsewhere in the UK?

Huw Irranca-Davies: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. That is exactly the sort of problem that the Welsh Centre for Health can tackle. However, we must be realistic. As has been noted already, once a problem has been identified, the necessary resources must be made available to ensure that it is rectified. We are committed to putting in the necessary resources. I share the hon. Gentleman's anxiety about the problem that he identified. It needs to be tackled, but that can happen only when effective resources are made available.

There are major lifestyle problems in Wales. It would be a failure not to accept that. In Bro Morgannwyg, 32 per cent. of the population are heavy smokers, and 21.3 per cent. consume more than the recommended levels of alcohol. Only a quarter of the population undertake regular exercise, and 53.8 per cent. of people are overweight or obese. Those are staggering figures. This Bill, which has been worked out jointly, gives us a chance to identify and tackle the problems involved.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Would the hon. Gentleman have welcomed a provision banning smoking in public places?

Huw Irranca-Davies: I certainly think the issue should be tackled. I was going to mention a report that came out recently, of which the hon. Gentleman may know. It examines the regularity of drug use by youngsters, comparing that with the way in which alcohol has already entrenched itself in our societies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) mentioned research on a ward-by-ward basis. The WCH should consider that. I am thinking of the way in which the "communities first" analysis was carried out, and the way in which we have looked at communities in terms of multiple deprivation. We should consider wards as well as the bigger county, borough and health authority areas. We need to pinpoint the evidence that will enable us to tackle some of the problems.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my hon. Friend aware of the Townsend report, produced by the Welsh Assembly? It gives details of inequalities in health authority areas.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I know of the report, and I think that we should adopt the same approach. It is no good simply looking at one area. My constituency contains areas of relative prosperity and good health, but the picture is different when it is broken down into not just individual towns and villages, but parts of those towns and villages. The contrasts are stark. I hope the WCH will extend the Townsend approach.

Brynawel house, an institution funded by charitable donations, is the only residential completely "dry" house in Wales that will tackle drug and alcohol abuse. It is the only institution with a policy forbidding any consumption of alcohol or drugs, and it is in my constituency. I suspect that the WCH will also increasingly consider that approach. How can Welsh solutions deal with such problems?

I have mentioned lifestyle problems. We should adopt a more innovative attitude to issues such as GP referrals and exercise on prescription. Not everyone wants to trot along to the leisure centre rather than being prescribed a bottle of pills, but exercise is not only good for physical health; time and again, it has been shown to have an impact on mental health. I have quoted some worrying figures in that context. We should end reliance on drugs, and turn to prescriptions that tackle lifestyle issues.

We need to get the balance right between repair and prevention. The Assembly is already starting to lead the way in devoting resources and talents to the prevention of illness rather than NHS repair costs.

Health Professions Wales should be broadly welcomed. I expect it to have an impact on standards of nursing, midwifery and radiography. I should declare an interest: my wife works as a radiographer. I see colleagues representing mid-Wales constituencies on the Opposition Benches. They will have their own constituency problems relating to midwifery provision in remote rural communities that are some distance from district general hospitals. Unique circumstances require different solutions.

I want to ask some questions. I am concerned about overall standards, particularly in regard to recruitment from overseas. I was pleased with what I took to be an Opposition welcome for the current recruitment, and a wish for the problems to be eased along with maintaining the appropriate standards. HPW could have a major input. I recently went to Madrid with a number of colleagues, and observed some very good schemes enabling British hospitals to recruit well-trained Spanish nurses directly. The problem is ensuring that they meet our standards and deal with our problems as quickly as possible. One of our problems, of course, is the number of vacancies that we cannot fill. As an Opposition Member pointed out in the Welsh Grand Committee, that reflects the investment that we are making; but we must fill those vacancies.

Mr. Evans: I welcomed the fact that the vacancies were being filled, but was alarmed by the fact that there were still 750 in Wales.

Perhaps HPW should also consider the problem of retaining nurses. When I discussed it with the Royal College of Nursing, I was disturbed to learn that so many people, after three years of training, ended up earning £15,000 a year as staff nurses when they could earn more as managers in McDonalds.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I do not think that the long-term solution to the staff shortages that exist in many areas is recruitment from overseas, although it may be part of the solution. You are right: we need to develop in-house training, and the Spanish example I gave is relevant here. Those people were experiencing the reverse of our circumstances. They invested for a long time, and now have a glut of staff. Oh that we were in that position! Anyway, you are right. We must look at retention, training—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman to use the correct parliamentary language?

Huw Irranca-Davies: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am still learning on my feet, as it were.

[Huw Irranca-Davies]

The same approach by HPW might help us to deal with the shortages of NHS dentists, and, amazingly, with the shortages of GPs. In Pencoed in my constituency, which has a large population, it is impossible to recruit more than one GP per surgery rather than the four who are needed. That seems absurd, given that the area is part of the M4 corridor. HPW could play a pivotal role in pinpointing shortages and trying to deal with them.

Let me say something about community health councils. I am glad that local patients and other local people are to be given a democratic voice. I do not agree that the proposals will lead to confusion; I strongly suspect that people will know exactly where to turn.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) mentioned time off for public bodies. I hope that the Government will clarify that in their response to the Committee. They have already said

"Further consideration will be given to approaching the relevant Secretary of State to make an order"

which would extend the power, but I should like more clarification. We must not discourage people from becoming members of CHCs by failing to give them enough time off. I think that the Government have a will to make the system work.

I acknowledge the extension of powers allowing CHCs to inspect local authority premises, primary care premises and, to a degree, nursing homes, but I want to know why that does not apply to prisons and young offenders' units. As I said in the Committee, that would not replace lay visits, but it would constitute a welcome extension of medical expertise and of patients' rights.

I want to say a little about cross-border co-operation—crossing Offa's dyke, if you will. The Government have said that no review is necessary and have given their opinion, but are they adamant that their proposals will work? I am not in the same position as the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and his neighbour in Powys, the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd, but constituents of mine certainly travel not to Bristol but all the way to Hammersmith for cardiac surgery. So it is a matter of concern, and I seek the Government's reassurance that what they said in response to the Committee's recommendations will work.

Mr. Roger Williams: The hon. Gentleman raises the interesting point of people accessing district general hospitals outside their CHC area. We have experienced differential waiting lists, with people in Wales having to wait longer for treatment for the same condition than people in England. We believe that CHCs could play a vital part in resolving that problem.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I welcome those comments. I am sure that the Minister is listening avidly and hope that he will give a suitable response that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

I welcome the schedule 7A changes on CHCs which allow the National Assembly for Wales to determine the membership regulations. I do not agree that that will mean that the CHCs are hidebound by what the Assembly tells them. The Assembly is setting the rules by which they work, but the CHCs have great independence within those: they will make their own representations and investigations; they will represent the views of their patients and committee, as opposed to saying what the Assembly tells them to say. There have to be some rules and regulations, but the CHCs still have a great deal of independence.

In conclusion, I welcome the Bill, not only in terms of the beneficial impact that it will have for health provision in Wales but for the precedent that it sets for co-operative working between the Assembly, Westminster and other partners.

7.11 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I begin by paying tribute to the Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Committee who has guided us through the proceedings on the Bill so far with great skill and diplomacy.

I am sorry that the Government's response to the Committee's proposals have been less positive about the CHCs than other issues. On time off, for example, the Government stated that it could be done by order—which is not in dispute—but that does not mean that it can be done only by order, as might happen under the Bill. The Government's reply on coterminosity seemed to address the case against exact coterminosity, which the Committee did not recommend. Instead, it recommended a statutory duty to have regard to the local health board and other boundaries that could readily be achieved.

The Government's reply regarding other bodies states simply that the current proposals strike the right balance. The Committee did not suggest that they did not, but that the National Assembly for Wales should be empowered to extend CHC remits if it wished to in the future rather than have to return to Westminster to seek such powers.

The Government agreed to the Committee's recommendations on clarity—what it called the

"arcane language in sub-paragraphs (g) and (h)".

However, that remains.

The Committee wanted to ensure that the National Assembly would be free to allow CHCs to commission others to carry out the independent advocacy services. The Government's reply does not make it clear whether the Bill allows that, or whether they wish it to do so. The Government agreed to review the terms of the schedule to ensure that the Association of Welsh Community Health Councils provided a system for CHCs to report to the AWCHC, but not to limit the functions that the Assembly could give the AWCHC. Again, nothing seems to have changed.

The Government accepted the principal point that the independence of the Wales Centre for Health should be more apparent on the face of the Bill, although no equivalent to the Food Standards Agency was suggested. The bald power of the Assembly to direct the WCH has been replaced in paragraphs 6 and 7 of schedule 2, which allows the National Assembly to give directions where it believes that there has been a serious failure by the WCH to perform any function that it considers should have been performed. That presumably applies to things that have not been done rather than those that have been done, but the distinction may be unclear.

Finally, the Government seem to have accepted the thrust of the Committee's concern that the ambit of Health Professions Wales should not be allowed to spread. However, clause 4(2) and (3) does not make it clear whether the functions to be confirmed by the Assembly order are to be restricted to health care staff. I will come to possible amendments at the appropriate stage. By and large, the Bill is benign, but one or two amendments on these subjects in line with the Committee's recommendations might be helpful.

The Bill could have addressed the excessive bureaucracy involved in the reform of the NHS in Wales. I have heard it said that Wales will have the most bureaucratic health service in western Europe. In addition, an NHS Confederation survey found that 80 per cent. of NHS managers did not believe that the Government's reforms of the Welsh health system would work. Nick Bourne, the leader of the Conservative party in the Welsh Assembly, in his speech entitled "Making Life Better in Wales" said that we should be reducing the unnecessary layers of bureaucracy building up in our health service.

To some extent, the Bill defeats the purpose of the national health service, which is supposed to be a nationwide public service. For example, Amicus, a manufacturing trade union, is of the firm belief that

"professional standards should be centrally determined to ensure that the standard of healthcare provision is of the same quality across the whole of the UK."

The Bill gives authoritarian and highly centralised powers to the National Assembly for Wales to abolish or alter the CHCs, to abolish or assume the functions of the Wales Centre for Health as well as to appoint its members and chairman, and to abolish Health Professions Wales. That is a great shame.

In the Queen's Speech of June 2001, allusions were made to legislation that would decentralise power and direct resources to NHS staff. Such National Assembly authoritarianism centralises powers and allows for measures of uncertainty and unpredictability in the Welsh health system. In addition, questions have been raised about the degree of independence from the National Assembly enjoyed by the Wales Centre for Health and Health Professions Wales. The Royal College of Nursing questions HPW's independence from the Assembly. We believe that the National Assembly should restrict itself to setting strategic objectives for the NHS, which would be more helpful.

The Bill further illustrates the authoritarian and centralised powers of the Assembly with regard to its powers over the CHCs. Proposed schedule 7A gives the Assembly powers to make regulations concerning CHCs' proceedings, staff, premises, expenses, the discharge of functions of a council by a committee and the appointment of persons who are not members of the council to such committees.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that that is less centralised than having all those decisions made at Westminster in the sense that the Assembly is closer to the people being served by the health service in Wales, which is one of the Bill's intentions?

Mr. Wiggin: The hon. Gentleman makes a useful point, but the Bill's wording does not achieve that. I should like to welcome the retention of the CHCs and the close link between the public and health service, but some of the Bill's wording is more authoritarian than it need be.

It is regrettable that the Bill does not make provision for the creation of foundation hospitals. Another opportunity missed is that there is no provision for the creation or construction of a much needed children's hospital in Wales. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House would like to see that.

Julie Morgan: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a children's hospital is going ahead in the University Hospital of Wales in my constituency and that the Assembly has given it considerable funding?

Mr. Wiggin: I was not aware of that—*[Interruption.]* I think that I heard one hon. Member say "Obviously not" from a sedentary position. I am delighted to hear that progress is being made, however, and perhaps at a later date the hon. Lady might fill me in on why all the money has not been forthcoming.

We would have liked the Bill to include more powers for CHCs to provide patient support services, perhaps by making patient support officers employees of the CHCs. Another of my concerns is the representation of Welsh patients receiving treatment in England, which the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) mentioned. In Hereford hospital, next to my constituency, at least 10 per cent., and sometimes as many as 15 per cent. of the patients are Welsh. As there are shortages of funding for Welsh patients seeking treatment in England, and as waiting lists are so long in Wales, it may be necessary for Welsh patients to keep crossing the border to be treated in England, so funding must be provided.

The Bill contains no provision for the use of the private or independent sector in reforming the NHS in Wales, or for the use of the private finance initiative, for example. Private and independent sector involvement might be used—and might be needed—to address such problems as the funding of Welsh patients seeking care in England, reducing waiting lists, dealing with the care home crisis, the problem of delayed discharges and reducing GP shortages.

Another major criticism of the Bill is that it fails to address the real crises and issues in the Welsh health service that affect ordinary patients. Assembly Member David Melding said on 18 July 2002 that

"the draft Bill is substantially different to that anticipated in June 2001 and much reduced in scope."

Among the problems that the Bill fails to address are waiting lists for both in-patients and out-patients, which increased dramatically between 31 March 1997 and 30 September 2002: in-patients by 7.1 per cent. and out-patients by 135.1 per cent. In that regard, the Government may have broken their manifesto pledge. Before the 1999 Welsh Assembly elections, they said that no one would wait more than 18 months for in-patient treatment. Given that 4,335 people have been on that waiting list for more than 18 months—1,810 people more than when the original pledge was made—it sounds as if they have broken that pledge.

[Mr. Wiggin]

Another promise that has been broken is that regarding out-patient waiting lists. The Labour party said that, by the end of its first term in the Assembly, no one would wait more than six months for out-patient treatment. However, more than 83,443 people are now waiting six months or more for out-patient treatment, compared with 25,676 in May 1999. Indeed, the *South Wales Evening Post* ran a story on unacceptable waiting lists for patients with regard to ear, nose and throat treatment. Adults needing nasal surgery will have to wait for between nine and 70 weeks—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying a little from the Bill. I know that he is talking about what is not in the Bill, but he should address his remarks specifically to the Bill.

Mr. Wiggin: I apologise for straying.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): It is very tempting.

Mr. Wiggin: Indeed.

Rather than focusing on reforming bureaucratic elements of the Welsh health service, the Bill will perhaps have less direct benefit to patients than I would have hoped. It is true that we are not overtly critical of the substance of the Bill, but it would have been better had some of the failures—on which I should have liked to continue—in relation to some of the promises made by the Government to patients in Wales been aired.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one aspect of the Bill might not only look at the failures but at things that have worked, to promote best practice, in which CHCs would have a role? For instance, in Bro Morgannwg, the number of nursing and dental staff has increased and administration has been reduced.

Mr. Wiggin: That sounds very positive, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman. By and large, we all want the same thing from the Bill—better care for patients. We have to identify the best way of going forward. Some of the proposals are exceptionally positive. Having sat through the Select Committee's review of what the Bill was going to contain, the hon. Gentleman will know that I have been very supportive. It would have been better, however, had one or two of the items on which I touched in my speech been included. A Conservative Assembly Member argued that for devolution to be meaningful, major reform in the public services for Wales should be achieved in Wales-only Bills. Much of the content of this Bill should therefore have been included in the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002 applying to Wales. The extra part of the Bill should not have been necessary.

The Bill's intention is to reform patient services in the Welsh health service, but it fails to address some of the most important issues to patients in Wales, such as GP shortages and massive waiting lists. By and large, however, the Bill is well-intentioned, and I am grateful that I was able to sit on the Welsh Affairs Committee.

7.25 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): The Bill has already been described as benign, modest and consensual. I agree with all those adjectives, which is why I must disagree with the conclusions of the Select Committee Chairman, who has unfortunately just left his place. Early in his speech, he suggested that the Second Reading debate on this Bill, and on other Bills, could be curtailed. It is dangerous to generalise from the particular. It is probably true that this Bill could be speeded through the House, as could any consensual Bill, but it does not follow that simply because this Bill is one with which we largely agree, any Bill introduced through this procedure would command similar levels of agreement. I would therefore caution against the Government taking the Select Committee Chairman's word that the House agrees with rushing through all such Wales Bills.

The philosophy that appears to be emerging in the provision of health care in Wales, as compared with the provision of health care in England, seems something of a diversion in terms of how patient empowerment is to take place. I am sure that all Members will say that they want patients to be given more power over their health care needs. It does not follow, however, that that goal can be achieved in only one way.

This Bill and other proposals made in the Welsh Assembly attempt to empower patients by creating committees—in this case, community health councils—that are as representative as possible to give patients greater power. I interpret what is happening in England as an attempt to give patients more power to choose their health care by giving hospitals greater independence, and by giving patients greater opportunity to choose where they seek their health care. There are arguments to be made in favour of both systems—I put it no more strongly than that, as I am being loyal—but we must try to make sure that both systems work as well as possible.

I am in favour of community health councils being made as independent as possible in Wales, because their role in Wales will be extremely important in ensuring that patients are given health care that is adequate to their needs and what they desire, and because it should be seen to be independent of the role of Government. I therefore approve of the measures in the Bill, and I might wish to strengthen them to give independence to the community health councils.

I would like the CHCs to be given possibly greater powers than those provided in the Bill. We need to do more than simply look forward to the role that they should have in relation to what used to be available. Tomorrow, the House will debate a Bill for England and Wales that deals with delayed discharges and the problem of bed blocking. CHCs exist in Wales, but not in England, and they could be given an important role in determining what constitutes bed blocking and whether beds have unnecessarily been taken up by people who should be discharged from acute hospitals. They could also determine at what point charges should be laid on local government to pay for the beds that are being occupied.

That issue is extremely important in Wales, and more important there than it is in England. On any one day in England, 5,000 beds are taken up inappropriately because social care cannot, for one reason or another,

be provided. On any one day in Wales, 806 beds are taken up. I calculate that, per capita, the problem is at least two to three times worse in Wales than in it is England. That fact alone explains in large part why waiting lists figures in Wales are so much worse than they are in England.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that CHCs will be able to make a positive impact on the difficulties that he has rightly described if, and only if, there is a degree of homogenisation and shared responsibility between local authority budgets and health budgets?

Mr. Jones: In effect, the Bill dealing with delayed discharges will do that. When people are lying in bed in a hospital, their care is being paid for from the health service budget. When they are lying in bed in a nursing home or a community home, their care is being paid for by the local authority budget. There is a vested interest—I put it no higher than that—for local authorities to be not too quick in moving someone out of a bed for which they do not pay and into one for which they pay. The delayed discharges Bill will allow the budget to be transferred if the bed is used for social service rather than acute health care reasons.

Julie Morgan: Does my hon. Friend agree that the mechanisms for dealing with this problem have already been set up by the Welsh Assembly in the partnership arrangement that has been created between local authorities and health bodies, which looks to solving the problem jointly rather than to considering penalties on one or other of the bodies?

Mr. Jones: I do not agree. I hope that that might happen, but we must accept that, if the partnership agreement had been effective, it would already hopefully have had some effect. I have already explained that the position in Wales is two to three times worse than in England—so it appears that, so far at least, partnership has not delivered. It may deliver in the future, but the legislation for England and Wales will enable provision to be made on both sides of the Severn.

Julie Morgan: I agree with my hon. Friend that the Bill coming before the House tomorrow will enable the Welsh Assembly to take advantage of what exists. However, the Assembly and local authorities have not been working in partnership for long enough to enable us to judge whether we should penalise local authorities when beds are blocked. Enough time has not yet been spent on the partnership solution.

Mr. Jones: Local authorities are not automatically penalised. They are penalised only if they do not deliver. If the partnership arrangement works, they will deliver and will not be penalised. Everyone will be happy, and waiting lists will fall considerably.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Is not the great hope that local health boards will create a closer working relationship between local authorities and the health service and that that will address the problem that my hon. Friend has so eloquently described?

Mr. Jones: I agree that we should all live in hope to some extent. The provisions will be there in case hope is insufficient, but they are important. The CHCs will also have a valuable role, especially if my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan), who may be well informed about the view of the Welsh Assembly, is correct. If Wales and England take a different view of delayed discharges and if delayed discharges are not penalised in Wales, the CHCs will have a particular role to play. I can imagine the interesting and difficult issues that will need to be sorted out if the Welsh Assembly chooses not to invoke the procedure. An English hospital, such as that in Shrewsbury, which treats many patients from mid-Wales, will be able to charge local authorities in Powys and Montgomeryshire, while a Welsh hospital such as the Royal Gwent will be unable to charge English local authorities such as Gloucestershire for delayed discharge. CHCs will have much explaining to do to their patients about why such a position has arisen.

I welcome the role that the CHCs will play. I look to them to be as independent as possible and to take on new powers as they become available in the legislative programme before us for the rest of this Session. I hope that the CHCs will be able to ensure that there is the patient empowerment that we all want and that they will do such a good job that Welsh patients will not feel the need for choices that may be available in England but not in Wales.

7.38 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): We are having an interesting and constructive debate. I commend the remarks of the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) and his support for the CHCs. I also commend the remarks of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) about the effect of mental ill health and the relative neglect that that subject has received.

Referring to the Bill in his press release for the Queen's Speech, the Secretary of State said:

"Patient power will be our watchword in the future."

Patient power—or rather patient power, carer power and community power—has for many years been the watchword of the most progressive elements in the health service, but they have often been frustrated by the centralisation and hierarchical structure of the system and by the strongly hierarchical nature of medical power.

There is a glaring and long-standing need to reduce health inequalities in Wales. As page 9 of the recent Welsh Assembly document "Well Being in Wales" notes:

"Average life expectancy in some parts of Wales is five years less than in others".

That is a startling geographical difference. The document goes on to state that there are marked differences between different social groups. We have known about those class differences for many years and they have often been neglected. Discussion about them has sometimes been thwarted, as notoriously happened under the tenure of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) when he served in the Conservative Government.

A cross-cutting approach is sorely needed in Wales. It needs to consider poverty, housing and other issues, such as smoking and the consumption of alcohol. I hope

[Hywel Williams]

that the Bill will help to expose those differences and to keep them in the minds of people who make and implement policy, irrespective of the long waiting lists and the lack of dental treatment that other hon. Members have mentioned.

It has been said that the Bill is largely uncontroversial. Even the House of Commons Library research paper says that. Some hon. Members will recall King Vidor's 1938 film "The Citadel". I am sure the previous Secretary of State will. In that film, part of the answer to a public health problem was the selective use of high explosives. The Bill may be largely uncontroversial, but the proper implementation of patient, carer and community power is the metaphorical high explosive we need to attack the historical inequalities of health in our country and to provide Wales with the world-class health service that the Secretary of State says it is his ambition to achieve.

Patient power has to be enabled. We will look for a practical demonstration of the growth of that following the implementation of the Bill and other measures. We welcome the provisions that will extend the roles of CHCs to the primary sector and nursing homes. That will provide a statutory basis for the patient advocacy service and will establish a Welsh body for CHCs. We welcome the intention to create the Wales Centre for Health, which will provide public health advice, research and training support, and Health Professions Wales, which will discharge the Assembly's functions on the education and training of health care professionals and health care support workers. We also welcome the education and training functions of the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Health Professions Council in Wales. All that is to the good.

We hoped that the Bill would contain other proposals, such as the banning of smoking in public places, which would have made a substantial contribution to the improvement of public health. I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Ogmore agree with that. We were also keen for the Bill to contain provisions on free personal care for older people, which would create a simpler and more coherent structure, to say the least.

However, we welcome the Bill as a specific Welsh Bill, with its process of discussion and scrutiny in both Cardiff and the Welsh Affairs Committee. We look to the fulfilment of the Assembly's pledge to provide draft regulations by the Standing Committee stage. We trust that that entire process will demonstrate clearly that the representatives of the people of Wales are well able to handle the legislative affairs of our country.

On the particular proposals for CHCs, we are very supportive of the retention and strengthening of CHCs in Wales. We are glad that that course has been taken for our country—as glad as some hon. Members from England are envious of us and unhappy about the course set for their CHCs. The CHCs will hopefully be independent of vested interests, which relates to a point made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones). That is essential. We trust that the independence will not be diluted by the proposed changes in the organisation of CHC membership.

I know from the case of my own CHC in North Gwynedd that the local authority representatives are wholly committed and valuable members. Perhaps they will join the CHC by other means. However, in rural and dispersed areas there is a limited number of such individuals. We cannot afford to ignore those public-spirited and committed people. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) referred to the importance of taking time off work. I agree entirely.

The extension of CHCs' role to the primary sector and to nursing homes is welcome. Clearly, CHC visits to NHS premises where care is being provided will be a valuable addition to the important professional inspection. We will look with interest at the draft regulations produced by the Welsh Assembly Government for the Report Stage on matters such as unannounced visits, but obviously those are to be welcomed as a development of patient and carer power. I do not share the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on the Assembly's power to draft the regulations and the powers given to it throughout the Bill. Irrespective of the value or virtue—or otherwise—of the Labour-Liberal pact in Cardiff, we are happy for those decisions to be taken in Wales.

Hon. Members have mentioned the fact that some Welsh patients receive their care in England. The names Gobowen, Christie, Alder Hey and Clatterbridge are familiar to patients from north Wales and their carers, who are also familiar with the high standard of care provided by those institutions and the difficulties that arise from accessing care in them. Only the other day I was made aware of a case in which a referral of a child from a specialist unit at Alder Hey to a local hospital for occupational therapy was refused because the list was closed, not because it was long. CHCs should have information about care from establishments over the border so that they can perform their duties well.

A particular concern is the availability in English establishments of people who can speak Welsh, especially in cases that involve children, people with chronic conditions or brain injury, and the terminally ill. We particularly welcome the proposed statutory basis for the role of CHCs as patient advocates. Some CHCs already have a discrete patient advocacy service, but others do not. The welcome extra funding announced the other day will be used in my area to employ a patient advocate for the first time. I hope that that will lead to a substantial improvement in the service provided.

I particularly look to the work that I expect the CHCs to undertake as part of patient advocacy to push for the extension and development of services through the medium of Welsh—and, for that matter, through the medium of languages other than Welsh and English—in our locality and throughout Wales. The establishment of proper and good communication between the patient and the health care worker is essential, and that means that communication needs to take place in all the languages used widely in Wales.

If patient power is to mean just that, there must be a sustained effort over an extended period to recruit people with the appropriate language skills. Being able to converse with patients in the language that they find most congenial is a core skill for some staff in some areas and for the majority of staff in others, especially if the patient is young or elderly or has suffered a stroke or

brain injury. I know that some hon. Members have family experiences of the health service's deficiencies in that respect, and I trust that they will support the CHCs in pressing for change, as I sincerely hope the CHCs will do.

The establishment of a national body for CHCs has been welcomed by the CHC representatives whom I consulted before the debate. The relationship with individual CHCs in respect of the performance management function will have to be approached in a supportive manner, and I understand that that is the standpoint of the new body. I note from the research brief that the Welsh Affairs Committee called for greater clarity as to how the new body's powers would be strengthened, and that the Government agreed that the wording of the schedule would be reviewed, but no change has resulted. Clearly the House may turn to that topic on Report.

On a lighter note, I understand that the body is to be known as the Association of Welsh Community Health Councils, or AWCHC, an acronym already used by an hon. Member on these Benches. The health world is blessed with many and varied acronyms, which exclude and sometimes confuse even those who are used to them, let alone the patients. I had a brief look at the back of the report by the Welsh Affairs Committee, and saw the WCCPH, or Welsh Combined Centres for Public Health, the WCH, or Wales Centre for Health, and the ATM, After Today Management. I always thought that ATM stood for automated transaction machine.

May I suggest, therefore, that the Welsh title of the new body is to be preferred, in acronym form at least, in that it yields an acronym that combines accuracy with at least a suggestion of the function of the new body? Welsh-speaking Members will realise that Cymdeithas Cynghorau Iechyd Cymuned Cymru becomes CCICC, or CIC—an essential attribute for a patient advocate. I hope that the CHCs, and the national body, will have CIC.

On the Wales Centre for Health, we welcome the establishment of a Welsh body to act as a multi-disciplinary advice forum. Hopefully it will draw attention to the many causes of ill health and the many ways of tackling issues of health, poverty and housing. The body will also disseminate research, particularly Welsh data, the lack of which has, for many years, been a problem to many people working in health and social services. It will support training in sustainable health and liaise with UK and international professional groups. We have much to learn from professional groups over the border and in other European countries. Sometimes we look with too narrow a focus for comparators. In addition, as we develop Welsh models of health provision and for the prevention of ill health, we will have much to teach the world.

We are glad that the centre's independence is assured and that it will take an active role. It will be a virtual as well as an actual centre. Some years ago, I had the experience of setting up a national centre for training and education in social work. I regret that we invested so much in bricks and mortar and much less in the networks of people throughout Wales that would have supported that centre in the future. Unfortunately, the money went into the building.

Equally, we welcome the establishment of Health Professions Wales, which is an ambitious move. The body will carry out the functions of the Health Professions Council in Wales relating to the continuing education and training and the clinical experience of nurses, midwives, health visitors and other health care professionals and support workers. Fears have been expressed about the loss to Wales of having new and different arrangements for the health professions, compared with England. I trust that those will be allayed by the operation of the new body.

As I said, I come from a background of education and training of social workers. In 1985, the body responsible for that, the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, consisted in Wales of one person coming over from Bristol to work half a day a week, sitting by the phone waiting for a call. As Members can imagine, he had very little business. The CCETSW developed into a fully fledged body, and when it was wound up, it had its own policy documents and publication programme. It also had professional staff and a training agenda complementary to that in the UK. That agenda covered all aspects of training, including, importantly, Welsh-medium training. After 17 years we see the value of that sustained development for the CCETSW, because we have a Welsh body for social care that is a fully fledged, separate entity. That was a process—a long one—and not an event. I therefore value the role of Health Professions Wales in developing high-quality training, Welsh careers information and senior practitioner posts.

On the retention of staff, we have to make sure that we recruit people who fully understand the profession, and we should be careful to promote work-based learning. I note from the research document provided by the Library that the acting chief executive of HPW sets out, as a function to be developed, advice on work-based learning. That is essential if we are to foster a climate in favour of training. People must be able to take up training while they are working. That will be important for the retention of staff.

The use of Welsh practice as a model for developments throughout the UK is also important. I referred earlier to developing medium and practice in Welsh and other languages. We have a great deal to teach other parts of the UK and the world. We have an opportunity to experiment and to develop proper practice to give the user of the service the power to choose the language. We should be confident that we can do the research and development work and that we have something to boast about.

I spoke earlier about the metaphorical high explosive that we need in order to attack the historical inequalities in health in our country and to provide Wales with the world-class health service that it needs. That will be hugely difficult and, no doubt, controversial. I also mentioned the widely held view that the Bill is uncontroversial. If it leads only to uncontroversial change, it will not have contributed sufficiently to the change that is needed if we are to achieve a healthier future for all the people of Wales.

7.57 pm

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I am pleased to be given the opportunity to speak on this Second Reading. I am pleased that there is a Wales-only Bill in the

[Julie Morgan]

Queen's Speech, following the Children's Commissioner for Wales Bill in an earlier Queen's Speech. Taking into account the Welsh clauses in other Bills, we can see that the devolution settlement is working, as many hon. Members have said tonight.

It is interesting that the Bill, along with the Welsh clauses introducing reform of the health authorities and the creation of local health boards in an earlier Bill for England and Wales, is helping to develop a distinctive way forward for the NHS in Wales. The first parts of both the Wales-only Bills, on the children's commissioner and on health, were initially included in legislation for England and Wales.

The children's commissioner began in the Welsh clauses of the Care Standards Bill, and the reform of the health service began in the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professionals Bill. In both cases, that allowed the proposals for Wales to start moving. The children's commissioner was able to begin work before the full powers were finally conferred on the post by the Wales-only Bill, and the health boards were included in earlier legislation so that they could be set up and staffed by April 2003. I understand that they are on course to achieve that.

The Health (Wales) Bill has already had pre-legislative scrutiny by the Welsh Affairs Committee—the first time that that has happened—and by the Health and Social Services Committee of the National Assembly. I attended a sitting of the Health and Social Services Committee, which I found an interesting and unique experience. In that sitting, members of the Committee raised the issue of smoking, saying that a ban on smoking on public places must be part of the Bill. Everyone in the room—every member of the Committee and those who were there observing it—strongly agreed that we all wanted a ban on smoking in public places, but it was also agreed that that did not lie within the scope of the Bill. None the less, I want to register my hope that we will get a ban on smoking in public places and that it will be dealt with as a priority. The emphasis in health should be on prevention, and smoking causes such a huge bill for the health service and such misery in people's lives that we have a duty to do what we can about it. I accept that it is not within the scope of the Bill, but I am glad that we have marked up the fact that we must do something about smoking.

The Bill is short and generally uncontroversial. There has been some controversy in England about the removal of the community health councils, and it is good that we in Wales have avoided that controversy by aiming to strengthen and build on the existing CHCs and increase their advocacy role. The performance of that role has varied throughout Wales. The CHC in Cardiff has played a strong advocacy role—many people who have come to my surgery to discuss problems in the health service have been helped to an enormous extent by the CHC. Cardiff CHC has had special funding to help it in its advocacy and complaints role in respect of individuals, but that does not extend throughout Wales. CHCs in other parts of Wales have not been so well funded for advocacy and complaints functions, so I am pleased that the Bill will ensure more uniform provision for CHCs and that they will be strengthened throughout Wales.

It is interesting that England decided not to keep, change and strengthen CHCs. There seems to be a divide between attitudes in England and in Wales to CHCs. In Wales, CHCs have been thinly staffed, but there has always been a good standard of advocacy and their existence has never been questioned. As other hon. Members have said, the difference in this respect between England and Wales shows how devolution produces different outcomes. It is easy to live with the fact of different outcomes—there is no tension about Wales taking one course and England taking another. That is what devolution is and what the Bill emphasises.

CHCs, with patients and local representatives, will work with local health boards and local authorities to create a service in which the primary aim is prevention, and the emphasis is on health, not ill health. That is the message that has been coming from the Assembly in its development of health policy: we are talking not about ill health but about health and how to create a healthy society, and that change of focus is a positive aim. Many people, especially in later life, experience health problems because of their style of living in youth—smoking is a prime example. CHCs and the health boards will play a vital role in spreading information, for example, about healthy living and ways to avoid ill health in later life. The Assembly has already done a lot of work on health promotion. If those efforts are successful, Welsh society as a whole will be healthier, which will help the health service by lessening the drain on health service resources and on the community caused by people who become ill later in life as a result of their lifestyle choices. I do not criticise those choices, but that is what happens and we have to tackle the problem.

It is important that CHCs reflect the society they serve. I was pleased to see in their response to the Welsh Affairs Committee's report on the draft Bill that the Government acknowledge the need to ensure that CHCs appoint members who

"bring . . . a wide range of skills and experience, drawn from a variety of backgrounds."

Until now, local authority representatives have made up half, and the voluntary sector one third, of the membership of CHCs, with the other members drawn from various sources. Now, it will be up to the Assembly to decide the composition of CHCs. I hope that a strong effort will be made to encourage people from a wide range of backgrounds to come forward, in particular people from less privileged backgrounds, so that we will have input from the whole spectrum of Welsh society. I hope that there will be representation from the black community and other ethnic minority communities.

I strongly believe that young people's voices should also be heard. I do not know precisely how that will be achieved, but we must get young people involved in CHCs and their advocacy role. We have had a huge problem with advocacy services for children in Wales since the loss of the Children's Society and the advocacy services it provided. Somehow, we must find a way to ensure that CHCs can speak for young people and children. The Children's Commissioner can work to determine what young people want from the health service—in fact, the commissioner has already done some work in that respect, by examining what sort of health service provision certain groups of patients want, but I think that the CHCs should take on that role in relation to young people.

It is important that work on a CHC be recognised as a public duty. In their response, the Government say that

"the list of public bodies can be amended by Order"

to include CHCs, but we could do that here and now, via the Bill, and perhaps we should consider doing so.

As hon. Members have said, in Wales the link between ill health and deprivation is clear for all to see. People in areas of severe deprivation suffer from bad health. In recognition of that, the Townsend report, commissioned by the National Assembly, suggested a funding formula that placed particular emphasis on funding, within as well as between health authorities. It is important to recognise that in a time of growth in health spending, it is possible to redistribute money. The Assembly is implementing the formula changes in the Townsend report—the formula needs some refinement, but the broad thrust of the Townsend report is being implemented. As the health budget grows, every area gets an increase, but the most deprived areas get a bigger increase, and the main beneficiaries are the areas where need is greatest. I applaud the Assembly for taking that step to tackle the health inequalities that are so obvious in Wales.

I hope that the Wales Centre for Health, when it has been set up, will take the Townsend proposals further and work towards ensuring that tackling health inequalities is seen to be the way forward in Wales. The huge differences in the health of the people in different parts of Wales are key issues that must be addressed. The Townsend report addressed the problem, and its recommendations are being implemented, but the creation of the Wales Centre for Health will be of enormous help.

The Townsend report set out two strategies: first, the change in the formula—the redistribution of money; and, secondly, tackling the causes of ill health, which involves all the other services that contribute to the well-being of the population. Because health is linked so strongly with poverty and the vital services that local authorities provide, I strongly support the proposals in previous legislation to make the health boards coterminous with local authorities. That is absolutely right. There has been some criticism that the authorities are too small, but if they are, it is because of what the previous Government did when they reorganised local government and that is what we have to work with.

Lembit Öpik: In Powys, it is the other way round—the local authority area is too large. While I agree with the sentiment expressed by the hon. Lady, does she agree that we must bear in mind the size of local authorities to try to avoid complicated cross-cutting for community health councils?

Julie Morgan: Yes, I agree.

If we look at inequalities which cause ill health, housing and access to leisure facilities have more of an impact on the health of the nation than, for example, the prescribing of drugs. I wonder whether hon. Members read press reports yesterday of a study which showed that pensioners in Japan live longer if they live near parks and tree-lined streets in cities? The study showed that less noise and more natural light in houses were associated with long life. The more active an older person, the longer they tend to live. We should look at those crucial points when we provide health care. A huge benefit of free bus travel for pensioners in Wales is that they will live longer because they are getting out and about—that is a vital impact on the health of people in Wales.

The provision of public parks is important. In Cardiff, we have wonderful parks. Bute park is adjacent to my constituency of Cardiff, North, and the Taff trail passes through it. Those opportunities for leisure and health are as important as the services provided by the NHS. The two issues are closely linked. I am therefore pleased that existing legislation makes provision for local authorities and health boards to work together closely—on the boards themselves, of course, there will be local authority representation. In our pre-legislative examination of CHCs, we discussed whether their boundaries should be strictly coterminous with those of the health boards. The Select Committee's conclusion was that that was best left to regulations by the Assembly, following consultation. There were strong views about not restricting boundaries too much, with which I agree. It is best to consult, as CHCs have already gone through reorganisation and uncertainty, and different issues arise in different parts of the country, as the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) mentioned. We should not be prescriptive, so I support the view that the Assembly should make a decision and introduce regulations.

The Bill plans to extend the CHCs' remit to primary care nursing homes, which is a good move. The Prison Service issue needs to be looked at again. I am concerned about the provision of health care in prisons, and an overseeing body is needed to look at standards. I support the creation of the Wales Centre for Health and Health Professions Wales. I welcome the fact that Wales will take the lead on the inclusion of health support staff. The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs discussed the way in which such an inclusion would be different from practice in the rest of the UK, and we in Wales should be pleased that we have acknowledged the importance of health support staff.

The Welsh health agenda is preventive and radical. Measures already introduced, such as the freezing of prescription charges and free prescriptions for the under-25s, by the Assembly will result in long-term benefits. We do not know what the long-term effect of such measures will be—perhaps the Wales Centre for Health can analyse the effect of their early introduction. For example, if young people have access to free prescriptions, that may have long-term benefits. I am pleased that the Minister for Health and Social Services in the Assembly has said that there is no intention to go down the route of foundation hospitals, which were included in the Queen's Speech.

One of my concerns about foundation hospitals is the fact that they could choose to pay their staff more. We would get into a situation where one hospital would be out-bidding another, and I fear that health would suffer generally as a result. It would be unfortunate if an auction were to take place between different types of hospitals. I am therefore glad that the NHS in Wales is not going down the route of foundation hospitals.

[Julie Morgan]

It is important to retain a national pay scheme for nurses in England and Wales—if there was a variation in Wales, we would end up being out-bid. Also—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Lady must resume her seat if I am standing. She is now roving rather wider than the terms of the Bill and must come back to order.

Julie Morgan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry if I roamed from the Bill.

In conclusion, the Bill is a small step towards achieving the Assembly's goals of prevention and a healthy Wales. The pre-legislative scrutiny was a beneficial process, and I look forward to the Bill's remaining stages.

8.15 pm

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): It is a great honour to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan), who has done a great deal of good work on behalf of children in Wales. I noted her remarks about the membership of CHCs and the way in which we could better reflect the needs of children. I shall return to that later.

We support the Bill wholeheartedly. It is a small and devolved step towards a better national health service in Wales. Those of us who want a thoroughly improved NHS in Wales know that that cannot be achieved at a stroke, but step by step, inch by inch. Waiting lists have been mentioned, but they are an inappropriate measure of the success of a health service. The Bill is about patients and patient power, but it does not matter to the patient whether he is first on the list or 10,000th. What matters is when he is going to get his treatment—that is the key issue for individual patients. We are in danger of sinking into a morass of statistics about the NHS and losing sight of the fact that it should provide a personal service—people desperately want to achieve that.

I was going to give another accolade to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) who was in danger of receiving so many that it would be impossible for him to leave the Chamber. However, he has left—probably because he is afraid of having so many accolades. It was a privilege to serve on the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which undertook pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill. Particularly impressive was the way in which the public and health professional in Wales were involved in that process. As a result, many of the Select Committee's recommendations were accepted and the Bill has achieved its Second Reading. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South said that we could have a truncated Second Reading because many issues had been teased out and put to bed. One that springs to mind is the title of the Bill. It started off as the National Health Service (Wales) Bill, but it quickly became apparent that CHCs, the Wales Centre for Health and Health Professions Wales could deal with health care delivered by agencies outside the NHS. Quite rightly, the title has been changed, and the Bill is now the Health (Wales) Bill. That is a minor issue, but it demonstrates the way in which problems were identified at an early stage and rectified.

Turning to issues raised by the Bill, I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, North that it is appropriate that the Welsh Assembly should have a say in the way in which members of community health councils should be identified and appointed—that should be a devolved matter. Under the old appointments system, local authorities could nominate members for community health councils. We all know of local authority members who have played leading and very significant parts in the work of community health councils, as well as some who see such work as another part of their overall role and cannot give the amount of time and effort that is needed because of the responsibilities that they have in their local authority. Perhaps the Assembly will take that into consideration when deciding on membership.

I also take on board the point made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, North about including on CHCs people from ethnic minorities and younger people. That is desperately important.

The Bill's extension of the powers and roles of CHCs will also involve the training that members receive. The duties and expertise that they will need in carrying out the inspections and dealing with problems raised by individuals will be much greater than in the previous CHC system. When we look at the amount allocated for setting up the councils, I hope that there will be enough resources to ensure that those involved do not go out on their visits and inspections unprepared for the duties and responsibilities that will be expected of them.

I also value the advocacy role that CHCs have exercised in the past and the greater advocacy that will be expected of them in future. I am especially interested in the work that they have done for people suffering from mental health problems. In rural areas, the importance of mental health issues is especially acute, because people tend to live in isolated locations where they do not get the family and community support that is sometimes available in more densely populated areas. Voluntary bodies are also involved in that advocacy work. Great skill will be needed when the CHCs and voluntary bodies decide between them how such work will be done to best effect for the patient.

Mention has been made of the possible extension of the work of CHCs to prisons and young offenders institutions. That issue has been teased out in this debate and we will perhaps see more of it in future. Schools are another area in which health provision is made. Not only are there emergencies such as accidents or sudden illnesses—lay people are often asked to administer medication to children who may need it during the school day—but children in school are given advice and counselling on health issues, and the quality of that counselling and advice is important in health delivery for young people.

I should like to mention a particular initiative that my local CHC has just undertaken: the setting up of a first responder scheme in which a group of volunteers is trained to attend when somebody has suffered heart failure or a heart attack and to use defibrillators to restart heart activity. As the volunteers are based locally, such action can often be more quickly carried out than by the ambulance service. The initiative has already been set up in one area and is about to be set up in another. It is an example of how CHCs can take initiatives and drive forward service improvements,

rather than merely inspect or wait for people to make complaints. Figures show that where first responders are in place, recovery from heart attacks is 10 times more likely than elsewhere. That is a very good example of how CHCs can work.

Lembit Öpik: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill presents an especially important opportunity in that regard? He and I have both known people such as the late Hugh Taylor, who would have been alive today if such a scheme had been in place and the community health councils had had the power to implement the very important service to which he refers, especially in rural areas.

Mr. Williams: I take the point that my hon. Friend makes; we both know the gentleman whom he mentioned. We have an opportunity in Wales to show what the powers and scope of CHCs can be in improving the health and well-being of people in such areas.

I would like us to keep the name "community health councils", as access to these bodies is so important. A change of name merely makes it that much more difficult for somebody to find their way in getting the help and support that they need. We have already a successful organisation and we are going to make it better by introducing the Bill, but we should not make access to it more difficult by changing names.

The Bill is about devolution and getting the right solutions for Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and I have certain difficulties in respect of community hospitals that have always delivered various medical operations and activities that are now being phased out because royal colleges believe that those hospitals do not have the appropriate facilities. That is happening despite the very good safety record on delivering those services. Indeed, the population to whom the services are delivered are very satisfied with them and hope that they will continue. In the Wales Centre for Health, which could give advice on those matters, and also Health Professions Wales, which could train people to operate in such ways, we will now have the facilities in Wales to reconsider those matters and see whether such services could be delivered locally in community hospitals by doctors who want to provide them and to patients who would benefit greatly.

A local example is Brecon hospital, which had a GP-led maternity service. Not only low-risk, but medium-risk, mothers could be delivered. However, because of advice given by a London-based organisation, that has now changed to a midwife-led maternity service of which only mothers who have been classified as low risk can take advantage. The service was very well thought of by local mothers, many of whom wanted it to be delivered locally. In some cases, however, they now have to travel 20 or 30 miles to get the level of service that they want. I hope that we can have Welsh solutions to Welsh medical issues, and I am sure that the Bill goes a long way towards achieving that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire mentioned several matters over which we would like the Assembly to have power. The first is free eye tests for everyone in Wales. In 1989, the Conservative Government introduced charges for eye tests, but the current thrust of health policy in Wales is prevention and primary health care. Free eye tests for everyone would mean the early diagnosis of the symptoms of some diseases and therefore the use of preventive medicine.

We also support free dental checks—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is losing sight of the Bill.

Mr. Williams: I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your advice. Free dental checks are such an important aspiration for us that we sometimes get carried away when we advance it.

The Bill will improve the health service in Wales. We thoroughly support it.

8.29 pm

Mr. Martin Caton (Gower): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams). Like him, I am a member of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which was involved in the pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill.

It became clear as we took evidence that the Bill is uncontentious and has wide support across the professional and political spectrums. That was confirmed in our debate in the Welsh Grand Committee on 16 July and in the debate in the National Assembly a couple of days later. It received further confirmation this evening, at least when we focused on the Bill.

I do not deny the importance of the Bill's three key objectives, but the different method of dealing with the measure so far and its impact on the Bill's passage is equally important. In the current instance, process may be as significant as the event. I therefore want to consider briefly what the process has achieved and whether we can learn lessons from our approach that will help in future.

It has already been said that this is the first occasion on which a Wales-only Bill has been subject to pre-legislative scrutiny that involved Back-Bench Members in Westminster and our colleagues in the Assembly. The Welsh Affairs Committee was given the job of initially examining the draft Bill on behalf of the Commons.

Some hon. Members, especially Labour Members, have argued that the Select Committee was not the appropriate forum for the task. Perhaps their strongest argument is that although a Select Committee is normally the best body for undertaking pre-legislative scrutiny, the Welsh Affairs Committee is different. Most Select Committees cover specific aspects of policy such as education, health and defence. The members have therefore developed expertise and have a special interest in their subject. It is argued that that does not apply to the Welsh Affairs Committee or any of the other territorial Committees, and that we need to find a different way forward for Bills that apply only to Wales.

Although that argument contains a kernel of validity, Select Committees have greater strengths than a collegiate expertise and experience. The approach and culture that established Select Committees are more important. We proceed through investigation, seek objectivity and try to reach consensus. All Select

[Mr. Martin Caton]

Committees, even those that cover specific policy matters, look outside to those who give evidence and to special advisers for expertise and special interest.

The Welsh Affairs Committee did a good job in considering the draft Bill. It would be difficult to establish an alternative body on an ad-hoc basis that could do a better job in future. The Welsh Grand Committee is too large and too party political to undertake that function.

I was impressed by the partnership approach that developed between the Government in Whitehall and the Government in Cardiff bay in devising the measure. That was reflected in the joint session when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and Assembly Minister Jane Hutt gave evidence together.

We did not achieve the same partnership between our Committee and the Health and Social Services Committee in the Assembly in scrutinising the measure. However, we made some progress and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) pointed out, Assembly Members attended some of our Committee's meetings and vice versa. I am sure that we can build on that. Surely we can maintain our separate responsibilities as Members of Parliament and Assembly Members and our separate decision-making processes, but co-operate far more effectively in evidence gathering.

Julie Morgan: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a good idea to have joint committees comprising Westminster Members and Assembly Members, as the Chairman of the Select Committee suggested?

Mr. Caton: I thank my hon. Friend for that suggestion. I think that we are a little way away from that, but it is an objective that I would seek. We could probably do that only in the evidence-gathering stage, as I suggested. For pre-legislative scrutiny, the Assembly needs to come to its own decisions separate from us, whichever forum is used to represent the Commons. Similarly, the Commons, whether in the form of a Select Committee or another body, would have to come to a decision about its recommendations independently. However, in the evidence-gathering stage, there could be much better, more effective co-operation. I hope that we will move towards that.

The pre-legislative scrutiny at both levels of Welsh government has already proved its worth. Even on a short and uncontentious Bill such as this, we have identified scope for real improvement at the draft stage. I congratulate the Government on taking on board many of the proposals. In some cases the Government, in responding to recommendations from various parties, including the Select Committee, made a fair case for sticking to their guns. In one or two other cases, they should be pressed a little further.

I want to return to the concerns that I raised in the Welsh Grand Committee back in July, and look at how they have been addressed in the Bill. I warmly support each of the three purposes of the Bill. I remain convinced that reformed and enhanced community councils will be the right people's watchdogs for the health service in Wales. I am sure that the Wales Centre for Health, with its advice, training and research remit, will provide independent assessment and support that will form a hub for partnership between the various sectors that provide or utilise information or evidence on health issues.

I am equally confident that Health Professions Wales is a step forward, building on the remit of the old Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting to include care support workers, and allowing the inclusion of other health care professions over time.

In July, we considered various issues that came out of the Select Committee inquiry. I welcome the fact that the short and long titles of the Bill now properly reflect the contents of the Bill. I welcome also the clarification of languages in some clauses and schedules, although I suspect that there is still more scope for improving the plain speaking part of the Bill; the inclusion of the promised reference to the rights of CHCs to receive information from health service providers; and the tightening of the wording to protect the independence and the perceived independence of the Wales Centre for Health, although again there may be further steps that we can take in that regard.

The Government have made a broadly rational case for maintaining their and the Assembly's approach to the co-terminosity of CHC boundaries and local health boards; to some extent on the adequacy of current drafting to enable CHCs to undertake independent advocacy services; and on the powers and functions of the Association of Welsh Community Health Councils.

I now also accept that the National Assembly's powers of direction to Health Professions Wales on functions carried out by that body on behalf of the Health Professions Council or the Nursing and Midwifery Council are already constrained by the agreements that established those functions. A requirement in the Bill for prior consultation, as we suggested, would therefore be superfluous.

Although we in the Welsh Affairs Committee did not address the matter in our report, the National Audit Office rightly drew attention to the lack of provision for the Auditor General for Wales to carry out value-for-money investigations into the work of the Wales Centre for Health. I am delighted that the Government have provided for that in the Bill.

That leaves me with three ongoing worries about the Bill—two that I raised in the Grand Committee, and one that the Royal College of Nursing Wales raised subsequently. First, I still believe that it would be useful if the Bill went even further in empowering the Assembly to extend the remit of community health councils to include the inspection of and the requirement for information from anyone involved in the provision of publicly funded health care.

I still believe that the scope of CHCs should extend to prisons and young offender institutions, as has been mentioned several times today. Medical assessment and care, especially psychiatric assessment and care, in our prisons is a real issue. Although I appreciate that prisons have their own inspection and lay visitor systems, I believe that inspections by a group of informed lay people who could make direct comparison between health provision in prison and outside would be extremely valuable.

That brings me to my other on-going concern: the fact that the Bill still does not give CHC members a statutory right of time off work for their public duties. Frankly, this remains an anomaly. Representatives of CHCs across Wales told the Select Committee that provision of this right was probably the best way of getting CHCs better to reflect the communities that they are supposed to represent. At present, younger working people feel unable to participate in the work of CHCs because they cannot get time off work or cannot afford to take that time off.

I was a member of the old Swansea and Lliw Valley community health council for some years, and this was a real issue even then, in particular for hospital and other institutional visits, some of which, sensibly, had to be made in the daytime. During my time on the council, anyone who went to one of our regular monthly meetings in an evening would have seen a body of people who broadly reflected Swansea and Lliw Valley society in terms of gender balance, age range and—to a lesser extent, sadly—ethnic origin. If they went on one of our inspection visits in the daytime, however, they would have got a very different picture. Mostly, it was only retired members who were able to take part. We are now talking about extending the responsibilities of CHCs to deal with private homes and primary care providers as well as hospitals and other institutions, and the problem is likely to get worse if we do not address it. Perhaps the Bill is not the right way to provide a statutory right—it might be more appropriate to use an order—but this change is essential, however we achieve it.

The Royal College of Nursing Wales has raised an issue worth considering, in the briefing that it has sent to us all. It is worried about how major health service reconfigurations proposed by local health boards or the NHS Wales Department will be dealt with in practice. It foresees that, due to the small size of local health boards, big changes—the closure of an accident and emergency department is the example that it cites—could be devised jointly between the local health board and the regional offices of the NHS Wales Department, which is part of the Welsh Assembly Government. In such circumstances, if a CHC exercised its right of appeal against that reconfiguration to the Assembly Health Minister, that Minister would be sitting in judgment on a proposal that had come, at least partly, from her own officials. The RCN believes that this would constitute a conflict of interest, and proposes the creation in the Bill of an independent configuration panel for Wales, to provide independent advice to the Minister. I understand that that is what happens in England. I would be interested to hear the Minister's thoughts on that proposal when he winds up. Perhaps we could return to the matter in Committee.

This was a good draft Bill; it is a better Bill now. Who knows—perhaps it will be better still when it comes back on Third Reading.

8.42 pm

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): I warmly welcome the Bill for several reasons, not least because it makes a major contribution to Welsh constitutional history, Welsh social history and—dare I say it?—Welsh socialist history. Most important of all, it makes a contribution to the future and well-being of the Welsh people. As a fervent campaigner for democratic devolution in Wales, I am proud to say that this is the first Wales-only Bill that has undergone pre-legislative scrutiny by the National Assembly for Wales and by this House, and as a member of the Welsh Affairs Committee, I am very proud to have participated in that process. What better first Wales-only Bill could there be than one that addresses the quality of life of our people and the health of our nation? It is also constitutionally important because it shows the benefits for Wales of the devolved and central Administrations working in partnership rather than engaging in confrontation and conflict.

The Bill is also important because it is the logical consequence of recent social history in Wales. The retention, democratising and strengthening of Welsh community health councils is the logical conclusion of our own recent struggles, particularly in relation to democracy and advocacy. We all know that the national health service was modelled on the democratic, socialist and grass-roots principles of the Tredegar Medical Aid Society by the founder of the NHS, Aneurin Bevan, rooted as it was in all the struggles of all the valleys of south Wales and, indeed, the whole of Wales.

More recently, that advocacy and those democratic principles have been carried forward by such pioneers as the late Dr. Alistair Wilson and his Cynon valley patients committees and by Dr. Julian Tudor Hart of Glyncorrwg in my constituency. Dr. Hart's document "Going for Gold" inspired so much of the thinking behind the Welsh Office document "Better Health, Better Wales", which, like Dr. Hart's publication, addressed improving primary health care, democratising the health service and giving patients a voice.

It is a tribute to the Welsh Assembly Government's Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt, her deputy, Dr. Brian Gibbons, who was at one time a partner of Dr. Julian Tudor Hart, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that the Bill, which has a consensual and sensible nature, has progressed with wide public support. It addresses the central questions of NHS reform, not only in Wales but more widely. I refer in particular to the nature of local democratic accountability and ensuring that we move from what Dr. Julian Tudor Hart once described as a "body repair service" and a "national disease service" to a genuinely democratic and effective NHS for the 21st century.

I commend two aspects of the Bill, the first of which is the continuation and strengthening of the community health councils in Wales. That welcome development is very much in the social-justice tradition of Wales, and it is thoroughly appropriate that the CHCs have a strong democratic element that is achieved through local authority and other representation. That is a major local democratic reaffirmation and a return to the best values of the Tredegar Medical Aid Society and other similar voluntary health organisations of the past.

The CHCs will have a significant additional advocacy role in the complaints process. We do not need a confrontational complaints procedure. The new complaints system can also provide useful feedback to service providers. We know to our cost how stressful some of those procedures can be. For example, a Gower doctor tragically committed suicide after a complaint was lodged against him last year.

[Dr. Hywel Francis]

When matters proceed to a formal complaints stage, patients need assistance through a complex and difficult process that they might go through only once in their lives. I welcome the fact that CHCs will be able to have a remit on nursing and residential homes. May I make a final observation on CHCs? The public do not find that name easy to establish in their thinking as that of an NHS watchdog. No doubt the Welsh Assembly Government will address that matter through their own local consultation processes.

The second aspect that I wish to address is the creation of the Wales Centre for Health, which will promote well-informed public health policies across Wales and from which I am sure the whole UK will benefit. Of course, we need good, reactive health services, particularly for those parts of the UK that suffer disproportionately from serious ill health, such as the south Wales valleys and certain parts of rural Wales. However, we also need informed public health policies that take on board the wider agenda of identifying the causes and determinants of good and bad health, so that people can live healthier lives in the first place.

The A.J. Cronin novel "The Citadel", which is based on a south Wales mining valley, has already been mentioned. Its hero performed an extreme act in taking a public health initiative and blowing up a defective sewer system. A more benign and peaceful, but nevertheless powerful purpose of the new centre is to provide independent public health information to community health groups that are concerned about the health implications of public policy. We have noticed in recent times, for example, the deep concern at Nantygwyddon Tip in the Rhondda and Crymlyn Burrows in my constituency.

I understand that the Welsh Health Minister has pledged that the CHCs will have a statutory right to consult on major local changes in NHS provision and that she will address that matter in regulations. I believe that she is correct in doing that, as those issues should be addressed by the devolved Administration.

The health service is entering a bright new era in Wales. Next Saturday, I shall visit a new hospital in my constituency at Baglan Moors and I am reliably informed that my first visit may coincide with the birth of the first baby at the hospital—Labour delivering once again for Wales.

The two developments within the Bill—the strengthened, democratised CHCs and the new Wales Centre for Health—encapsulate democratic devolution in practice. They are policies made in Wales in partnership with Welsh representatives here in the House. I hope that we have been true to the needs and aspirations of the Welsh people in our deliberations. The representative and advocatory nature of the CHCs and the WCH is very much in accordance with the spirit and aspirations of the Welsh founder of the national health service, Aneurin Bevan.

I end with Aneurin Bevan's prophetic words, quoted in Dai Smith's admirable book, "Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales":

> "The first function of a political leader is advocacy. It is he who must make articulate the wants, the frustration and the aspiration of the masses. Their hearts must be moved by his words, and so his words must be attuned to their realities . . . A representative person is one who will act in a given situation in much the same way as those he represents would act in that same situation. In short, he must be of their kind ... Thus a political party which begins to pick its personnel from unrepresentative types is in for trouble. Confidence declines."

I believe that that applies equally to public bodies, and for that reason the Bill enhances confidence. That is why I commend it to the House.

8.52 pm

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the Bill. Although it is short, it is very significant. Unfortunately, some Members—perhaps not those who are here tonight—have been somewhat dismissive of it. I believe that the Bill will make a big difference, because the health service is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, issue in Wales today. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) quoted from Aneurin Bevan's "In Place of Fear". If something is to be put in place of fear, it should be a society with a proper health service, so that people do not have to be unduly concerned about their health.

The Bill is important in two very real senses. First, it has constitutional significance: this is the first time that a Wales-only Bill has passed through the process of pre-legislative scrutiny. It is therefore very much a product of a constructive partnership—not just a consensual partnership in this House, but a partnership between this House and the National Assembly for Wales. Others have described the Bill's long gestation process: it was discussed in the National Assembly—the genesis of the idea came from the Assembly; it has been discussed by the Under-Secretary of State for Wales in this House and by the Minister for Health and Social Services in the National Assembly; and it has been deliberated on by Members of both places. It was also discussed in some detail in the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which produced an excellent report on it. It was the subject of a major debate in the Welsh Grand Committee, which I am pleased I participated in. If we look back at the process to date, we can honestly say that it has provided a good model. I sincerely hope that its lessons will be learned and similar processes will be put in train.

There is a wider debate to be had about how the House co-operates with the National Assembly for Wales. We must seek and promote greater dialogue between individual Members. We need mechanisms that bring our two institutions together. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) for the suggestions that he has made.

It is worth noting that there has been a debate about co-operation with another institution, namely in the European Scrutiny Committee. The suggestion has been made that there should be a European Grand Committee, which would pull together Members of the European Parliament and hon. Members to debate issues of common interest. Perhaps we should consider inviting Assembly Members to the Welsh Grand Committee, so that they could deliberate on legislation at a pre-legislative stage. That is one of the constitutional debates that must be held and arises from dealing with the Bill.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the strength of the Bill and the relatively uncontroversial

nature of the debate tonight is a direct consequence of stakeholders in the Assembly, together with health professionals, having exactly the opportunity that he describes?

Mr. David: There is something in that point of view. However, the material that we are debating is perhaps intrinsically uncontroversial. Nevertheless, if we are concerned about achieving a new form of politics in Wales, as has often been said, it must be done on the basis of partnership. The experience of this Bill has provided a good model to develop in future.

The Bill, which is important for the people of Wales, essentially contains three proposals relating to community health councils, the Wales Centre for Health and Health Professions Wales. Although it is good legislation, it is not always easy to comprehend and certainly during the later stages of the Bill consideration could be given to how it could be simplified and more straightforward language could be employed.

I should like to concentrate on the proposals with regard to community health councils. In my time as the Member of Parliament for Caerphilly over the past year and a half, I have had a positive relationship with my local community health council, Gwent community health council. Some 60 members bring to that CHC a wide range of experience. I have been very impressed with the range and quality of the work that they are engaged in. Extensive consultations are taking place on a range of services, and the CHC frequently takes up individual issues in a sensitive and responsive way for members of the public. My constituency office has developed a good and productive relationship with Gwent community health council.

I am pleased that the Bill recognises the worth of community health councils and points the way forward but significantly the Bill is not so much about defending what we have and maintaining the status quo; it is about looking positively at how we can build on the base that we have already. That is why I warmly welcome the fact that there is scope for making our CHCs more representative than they are already. There is scope to bring a wider still cross-section of society into CHCs to make them more effective. There is a need to extend the powers of CHCs.

I welcome the fact that there will be a more comprehensive advocacy service, covering, I hope, the whole of Wales. That network of CHCs will need to co-operate closely with other advocacy services, not least the Children's Commissioner for Wales, a post that has recently been established and has proven to be a success.

I think, too, that we must welcome the new powers in the Bill to oversee primary care facilities. The National Assembly for Wales will be empowered to introduce regulations to allow inspections of private health premises where NHS services are deployed. I certainly welcome that: it is a small measure in terms of the relationship with the private care sector, but I am very concerned about the standard of private nursing homes in my constituency. I could cite many examples of appalling standards in those homes that would be a disgrace in any civilised society. Modest as it is, the proposed introduction of CHCs into that context will be warmly welcomed by many people.

I share with other hon. Members the view that there remains scope to extend CHCs' role. There is a logical argument that they should be involved in prisons and institutions for young offenders. It is also worth noting that, although the allocation of extra resources of some £550,000 from the National Assembly is welcome, that amount will not be sufficient to secure true democratic accountability and effective CHCs. For that, we will need even more resources in the future, and I urge the Assembly to allocate them.

In conclusion, the Bill is significant, both in constitutional terms and in terms of the development of the NHS in Wales. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond positively to the constructive points that have been made by hon. Members of all parties, and that the Bill will receive the House's warm endorsement in its later stages.

9.2 pm

Mr. Dai Havard (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I, too, welcome the Bill. I do not intend to deal with technicalities and cover ground that many hon. Members have covered already, but I am especially interested in the scrutiny process that has taken place. Many useful comments have been made about how the process has increased the number of people able to express a view.

I share the concern about prisons and institutions for young offenders, and think that the involvement of CHCs could be a good idea. A long time ago, in a former life, I was a trade union official representing prison governors. I have seen some consequences of bad health provision in prisons. That provision would certainly benefit from having another pair of eyes look at it from outside.

The cross-border problem associated with the work of CHCs has been mentioned, and I shall return to it later, as it has some important aspects. First, however, I want to say something about investment, process and patient involvement. The latter is the most important element of the Bill.

I have different tests for the Bill. Is it really about patient empowerment? Is it really going to be a way of providing engines of change? What I require in the health service is step change as well as incremental change. There has been massive investment in the health service in Wales. By April 2004, spending on health provision in Wales will be £3.8 billion, 50 per cent. more than when the Assembly was created in 1999.

There has been investment also in people. That is continuing, and the Bill contributes to that growth. I welcome that. Investment is going not simply to clinicians, but to the other professionals in the health team, right the way through to the ancillary workers. That is necessary, because health provision requires a team approach.

Investment is also being made in knowledge and information, and I hope that that will allow the health service to be proactive rather than reactive. I intend to concentrate on the role of CHCs in that context. The structures of health service provision in Wales have been subject to many changes, and that process is continuing. We now have local health boards and strategic partnerships involving local authorities. They are fundamental to a holistic approach to health. I pay tribute to the managers of all those institutions in my area. They even involve themselves in crime and disorder partnerships. I celebrate the development of that strategic holistic view.

[Mr. Dai Havard]

My local CHCs do a lot of good work, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) has said, we should do more than defend what we have; we should develop it for the future. Advocacy is important in that context. In the valleys, people often put up with services that the articulate middle classes in other parts of the United Kingdom would not tolerate, because they do not have the right aspirations. I need others to help them identify their requirements. Studies are in progress, although I understand that developing the advocacy role is proving slightly more problematic than was expected. The patient support officer schemes that are being trialled are exactly what we need.

If we are to live up to the standard we have required from the Welsh Assembly—sustainability in all things, but particularly in terms of improving health, and a holistic view—we need helpers. The voluntary sector is very important in my constituency. A charity called Cancer Aid Merthyr provides not only transport but counselling, and other services that would not otherwise be available. Macmillan nurses are also important, and they are to become part of the facilities provided by hospitals—oncological facilities, for example. I hope those voluntary workers will be integrated in the make-up of the institutions that we are creating—or the Welsh Assembly is creating.

Perhaps other parts of the UK can learn from the various ways of managing this process in Wales. My local trust now has public involvement liaison groups. It is a horrible title, but its intentions are good. It has already accepted the principle of extending involvement and bringing in more people—not the "usual suspects", as my research assistant said to me the other day, but people beyond that definition. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) made a good point about the need to involve younger people and previously disenfranchised groups.

The Minister referred to the new community hospital that we are to have in Merthyr. The principles I have mentioned are being applied in the plans for that hospital. I am also very pleased that it is being financed publicly rather than through the private finance initiative—but that is another story for another day.

I want to say something about patient involvement—not what is planned, but how it could be used. The incidence of cancer in my constituency is very high. Wales already has a cancer champion, a care strategy including a palliative care strategy, investment in specialist centres and a cancer co-ordinator. Many useful things are happening. The problem is the standards being applied, and the major frustrations encountered by those who try to make changes. As I have said, I want to test the ability of the new institutions to make such changes.

My current worry is that cancer patients often suffer badly from fatigue as a result of anaemia, and need blood transfusions. Having investigated, I think they would benefit from alternatives to transfusion. Bed-blocking was mentioned earlier, and it is certainly one of the major problems in the health service. If patients were not having transfusions they would not be taking up hospital beds, and according to my calculations 250,000 hospital beds would be become available.

How can I ensure that such standards operate? If change is to happen, there must be ways of seeing that. I need agents to help me. The blood service in Wales is run by the Welsh blood service in the south, while what is known as the national blood service but is actually based in England deals with north Wales. It will be interesting for the CHCs responsible for the area to deal with that problem by considering the remit of those blood service institutions. Another serious issue, as we have heard, is that some patients have to go to Alder Hey or other hospitals in England, and I ask the Minister to give further consideration to that arrangement.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point about how effective specialist care could be best managed in different areas. I am sure that community health councils will be able to play a role, but surely the most effective way to develop that is to have a national audit across the United Kingdom comparing best systems and how they work. An independent database helps local people know what is the best available care.

Mr. Havard: I share some of my hon. Friend's views on the audit process, but I shall not go into detail about it. He has made the point that he wanted to make.

Setting up the Wales Centre for Health is a very important step. It will have to work alongside and co-operate with many other health institutions, for example, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, whose remit will still apply in Wales. It will be important to judge how that arrangement works.

I have a problem that I am trying to resolve. I have decided that I may be banging my head against the existing bureaucracy, even though I have the Chancellor of the Exchequer on my side, apparently, in doing so. So, I have turned the problem the other way around and said that what is really important is what the patients understand. I welcome the CHCs and the advocacy services. I want the informed debate that I am told should take place between clinicians and patients regarding what is the standard and the care that they should expect. I hope that these bodies will help empower patients so that they know what to ask for—very often they do not know unless someone tells them what care is available.

I am involved with a free magazine for cancer patients. It is in the Library of the House, and it provides a forum for debate so that patients can understand what could and should be available to them. In that way, they are empowered and can make the health service their health service. If these proposals help that process, I shall be very pleased—if they do not, I shall be less pleased, because those are my tests to measure their success.

I once saw a campaigner wearing a huge badge that said, "Wearing badges is not enough"; nor is changing institutions. We have to have the right intentions; we have to listen to the response when it comes, and act on it. We will confront the issue about money at some point, although it will not be in our gift here at Westminster, of course, because we will have given that opportunity away. It is called devolution. Nevertheless, we will have an important view and there need be no worry that it will be properly put.

I welcome the fact that some of the institutions in the Bill will help make change. They will test one or two of the old boys' clubs current in the bureaucracy surrounding the health service. If we say what standards we require, people will say exactly what they want. Wales is the appropriate place for those institutions to carry out the Government's intentions in practice, given that it was the place that designed and achieved the national health service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) articulated earlier.

9.13 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): This has been a long and interesting debate. Right hon. and hon. Members have been almost unanimous in welcoming the Bill. Part of the reason that the Bill has been so widely welcomed is the procedure that has been followed to bring us to this point. The scrutiny that has taken place has ironed out some of the differences between the various parties and the Government have in many respects already addressed the smaller issues that were raised during the process. However, the Bill is largely uncontroversial and I therefore caution against the inference that the procedure that has been followed for this Bill is the best possible when considering legislation for Wales.

I want to say, at the outset, that the onset of draft legislation—a tremendous innovation by the Government—gives us a great opportunity to forge a working relationship with the National Assembly for Wales. Within the context of draft legislation, we can begin to deal with the major constitutional challenges brought by the establishment of the Assembly.

The Government decided that a draft Bill for Wales should first be looked at by the Welsh Affairs Committee. That was a useful experiment, but I am not a member of the Welsh Affairs Committee, and I have an interest in, and experience of, the health field, and I should have liked to contribute to the Bill at an earlier stage than now. The fact that the Welsh Affairs Committee is a territorial Committee is relevant in the context of draft legislation. One of the great benefits of the Select Committee system is that it enables Members to develop specific expertise, which they can bring to bear in consideration of any Bill that relates to the individual topic. The Welsh Affairs Committee does not have the same merits as a departmental Select Committee in that respect.

My view is that a special Committee should be set up to look at draft legislation of this type. As I have said before, I believe that that Committee should be made up of Members of this House and Members of the National Assembly for Wales. I am pleased that, today, the Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Committee has adopted my suggestion and appears to be following the course that I have set out previously. It is important that we follow that course for two main reasons. First, it would mean that a thread would run from the inception of any policy in the Assembly through to the passing of the Bill in the UK Parliament. Assembly Members would be present at the beginning of the Bill when the ideas were brought forward, and, at the onset of draft legislation, they would become members of a Committee with Members of this House and would work together to improve the Bill.

At that stage, once the preliminary consideration of the draft legislation had taken place, the Bill would be shifted up to Westminster, and the Committee members from Westminster who had been looking at the Bill could pass on the information, experience and arguments of Assembly Members to this House. That would ensure a rigorous line of scrutiny from inception of ideas through to passing of legislation. That is a sensible framework that at least deserves to be tried. The test will come when we have a contentious piece of legislation. The Select Committee format is very positive, and as a new Member I have been impressed by the way in which Select Committees operate and relationships develop, even with Members from Opposition parties.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure that this is the most apt occasion for a constitutional essay. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will come to the Bill in a moment.

Ian Lucas: I am obliged, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am coming to the Bill now.

The issue on which I want to focus is the retention of community health councils. My experience of community health councils comes from a different perspective, which has not been mentioned in the debate so far. Before I came to the House, between 1997 and 2001, I was a non-executive director of the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt hospital at Gobowen. It is an unusual hospital. It is two miles from the border with Wales and provides a great deal of help, expertise and care to people from north Wales, mid-Wales, Shropshire and the surrounding area.

In my role as a non-executive director, I was also complaints convenor and had much experience of dealing with members of the CHC. It played an extremely valuable role in putting together submissions on behalf of people who would not usually be able to put together submissions themselves. It presented complaints in a NHS procedure that is, in my experience, the most complex one that anyone making a complaint could encounter. The procedure is bedazzling to all those who deal with it, including me as a trained lawyer.

Gareth Thomas: I know that my hon. Friend has an interest in this subject. He has not only been involved in health service management but is a lawyer who has experience of clinical negligence claims. He will recall that I chaired a seminar on clinical negligence in the House. Does he think that there is a role for CHCs and the Wales Centre for Health in trying to bring about a more effective complaints system? Such a complaints system would offer the patient a quicker and more transparent explanation of what had gone on in an adverse incident, as it is termed by doctors. It would also have the ability and power to make small awards and compensation without recourse to the long-winded procedure in the courts.

Ian Lucas: There is, indeed, an essential role for the CHCs. In my role as a member of the board of a hospital that provided health care to people in north Wales, I knew that the submissions and complaints made by patients were a valuable management tool for the hospital. They helped to improve the standard of care that was delivered. One of the major challenges that the NHS faces is to find a system that responds to the

[Ian Lucas]

concerns and complaints of patients and does so in an environment that does not threaten the providers of the care—whether they are doctors or nurses. The CHCs need to develop a partnership role with hospitals so that information can be presented in a uniform way as far as possible. That information would then be a valuable management tool for the hospital.

I must confess that another aspect of the Bill causes me concern, and it relates to cross-border care. I represent Wrexham, which is a border town. Health care is supplied to it by the Countess of Chester hospital, Wrexham Maelor hospital and the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt hospital near Oswestry that I have already mentioned. More specialist care is provided in Liverpool and Manchester. However, the Bill does not appear to be clear on the important question of whether the CHCs in north Wales, which will continue, will have the investigatory powers to examine matters in England. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will clarify that point when he winds up. Many of my constituents who see me about health care problems tell me that they have been treated across the border and want to pursue their case just as readily as they could if the hospital were in Wales.

Lembit Öpik: My personal experience of Gobowen hospital has always been positive and just as the hon. Gentleman describes. Does he agree that we may want to explore the important matter that he raises in Committee? There will unquestionably be issues on jurisdiction to deal with and it may be the case that the CHC will need to have the authority to act on a non-statutory basis across the border.

Ian Lucas: I agree. The issue has not been raised sufficiently. Most hon. Members who have contributed to the debate do not have the same cross-border services as those of us who work in north-east Wales.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Does my hon. Friend also agree that because the issue is long standing, the Bill gives us the opportunity to address it? One way or another, we have to ensure that we satisfy the requirement for accountability on cross-border issues.

Ian Lucas: My hon. Friend is also correct. We must be conscious of the fact that we are in an era in which health care and the experts are becoming more specialised. It is simply not the case that every district hospital can provide expertise of the highest quality. Although the mantra "Welsh solutions for Welsh problems" is appealing, when my constituents come to me for good quality health care, they do not mind whether that is supplied in Chester or Wrexham. What they want is a decent service and a good standard of care.

Mr. Evans: Would not the hon. Gentleman prefer it if the CHCs in his area were in discussions with the sister organisation in Chester, for instance, so that it could investigate the problem? After all, part of the problem is that his Government abolished CHCs in England and we are trying to preserve them for Wales. Does he not have faith in the sister organisations in England?

Ian Lucas: I know from close discussions with health professionals, health consumers and patients in north-east Wales that there are close working relationships of all types between people who work on different sides of the border. Indeed, many health professionals are employed by more than one hospital spending, for example, 50 per cent. of their time in Chester and 50 per cent. in Wrexham. Areas such as north-east Wales recognise that the services must be provided on both sides of the border. The care needs to be of a high quality. I am sure that good relationships will be developed in due course.

Another aspect that I greatly welcome is the extension of the CHCs' powers on primary care and the inspection of private facilities that offer NHS services. Will that inspection extend to voluntary organisations that provide health care? I have in mind the Nightingale House hospice in Wrexham. It provides an excellent standard of care and would have nothing to fear from an inspection regime. Will CHCs be able to inspect hospices?

For once I take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David). There are excellent nursing homes in the private sector that provide high-quality care. I have inspected the Pendine Park nursing home in my constituency. It is a high-quality home that provides an excellent service. Private nursing homes have nothing to fear from the system of assessment, but it is good that the CHCs have that additional power.

I welcome the Bill. The substance is good, but the procedure by which we reached this point could be improved. The Bill is positive for Wales, and although it may need some refinement in Committee, I am sure that it will be a good step in the right direction for my constituents in Wrexham and I am pleased to support it.

9.30 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate—sometimes a little too wide-ranging for the Chair. In some ways, however, it has not been as wide-ranging as it might have been because, as some hon. Members have said, this is not quite the Bill that was anticipated, so much of the Government's planned reforms for Wales having already been handled in the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002.

The debate began with the Secretary of State making a strong defence of the Bill and of the NHS in Wales. However, he failed to explain why such high levels of spending per head of population have not led to better health outcomes, and he admitted that not all was well with waiting lists. During his speech there was a noteworthy intervention by the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith), who basically asked, "Whatever happened to our bonfire of quangos?" I got the impression from the Secretary of State's response that he believed that the only problem in the past was that we had the wrong kind of quango.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) made a telling attack on the failures of the current Administration to deliver improvement. He warned that the Bill risked putting too much control into the hands of politicians. He also pointed out that it delivers more change to a service that is already struggling with very considerable change.

We have had numerous contributions, including many from members of the Select Committee. Those speeches addressed the measure itself but they also

strayed—as I said, sometimes rather too far for the comfort of the Chair—on to wider Welsh health issues ranging from the health benefits of free bus passes to a call for free eye tests, and even, in the case of the hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis), making a foray into the labour wards.

The Bill is not directly about the treatment of patients, but it is about the creation of new organisations designed to improve the quality of health care in Wales. The key question that needs to be asked tonight and in Committee is, "Will these changes ultimately make a difference to patients in Wales?" That is the criterion by which any change of this kind must be judged.

Conservative Members do not take issue with the overall nature of the organisations, but we think that important modifications need to be made to the detail of the Government's plans. The Bill concentrates too many powers in the hands of the Assembly and too few in the hands of communities and health care professionals. In Committee, we will want to put forward different ideas about how the organisations should operate. We also question whether the Bill risks creating unnecessary duplication at a time when the NHS in Wales has many other pressing priorities.

At the heart of the Bill are the community health councils. The Bill marks an astonishing U-turn by Ministers, who are tonight heading in a direction diametrically opposed to the one that they took in the House only a few months ago. We Conservatives have always supported the role of the CHCs in providing a proper link between local communities and the NHS and in monitoring the effectiveness of the service that it provides, and until recently so did the Prime Minister. In 2000, his office wrote to his local CHC, praising its work and that of its counterparts. The letter said:

"Tony would certainly like to add his congratulations to the work the CHCs have done over the last 25 years, and wishes them every success in the future."

Only two years after that letter, CHCs have been abolished in England.

We opposed the changes put forward by the Government earlier this year in the same way that we support tonight the retention of CHCs in Wales. Earlier this year, however, the Government told us that we were wrong. Indeed, we were lectured by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who said on 15 January:

"We are all tempted to stick with what we know because it is comfortable and we have seen it in practice, but we must now push forward the boundaries and consider new ways of working to empower the public, too."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 226.]

How is it necessary to push forward the boundaries in England and not in Wales? The Secretary of State for Health put it even more strongly, telling the House:

"No organisation has a God-given right to exist. Governments do not have a God-given right to exist. Community health councils do not have a God-given right to exist. MPs do not have a God-given right to exist."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2001; Vol. 360, c. 1089.]

Have Ministers had a vision on the road to Damascus? Here they are, a matter of months later, telling us that CHCs are the right way forward for Wales. Ten months ago, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales voted against Conservative amendments to the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill that would have retained community health councils in England. Tonight, he will vote in favour of community health councils. He cannot have it both ways—either CHCs are a good idea or they are not; they cannot be both.

We welcome the U-turn and the plan to retain CHCs in Wales. Our concerns about the Bill centre on the provisions that allow the Assembly extensive controls over Welsh CHCs.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that he has just paid a magnificent back-handed tribute to the good common sense of Welsh elected representatives? Furthermore, he might like to realise that we now have devolution.

Chris Grayling: If the hon. Gentleman believes so strongly in CHCs, why have he and his colleagues deprived English patients of the right of representation by CHCs?

To be effective, CHCs must be independent—that telling point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin). CHCs must be free to represent the interests of the communities and patients in the areas they cover. They do not exist to be controlled by politicians. The Government should not put as many powers into the hands of the Assembly as they are giving it in the Bill. The Assembly cannot be both provider and monitor of services—it cannot be both poacher and gamekeeper. During debates on these measures, our Conservative colleagues in the Assembly argued for a strong, independent organisation to co-ordinate the work of CHCs and to remove some of the prescriptive powers that the Bill would give to the Assembly.

Lembit Öpik: Surely politics is different. Politicians who do not do a good job will lose their seats. We are talking not about trying to sell a service to the public but about being judged on the outcomes, so the poacher-gamekeeper analogy is not entirely valid.

Chris Grayling: The Conservatives believe that the role of CHCs is to challenge what is happening within the NHS, and that, by definition, means challenging decisions taken by politicians who control the NHS. That is why it is so important that CHCs are a truly independent voice, not subject to undue controls placed on them by central Government.

We need to ensure that Welsh CHCs are properly independent of political manipulation, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones). In Committee, we will table amendments to strengthen the role of CHCs and their independence from politicians. In an intervention, the hon. Gentleman called for better auditing of the outputs of the NHS in Wales. Given its poor performance, his words are especially important. They go to the nub of why we must ensure that CHCs have a powerful voice in the communities they seek to represent.

Any assessment of NHS performance in Wales today does not make happy reading. The Secretary of State is right to say that spending per head in Wales has been much higher than the national average in recent years,

[Chris Grayling]

and the Wanless report highlighted the fact that Wales has more doctors per head of population than England, as well as shorter GP lists and higher prescribing rates. Despite that, by any objective judgment, the NHS in Wales is not delivering for patients what it should be delivering. That must be a priority for CHCs as they examine what is happening within the service. That is why it is important that the Bill gives them the freedom to do so.

In reality, things are getting worse. In the past three years, waiting lists have been rising by 1,000 people a month. In the past five years, the number of people waiting more than 12 months for in-patient treatment has increased by 82 per cent. The number of people waiting more than 12 months for out-patient treatment has increased from just 378 five years ago to more than 36,000 today. In 1997, no one waited more than 18 months for such treatment; today, more than 16,000 people are waiting. That is nothing short of a scandal. Having heard the comments of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), I say to him that those are real figures about real people waiting for real treatments, and those people deserve better. I would tell the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) that no hon. Member should feel proud of that situation, still less one who represents a party that is part of the Administration in Cardiff. We want CHCs to address those issues. As the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) pointed out, they need to serve as metaphorical high explosive to make sure that there is real change for the benefit of patients.

Lembit Öpik: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman a second time, but I hope he agrees with other hon. Members that we are lucky to have a national health service at all. For all the difficulties that people experience in the NHS, surely he is not suggesting that we are not privileged in our standard of living and health provision.

Chris Grayling: I find it distressing that at a time when more and more money is being spent on the service it is getting worse. None of us should be proud of that.

Turning to the implementation of the proposals, we are concerned about the ability of the NHS in Wales to tackle a further round of organisational change when clinical targets are not being met and organisational plans appear to be in chaos, despite the fact that the NHS has been hiring administrators three times faster than doctors. In Committee, we must ensure that we do not add to the burdens that NHS management are already facing. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) spoke about the problems caused by the latest set of Government reforms in Wales, the establishment of 22 health boards and the document leaked to the BBC a month ago questioning whether they would work at all. We are told that the cost of the changeover and the future operation of the system is still unknown; that the changeover may not happen on time; that the NHS in Wales cannot find enough applicants to fill key posts in organisations; and that there are real fears that the system for funding health care in Wales after April will be launched in chaos. All that will make the implementation of the Bill more difficult, so the changes outlined and discussed tonight must be seen against the background of a system that is not working for patients and the dedicated staff who work long hours. That is the true priority for Welsh health Ministers.

Turning briefly to other bodies covered by the Bill, we are concerned about possible duplication between the new Welsh bodies set up by the Bill and existing organisations elsewhere in the United Kingdom. For example, we are uncertain about the provision for the Wales Centre for Health to commission research into health matters in its own right. It would be foolish in the extreme to have a service commissioning research that is duplicated elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will the hon. Gentleman please recognise that some health issues are of greater concern in Wales than in other parts of the country? One group in Wales that will welcome the creation of the centre consists of the victims and families of victims of flight-related deep vein thrombosis. A higher proportion of people die and develop serious injury from that disease in Wales than anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman should realise that that condition affects people throughout the UK, which is precisely why we should ensure that resources in different parts of Britain are pooled for the maximum benefit of patients.

We are also concerned about possible duplication between Health Professions Wales and organisations that the Government have established for the UK as a whole. Ministers need to ensure that those organisations work together effectively. In particular, they should not create different training and registration criteria for our health care professionals, thus making it difficult for them to work in one part of the UK after working in another. I hope very much that Ministers will exercise great caution on that score.

The Bill is not controversial in itself, but it comes at a time when the NHS in Wales is in turmoil. It is failing to meet its clinical goals and, far from getting better, it is getting worse. It is tangled up in a major reform process that is also in turmoil, and huge amounts of work remain to be done if the transition next April is to occur without causing real problems to the people who work in the service. Welcome as some of the Bill's provisions are, welcome as the retention of CHCs is, the Bill will not help to tackle those problems. Too much of its detail leaves power in the hands of politicians, not communities and professionals. Conservative Members have argued for years that the reason why the NHS is not delivering the first-rate health care that patients deserve is that it is too centralised and prescriptive. Too many of the provisions before the House fall into the same trap and we will work to change them as the Bill continues its passage.

The Government simply do not seem to understand that that centralised approach will not deliver the improvements that people want and need. Wales is the living example of what is wrong with their health policies. Spending in Wales is already much higher than the national average, but the NHS in Wales is heading backwards, and until the Government take on board the

real lessons from this situation, nothing that we discuss in the House will make the difference that people in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom are hoping for.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): We have had a very good and constructive debate on the Bill.

In summary, the Bill has three key elements: it provides a new role for reformed community health councils as the main vehicle for giving patients a greater say; it establishes the Wales Centre for Health to provide independent training, advice and research in health care; and it establishes Health Professions Wales to provide education and training to the health care professions.

We have heard in the debate that the pre-legislative scrutiny process in which we have been involved has been very successful. Publication of the Bill in draft, including on our Wales Office website, has allowed thorough consideration in all policy areas. Here in the Commons, the Bill was considered by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs and debated in the Welsh Grand Committee. In another place, peers met the Assembly's Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt, and me, and in the Assembly, the Bill was discussed in the Health and Social Services Committee and in plenary session. The extensive public consultation on the draft Bill has ensured that the most important people—the people who will be affected by the legislation; the people of Wales—have had an opportunity to contribute.

Eighty-seven groups and organisations were invited to comment on the Bill, which was extensively scrutinised. We also published the Bill on the Wales Office website, which produced 15 responses, including an e-mail from a Mr. Liu Lieu, who runs a company in China and offered to sell us an excellent forging hammer. I think that something was lost in the translation.

In total, that process produced 45 recommendations for changes to the draft Bill. It says much for the effort that was put into the original drafting that the Bill received widespread support from stakeholders and that none of the pre-legislative scrutiny revealed any major concerns about the principles of what was proposed. The amendments made to the Bill following the pre-legislative scrutiny were all minor and of a technical nature.

The Bill has been in preparation for a long time in the sense that the proposals for reforming and retaining community health councils were first mooted by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) in his first week after being appointed Minister with responsibility for health in Wales following the 1997 election of a Labour Government. Our reform agenda has been to reinvigorate and change community health councils in Wales. That has been universally accepted throughout the country, and the Welsh Affairs Committee helpfully contributed to that debate and expressed its support.

What the Bill proposes for community health councils in Wales is an essential element for the Assembly's wider strategy of involving the public in health service planning and delivery and listening to their views and concerns. The independence of community health councils in Wales is rightly cherished and we will ensure through the mechanisms in the Bill that they are independent and can deliver the services required by their communities.

The establishment of the Wales Centre for Health originated in the "Better Health—Better Wales" document produced by the Wales Office in 1998. The foundations for creating the Wales Centre for Health were laid before devolution. The Government are now carrying them forward in partnership with the Assembly. In addition, the creation of the body that will oversee training and so on, Health Professions Wales, has been well-received and widely welcomed and will make an important contribution.

The Government were unable to take on board some aspects of the recommendations. As hon. Members have referred to a couple of those issues, I think that I should also mention them. The seventh recommendation of the Welsh Affairs Committee was that the Bill be amended to allow community health council members a statutory right to time off work for public duties. Other respondents made the same comment. While the Government strongly sympathise and understand and fully support people's opportunity to serve on community health councils, after having reflected, we did not consider that the Bill was the appropriate measure or vehicle in that regard. The Employment Rights Act 1996 contains a list of bodies whose membership attracts statutory time off. It could be amended by order and we will give further consideration to approaching the relevant Secretary of State with that in mind.

A ban on smoking in public places was a further suggestion from the Welsh Affairs Committee that we could not accept. After considering the proposal, we decided that such a measure was beyond the scope of the Bill and would entail creating a new public offence. A health Bill is not the proper vehicle for that.

I want to comment briefly on the remarks made by as many hon. Members as possible. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who led for the official Opposition, welcomed the draft Bill but provided his usual litany of all the woes that he perceives in the NHS in Wales. He quoted two statements:

"You have 24 hours to save the national health service",

and

"The National Health Service is safe in our hands".

I accept ownership of the first on behalf of my party. We said that to the people of Britain, and they elected a Labour Government. However, the second statement was originally made by Baroness Thatcher when she was Prime Minister. She said that the NHS was safe in Tory hands. My right hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher) responded by saying that that was as encouraging as putting King Herod on the board of Mothercare.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the National Assembly's powers to make regulations. They will be exercised in the way prescribed by Assembly Standing Orders. Public consultation will take place before any regulations are made and I shall be happy to convey the Assembly's intention on each of the orders when we discuss the Bill in Committee, if that is helpful.

[Mr. Don Touhig]

The hon. Gentleman spoke with some passion about nurse training. The Conservative Government cut the number of nurses and midwives in training by 25 per cent. in the mid-1990s and I am therefore not surprised that he is passionate about the matter. Those cuts led directly to the shortage of nurses that we inherited.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) for all the work that he and Welsh Affairs Committee undertook on pre-legislative scrutiny. He welcomed the Bill as a progressive measure and spoke about the opportunities that it would provide through its CHC provisions to respond to patients' voices in the health service.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) said that the pre-legislative consultation had been successful. I thank him for correcting some of the points in the research paper that was produced in the House on the costs of the proposed reorganisation. He was worried about co-terminosity with regard to CHCs. There is provision for CHCs to work in federations. However, I understand that that would not work in his large constituency. The Bill and the Assembly's regulation-making powers have sufficient flexibility to deal with those points.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) asked several questions to which I shall try to respond. He asked whether Health Professions Wales would have an input into the standards on overseas recruitment to ease assimilation. It may adopt functions from the Nursing and Midwifery Council only with the agreement of that body. That is a matter for Health Professions Wales when it is established.

My hon. Friend also asked about extending the role of CHCs to examining health provision in prisons. The National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002 requires the Prison Service and prescribed NHS bodies to co-operate with the view of improving health care in prisons. We do not believe that CHCs have a role in that and the Bill does not make such provision.

My hon. Friend and several other hon. Members raised matters about CHCs' cross-border operation. Powers for CHCs, including those to require information and undertake inspections, will be the same for CHCs in Wales as those that we gave patient forums in England in the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002. The Bill's language will mirror that of the 2002 Act. That reciprocal arrangement is sensible and will work beneficially for all of us.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) said that he was disappointed that the Government had not responded more positively to the Welsh Affairs Committee report. It was debated thoroughly in the Welsh Grand Committee. We carefully considered the comments of the Welsh Affairs Committee and adopted several although not all their proposals. There was widespread consultation and the hon. Gentleman and anyone else who felt strongly about our responses could have contributed at the pre-legislative scrutiny stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), a former Wales Office Minister with responsibility for health, made important points about choice, which underpins the aims of our NHS reforms. I share my hon. Friend's views about the independence of CHCs. Any monitoring, appraisal and inspection of the health service must be open and transparent and must be seen to be fully transparent.

My hon. Friend referred to delayed discharges and bed blocking. I shall leave that to my colleagues who are dealing with the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill tomorrow. In response to the question whether the Bill could be amended to enable community health councils to investigate delayed discharges, I can tell my hon. Friend that I believe that the powers in the Bill are sufficient. Under paragraph 1(a) of schedule 7A, it is the duty of a CHC

"to represent the interests in the health service of the public in its district".

The powers that we will confer on CHCs will cover the point that my hon. Friend raised.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) said that patient power must be enabling. I agree. The thrust of our CHC reforms is intended to enable patients to exercise more power and influence on the health service. We must make sure that that works.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) spoke about the developing roles of community health councils and put forward some interesting perspectives. I do not know whether she will serve on the Committee, but we can explore there the perspectives that she outlined in her comments this evening.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) gave his wholehearted support to the Bill. I welcome that. The fact that he was able to do so stems from the fact that we had wide-ranging pre-legislative scrutiny, which enabled members of all political parties or of none to make a contribution to the way in which the reform should be structured. That is reflected in the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) believed that the Welsh Affairs Committee did a good job on the pre-legislative scrutiny, and I agree. The Committee did an excellent job, which is a model for future pre-legislative scrutiny. He welcomed the partnership approach between the Government and the National Assembly for Wales. I have had the closest working partnership with my colleague Jane Hutt, the Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services. We have had the closest collaboration between my officials and hers, which is reflected in the strong support that we received throughout the pre-legislative scrutiny. This is how we are trying to take the agenda forward in Wales: the Government working in partnership with the Labour-led Assembly—the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire might care to note that—the Labour-led Assembly. That is proving beneficial for the people of Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) also welcomed the reforms to CHCs and gave some interesting and important historical

perspectives on how we had developed a democratic and a socialist health service as a result of the work of Aneurin Bevan.

Mr. Roger Williams: The hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) waxed lyrical about the support that the NHS was given by socialists, but does the Minister agree that it was conceived by a Liberal—Beveridge?

Mr. Touhig: Nye Bevan was certainly no Liberal, and he was the architect of the national health service. We share that honour with no one.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) said that although the Bill was short, it was important and it would make a difference. I certainly agree. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard) said CHCs in his area did good work and he wished to see their role develop, especially the advocacy role. We will see that develop, following the introduction of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) welcomed the pre-legislative scrutiny procedure and wondered whether it could be improved. I am sure that we will return to the matter later in our discussions. CHCs will have the power to inspect hospices, where they are delivering primary care. That is an important point to make.

I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. I thank those who took part in the pre-legislative scrutiny, those in the Welsh Affairs Committee, the Welsh Grand Committee and colleagues in the National Assembly, who made an important contribution to our discussions in formulating the policy. As a result of the pre-legislative scrutiny, we have a better Bill now than we would otherwise have had, and that is a lesson for all of us. I remember a time when I had a private Member's Bill soon after coming to the House. If we had had pre-legislative scrutiny at that time, that piece of legislation might well have been improved.

The Bill builds on the strategic framework put in place by the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002, which was passed in the last Session. It gives patients in Wales a stronger role and a voice in the improvement, development and running of the health service in Wales, to which we are all committed, and changes the emphasis from treating disease to improving health in Wales. It supports the Welsh Assembly's drive to improve the health and well-being of people of Wales and delivers key elements of the Assembly's 10-year plan for the health service in Wales.

This is an excellent example of the partnership that exists between the Government and the National Assembly. We have already achieved a great deal by working together, and I commend the Bill to the House and ask hon. Members to support its being given a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

HEALTH (WALES) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Health (Wales) Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

2. The proviso in paragraph (2)(ii) of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of Standing Committees) shall not apply to the Bill.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

3. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 12th December.

4. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

5. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

6. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

7. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

8. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments or any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

The House divided: Ayes 240, Noes 72.

Division No. 10] **[9:59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet
Armstrong, Hilary
Atherton, Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Margaret
Begg, Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith
Bradley, Peter
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Annette L.
Brown, Nicholas
Brown, Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Patsy
Campbell, Alan
Campbell, Ronnie
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Lynda
Clarke, Charles
Clarke, Tom
Clarke, Tony
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross

Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Davey, Valerie
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Terry
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Janet
Denham, John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David
Drown, Julia
Eagle, Angela
Eagle, Maria
Ellman, Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Derek
Foster, Michael
Foster, Michael Jabez
Francis, Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane
Griffiths, Nigel
Griffiths, Win
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hall, Patrick
Hamilton, David
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, David
Harris, Evan
Harris, Tom
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug
Henderson, Ivan
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan
Howarth, George
Howells, Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley
Hughes, Kevin
Humble, Joan
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan
Jones, Helen
Jones, Jon Owen
Jones, Kevan
Jones, Martyn
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Ashok
Ladyman, Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon
Marshall, David
Marshall, Jim
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Meg
Murphy, Denis
Murphy, Paul
Naysmith, Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra
Palmer, Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Bridget
Prentice, Gordon
Prescott, John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy
Reid, Alan
Rendel, David
Robertson, John
Robinson, Geoffrey
Roche, Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob
Russell, Christine
Ryan, Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew
Smith, Chris
Smith, Geraldine
Smith, Jacqui
Smith, John
Smith, Robert
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David
Stewart, Ian
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Howard
Stuart, Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Dari
Taylor, David
Taylor, Richard
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas, Simon
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Desmond
Turner, Neil
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Roger
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D.
Wright, Tony
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and Charlotte Atkins

NOES

Atkinson, Peter
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Burnett, John
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Kenneth
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Davis, David
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, Stephen
Evans, Nigel
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Eric

Fox, Liam
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, John
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, Douglas
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald
Knight, Greg
Lewis, Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Anne
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mates, Michael
Mercer, Patrick
Murrison, Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Ian
Pickles, Eric
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Laurence
Robinson, Iris
Robinson, Peter
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Simpson, Keith
Smyth, Martin
Spring, Richard
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Yeo, Tim
Young, George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

10.13 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Did you notice, during the vote, a senior Cabinet Minister walking the length of the Chamber, presumably on her way to vote, clutching a mobile phone to her ear? Is that appropriate behaviour from any hon. Member, let alone a senior Cabinet Minister?

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall, because I wrote to you a fortnight ago, that on Friday a couple of weeks ago an hon. Member entered the Chamber, sat just below the Gangway and sought to be called wearing a pair of jeans. Surely there must be a limit to modernisation.

Mr. Speaker: That matter did not arise today. The hon. Gentleman wrote to me, and when hon. Members write to me I deal with their complaints. So I have dealt with that matter.

I say to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) that no hon. Member should come into the Chamber with their mobile phone. All mobile phones should be switched off before they come into the Chamber and no one should be in conversation on a mobile phone. I certainly hope that note is taken of the hon. Gentleman's complaint.

HEALTH (WALES) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Health (Wales) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable by virtue of any other Act out of money so provided.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Contracting Out

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions in Relation to Applications for Patents) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 5th November, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Legal Services

That the draft Access to Justice Act 1999 (Solicitors' Practising Certificates) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Health Care and Associated Professions

That the draft Medical Act 1983 (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 14th November, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Northern Ireland

That the draft Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 2nd December,

(1) proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Reverend Ian Paisley shall lapse, if not previously concluded, at Seven o'clock or three hours after they have been entered upon, whichever is the later, and paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) shall apply to them as if the day were an Opposition Day; and

(2) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the Convention on the Future of Europe not later than three hours after they have been entered upon, and the proceedings may continue after the moment of interruption.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

PETITIONS

Israel

10.16 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): It is a privilege to present to the House a petition signed by more than 700 residents of Slough. In the letter that accompanies the petition, the organiser, Mr. Baig, urges us to change what he calls

"the immoral and inappropriate stance the Government has taken by not coming out clearly to condemn the continuous Israeli occupation and its failure to support the oppressed people of Palestine with any practical means beyond futile rhetoric".

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Slough and others

Declares that Palestinians are victims of brutalities committed by Israeli security forces and that the British Government is a silent bystander in the face of such war crimes.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take steps to prevent war crimes against innocent and defenceless Palestinians.

To lie upon the Table.

Consumers for Health Choice

10.17 pm

Ian Stewart (Eccles): This petition is presented by Mr. Michael Grace of the Village Health Food store in Eccles and his customers. I have been a customer of that store for many years.

The petition states:

The petition of—Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters,

Declares that—consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons—requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

To lie upon the table.

10.18 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I have great pleasure in presenting two petitions. The first follows on exactly from the previous one. It has been given to me by Mr. Brigh of the Bean Bag health store in Witney.

The petition has 1,100 signatures. The petition states:

Consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products . . . in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

To lie upon the Table.

Cotswold Railway

10.19 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): The second petition that I have to present was put together by Frances Short on behalf of residents of west Oxfordshire and it calls for improvements to the Cotswold railway line, a subject close to my heart.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons:

The petition of residents of West Oxfordshire declares that an infrastructure upgrade is required to reduce delays and produce and hourly service on the Cotswold Railway line.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires the Strategic Rail Authority, the train operating companies and the local councils to fund an infrastructure upgrade on the Cotswold line.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Consumers for Health Choice

10.20 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The petition that I have the pleasure to present is on behalf of 320 constituents in and around the comparatively small town of Bude. It is a relatively small community, and that is why the number is very significant.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Pre-schools

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

10.21 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am delighted to have this opportunity to raise an issue of growing concern in my constituency, and I expect in the constituencies of many other hon. Members.

I was slightly surprised to be told that the Minister responding to the debate on behalf of the Government would be the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle). I mean no disrespect to her, as I know that she is diligent and effective—and I am looking forward to hearing her response. However, I am raising the problem of the huge bureaucratic burdens faced by pre-schools, many of which are imposed by the Department for Education and Skills. How can a Minister who does not sit in that Department really help to put that right?

I am talking about children under five, and some of them are as young as two. Even in this Prime Minister's Britain, none of them works and certainly none of them has a pension. There are five Education Ministers in the House of Commons. One of them, the Minister for School Standards, the hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband), is meant to have a brain the size of a football pitch. Surely he could dedicate just one part of it to pre-schools. However, although I look forward to the answer, I suspect that it will be that this is "partnership working between Departments" or even, heaven help us, "joined-up Government". If it is, I am not sure yet that I am in favour of it.

Pre-schools and nurseries in my west Oxfordshire constituency provide a magnificent service for children, parents and the wider community. The Government often talk about the need for diversity and choice. This is the one area in education where we already have it. There are, as it were, a thousand points of light—some provided by the state, some are private and some voluntary, and many are collaborations between parents and supervisors.

As Sue Harrison, of the fabulously named Blackditch Bunnies pre-school in Stanton Harcourt, explained:

"The culture of pre-schools is rooted in parental involvement and community spirit, not central control."

I have been hugely impressed by what I have seen in Witney, North Leigh and elsewhere in my constituency—dedicated staff, contented parents and children getting a first-class foundation to their education.

So why the need for this short debate? I want to raise two important concerns. First, it is quite clear that the pre-school sector is suffering from over-regulation. Some of the best providers are in danger of being strangled by the red tape. Angela Buckingham of North Leigh nursery told me that she comes close to

"spending more time with the paper than with the children."

Linda Trigg of Cherubs in the Wychwoods says that she is too often

"taken away from childcare because I am filling in the forms".

Sue Moore, from the Farm House nursery in Witney, told me that eight and half years ago, when she set up her nursery, she spent two hours a week on paperwork. Now it is every day, and sometimes all day. As she put it:

"They want you to justify every time you sneeze."

There are a number of specific areas that are causing this problem. Ofsted inspections have replaced social service inspections. They are much more paper based and they take place, in most cases, every year. Primary schools, by contrast, are not inspected so frequently. The response can take months. One pre-school inspected this January has still not received a written response.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I wonder whether it will surprise my hon. Friend to learn what happened to my constituent Anne Beckwith, proprietor of the Discovery nursery in Diss, when she was trying to set up the nursery. Several months after she had completed all the paperwork that Ofsted had asked her to complete, several months after she had answered all the questions and, indeed, several months after being told by Ofsted that she had fulfilled all its requirements, she still could not get the go-ahead. Will my hon. Friend join me in urging the Government to look seriously at Ofsted's procedures, which are clearly too bureaucratic?

Mr. Cameron: I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend say that, because it accords with the thrust of what I am saying. It is all taking too long, the burden is too heavy, and as a result we are in danger of losing some very good pre-school facilities.

Pre-schools have to draw up dozens of policies and procedures. Although some may have only 20 or so children, they are required to have—at the last count—20 policies and four procedures, including policies on record keeping, equal opportunities, behaviour management and much else.

Another subject that arises time and again in conversation with supervisors and staff at pre-schools is child profiles. I know that they are necessary, but they currently run to 16 pages per child, and some pre-schools do not find them particularly useful. The pre-school in Stanton Harcourt that I mentioned runs its own system alongside the official one. Every supervisor to whom I have spoken agrees that all the profiles could be slimmed down without child safety or protection being affected. Of course pre-schools must be equal opportunities employers, and of course they must have regard to such things as safety, but would not a single brief statement outlining the position be sufficient, rather than a myriad? I ask the Minister to tell the Department to consider its own role in creating much of all that paper.

There is also a degree of doubling up. Much of the form filling is so that pre-schools can become accredited. Many of the smaller pre-schools want that status because they do not want to be seen as second class; but they ask whether, if they are inspected by Ofsted, that is not enough. I would be grateful if the Minister could look at that specifically.

[Mr. Cameron]

Sue Harrison wrote a very good letter to *The Independent*. I do not always read *The Independent*, so I do not know whether it was published, but this is what she said:

"The new accreditation process has just been one huge paper chase to prove ourselves in print. And we have to endure annual inspections when schools only have one every five years. My committee, all of whom are unpaid and are busy working mums, can't cope with it all. The staff are the only people trained to deal with it but I am paid £3,500 a year to work 12 hours a week, not the 24 which I am working at the moment to keep all those forms filled in . . . Just how has this paper mountain improved the children's learning and well being? I can't think of one instance. Our Ofsted health and safety check was a pale shadow of the disbanded Social Services one. The inspector seemed only interested in the contents of our bulging documents cupboard."

The supervisors to whom I spoke singled out Ofsted for its habit of using four pages when just one would do. Adrienne Willsdon, the supervisor of Kiddiwinks nursery in Charlbury, said that the registration forms from Ofsted were like booklets, when in fact the name, address, contact details and basic information about the child were all that was really required. The paperwork is not just a burden on staff; it has a knock-on effect on funding and on governing bodies or parents' committees.

Many pre-schools have no funds for a computer, but how can they be expected to draw up policies, operational plans and the like without one? What happens is that that is done by the supervisor or the committee secretary on his or her own computer at home. If, by some unhappy chance, they leave, much of the information may be lost for good. All that is deterring parents from taking part. One supervisor told me:

"The nature of meetings has totally changed. It used to be discussing the rota for the cake stall and whether the hall needed painting, now it is composing policies and forms for which the committee don't see the need."

The types of paperwork, the forms and the bureaucracy keep changing. The principal teacher of St Hugh of Lincoln nursery school in Curbridge told me:

"We fill in the forms, get it all organised . . . and then we have to start all over again."

The second issue I want to raise is the concern that has been expressed about a proposal that all four-year-olds should go to primary school at a single point of entry. Although the proposal comes from the Oxfordshire local education authority, I understand that it is in line with Government thinking on the foundation stage. The LEA, which has, as ever, been helpful in answering my questions, listed a number of advantages, including the belief that the approach would

"give greater parity of entitlement to all children in the reception year."

Having listened to the views of many pre-schools, I fear that it could have harmful effects, particularly for provision in my very rural constituency.

Many of the pre-schools in west Oxfordshire are small. Without the four-year-olds, the pre-schools in some villages may not survive. If that happens, valuable provision for children of two and a half and three would be lost altogether. One pre-school representative was quite frank, saying that if four-year-olds were absorbed into the school, the loss of funding would kill the pre-school without any doubt. Another pointed out that had the policy been in place last year, 20 out of the 30 children would have left in one go, threatening the viability of the pre-school. The Farm House nursery in Witney said that it might lose half of its 28 children. It said that there simply are not enough children of two and a half and three to go round. Pre-schools and nurseries could close. That could have knock-on effects on other provision in our villages.

A letter from the Finstock village hall committee makes the point about the Woodpecker pre-school, which shares its facilities:

"Insufficient consideration has been given to the viability of pre-school groups and the income of village halls, once children are admitted to the school from the age of four."

I accept that pre-schools are not unanimous about this. Some that I have spoken to, particularly in one or two of the larger villages, believe that they will be able to cope with the change. There is also the question of whether the smaller village primary schools will be able to manage with the change once it has taken place.

As a briefing note sent to me by David Smith, the private sector representative on Oxfordshire's early years development and child care partnership puts it, these schools

"are unlikely to be able to make specific provision for younger four year olds either due to the limitations of their premises or because the number of children would not justify it. If younger four year olds are admitted to such schools they are likely to be taught in a mixed age reception class totally unsuited to their needs."

He concludes that

"children in rural areas will be further disadvantaged and admission to quality provision will become a lottery."

The LEA is clear that

"a change in admissions policy would create greater choice for parents, and create capacity for children to have their full entitlement in communities where there is currently insufficient provision."

I fear that in rural areas the exact opposite might happen and that there will be less choice and less capacity. The LEA says that such a change will

"end the long standing problem of Oxfordshire's primary admission arrangements being out of line with its geographical neighbours".

Arguments in favour of tidiness are never the strongest.

I know that it will be argued that parents have a choice. Yes, they do—no child has to go to school before the age of five. However, in the case of popular village schools, parents will always be nervous that if they do not take what is on offer when their child is four, they will miss the boat altogether. That point was made by one of the governors of the ACE centre at Chipping Norton during the public consultation.

I urge caution in this area and look forward to what the Minister has to say about the Government's view on the difficult issue of the age at which it is right for children to go to school. The proposal for the single point of entry for four-year-olds opens up the debate on what sort of provision is right for children. I tread carefully here—I am no expert. I have just the one child, and he is only seven months old. However, the points that have been made to me about whether the quality of provision in primary schools will be as good as what is on offer in dedicated pre-schools are worth making.

Sue Gibson from the Daffodil nursery in Long Hanborough, among others, expressed some concerns. The first is over staffing levels. In pre-schools, the supervisor-to-child ratio tends to be 8:1; in primary schools it is more like 13:1, with classes of 26 run by a teacher with a learning support assistant.

The second concern is over content. Pre-schools are experts in learning through play. Of course, primary schools that do not have early years provision will be able to develop it. However, there is a danger of reinventing the wheel or—to mix my metaphors and find a more appropriate one—throwing the baby out with the bath water.

The third concern is whether primary schools can cope with all the needs of four-year-olds. As many supervisors have told me, some four-year-olds are ready for school, while others still need nurturing more than teaching. Maggie McClay, from St. Peter's nursery in Filkins in my constituency, made this point with real concern. In small schools, will they have to share classes with older children? How will that work? Will children be moved too quickly into years one, two and three?

Another need that most pre-schools and nurseries can provide, but not all primary schools do, is access to outside space. A meeting was held in Witney on 8 October by the LEA to consult about this. I have a copy of the minutes. One pre-school supervisor who was there told me that, interestingly, none of the primary school representatives from west Oxfordshire who attended the meeting welcomed the change, and the minutes seem to bear that out. I know that this is a difficult issue and the LEA is still thinking about it. From what I have heard—and I have spoken to as many pre-schools and nurseries as possible in the past two days—the case for change is still to be made.

I would like to end with one further plea. Although pre-schools and nurseries do a wonderful job, as I hope I have demonstrated, they are often short of money for buildings. The LEA has told me that Oxfordshire received £220,000, this year and next, to increase capacity for the whole county. That is only likely to be enough for one project in each area. Clearly, if we are to embark on the huge change of providing a single point of access for all four-year-olds, there will be an enormous need for new facilities. That is why I say that it may be better not to change.

Many pre-schools still have to move heaven and earth to raise funds. One project with which I have been helping, the Little Oak pre-school in Witney, has a temporary classroom that is rotting away. We have had no help from anybody, but we have managed to find a construction company, Persimmon, which has given us another second-hand building. I thank it for its generosity; it is great that a company is doing something for a community like that.

The building is just the start, however. It must be transported, made ready and kitted out. The parents and teachers working on this project have shown incredible dedication. Their reward, and the reward of all who work in this vital sector, should be congratulation and support from both central Government and the LEA. I fear that, at present, those involved in pre-schools are instead suffering from regulation and change that may not only be unnecessary but damaging.

I want to end by quoting again from Sue Harrison's letter about her experience in the Blackditch Bunnies pre-school in Stanton Harcourt:

"Many fellow supervisors have left the profession to work at something better paid (like shelf stacking) and less hard work ... and who in their right mind would volunteer to be on a committee now? Soon rural pre-schools will implode and leave millions of young children and their mums with nowhere to play and no one to talk to."

I beg the Minister to recognise that when we have a sector that demonstrates such diversity, such inventiveness and such a high standard of care, we should do what we can to nurture it rather than damage it.

10.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): First, I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) on securing this debate on the important issue, as his speech demonstrated, of how we provide best for our young children before they have to attend school.

The hon. Gentleman started his remarks with a gentle suggestion that I might not be the appropriate Minister to deal with these issues. I want to start by assuring him that he is not being short-changed by having me answering his debate. I am not doing any of my colleagues from the Department for Education and Skills a favour of any kind. I am the Minister in the House of Commons who deals with sure start, early years and child care. That recent change was announced at the time of the spending review, along with many other announcements, so I do not criticise him for not spotting it.

The hon. Gentleman may be aware of the review across Government into this subject, which took a year, the results of which were published on 6 November. He may have seen those results, but, if not, I commend them to him. One of the findings of the review in terms of machinery of government was that it would be more sensible to join up—that hideous phrase—some of the work that is done across Departments in respect of the early years, early development and health of young children. As a consequence, my noble Friend Baroness Ashton was asked to lead an inter-departmental unit dealing with all of those issues. She is the lead Minister—she is a Minister in both the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions—but, as she is in another place, she cannot answer debates in this place. Consequently, somebody else must answer in this place, and I am that person.

The hon. Gentleman made two major points, and he illustrated, partly through their wonderful names, the diversity of the nurseries and pre-schools in his constituency.

The hon. Gentleman's first point was about what he described as over-regulation in the pre-school sector. He quoted some of his constituents who work in that sector and who have complained about spending more time with paper than with children. We obviously take that concern seriously. It is not the aim of Government to bury teachers or pre-school staff in paperwork. That is not the main job that they seek to do or the main job that we want them to do. They have a legitimate concern that

[Maria Eagle]

paperwork will take them away from their primary function of caring for and looking after the development and needs of young children, but it is not in the Government's interest to increase the amount of paperwork and restrict the teaching and child care that take place.

We are sympathetic to such concerns. Although we cannot control every piece of paper that the staff might be expected to fill in, we have responsibility for some of it. However, the hon. Gentleman must bear in mind that the regulatory processes of registration and inspection operated by Ofsted require some form filling. The Government do their best to ensure that that is simplified and that the forms deal with what is necessary. We do not want their number to expand just for the sake of it.

The hon. Gentleman referred to child profiles that were 16 pages long and that had to be filled in for every child. There is certainly no requirement for profiles to be of a particular length, but pre-schools must keep records on their children's progress. I hope that he does not think that such a requirement is unnecessarily bureaucratic. The profiles can be simple and straightforward, and 16 pages seem to be excessive. However, there is no requirement for the profiles to be of that length, so I hope that the example that he cited did not arise out of a central Government diktat that meant that the profiles had to be of a particular length and overly burdensome.

The regulatory processes are there to ensure quality and safety, so there must be a proper balance between the amount of the paperwork required and its purposes. If we get the balance right, I hope that no one will complain about having to do some paperwork. It is not the Government's intention that excessive paperwork should drive people out of the business of looking after children or providing pre-school care.

Mr. Bacon: No one would dispute the need for balance. However, does the Minister accept that, when proprietors have filled in all the paperwork, have been told that they have met all the requirements but still cannot get the go-ahead for their plans, there is something about the bureaucratic processes of Ofsted that must be seriously examined?

Maria Eagle: I shall say something about Ofsted. It has a role in regulation and in ensuring that children are safe and well looked after and that the premises are safe and suitable. It provides the quality checks that parents require before they decide to leave their children in particular places or under the care of particular organisations. Parents must be sure that the places where they leave their children are safe and have proper standards. Taxpayers' money is used to fund elements of early-years provision so it is right for the House to expect the money to be properly used and accounted for so that we obtain value for money and proper quality and care. That is why the regulations exist.

As I have said, there must be a proper balance. Ofsted took over responsibility for child care registration and inspection from local authorities only last September. That has some advantages in the sense that pre-schools now have to work to only one set of standards. Before that, there were 150 sets of standards that varied from local authority to local authority and their interpretation of the requirements differed. We are bringing together the requirements into a national standard that should make it clearer and easier to meet them. The system is settling down but I say to the hon. Member for Witney and to those who take an interest in the subject that we want to ensure that it settles down properly. We certainly do not intend to impose more regulatory burdens, red tape and form filling than is absolutely necessary to meet the legitimate concerns of Government, parents and taxpayers.

The hon. Gentleman said that it was a requirement that all four-year-olds should go to primary schools at a single point of entry. He also made it clear that some of the changes considered in Oxfordshire have been proposed by the LEA. That is therefore a matter for the LEA, not the Government. If we told each LEA what to do, he would no doubt raise that in a debate on how Whitehall is trying to micro-manage bits of his constituency.

I am aware of the fact that the hon. Gentleman's LEA proposes to change admission arrangements for primary schools. He gave some of its reasons for that and he is rightly attending constituency meetings about it. The LEA proposes to move from a three-point entry of admission to a reception class to a single point of entry. It wants to do that for various reasons, some of which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The Government do not have a preferred best way of doing that. We laid the schools admission code of practice before the House on, I think, 15 November. The hon. Gentleman will find it useful for discussions with his LEA because it sets out the Government's suggestions.

It is for the admissions authority in the first instance to produce policies and it must consult. The consultation process in Oxfordshire has been going on for, I think, a couple of years. No one could argue that the authority is jumping to conclusions. There has been an extensive consultation, which is how it should be, and I understand that it will reach some conclusions in the new year.

The Government are fully committed to parental choice in early-years education. We are not telling authorities like the LEA in the hon. Gentleman's area that it should have a single point of admission. That is a matter for the local area to decide on after consultation. If a single point of admission is accepted, I do not deny that some parents will feel under pressure to transfer their children from pre-schools to schools, as the hon. Gentleman said.

The schools admission code of practice encourages admission authorities to allow parents to secure a place at a school of their choice and to defer entry. That should deal with some of the problems raised. Some authorities already do that. I am sure that Oxfordshire will consider all the issues before it comes to its conclusions. The policy suggested in the code of practice should alleviate some of the pressures on parents to get their children into a particular nursery at a particular time rather than leaving them in the pre-school.

Our aim is to ensure that provision enables local parents to choose what is best for their child. What is good for one child might not be good for the child next door, and we are trying to ensure that local authorities provide diversity.

Mr. Cameron: I am listening carefully. Does the hon. Lady accept the link between over-regulation, which is driving some of the small voluntary pre-schools to the wall, and the move to send more four-year-olds to primary schools, which are better able to cope with the regulatory burden? Perhaps she would like to visit one of those voluntary pre-schools with me to see the paperwork. My plea is that the Government do not crush those wonderful little gems because we will very much regret losing them.

Maria Eagle: The Government are certainly not interested in crushing gems. We are trying to promote and nurture diversity and choice for parents. I do not accept that the regulatory burden is driving schools to close. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that the Government have an obligation to ensure safety and quality. These are, after all, places where parents leave their very young children; they need assurance about these issues and it is the Government's responsibility to make sure that they get it. Of course we are always willing to try to reduce the volume of paper. As I said, I think that there are misconceptions about what is required because the Ofsted regime is relatively new and is bedding in, and we all need to learn lessons about that.

The hon. Gentleman referred to struggling pre-schools. I shall not deny that some pre-schools have struggled to exist, and some have closed, for a variety of reasons. We have, as the hon. Gentleman said, seen a steady shift in the balance of child care provision, away from playgroups and pre-schools towards the full day-care that parents want when they work full-time. We are encouraging pre-schools and playgroups to expand their services wherever possible and to provide child care over extended hours.

We have allocated £6 million of capital funding to help with such conversion—£3 million this year and £3 million next year. The additional funding from the spending review doubled provision for child care and early-years education. Overall then, funding in this field is increasing. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that although that does not always trickle down into every little school in every little village, we are doing our best to ensure that there is diversity and choice.

We have no interest in trying to squeeze all pre-school and early-years provision into one nationally recognised and Government-preferred option, and we are not doing so. We are trying to encourage diversity and choice because that is what parents want and, in the end, that is what is best for our children.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 28 November 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

STANDING ORDERS (PRIVATE BUSINESS)

Ordered,

That the Amendments to Standing Orders set out in the Schedule be made:—

SCHEDULE

Standing Order 4a, line 4, after 'London' insert—

'and, if it affects Wales, at an office in Cardiff'.

Standing Order 4a, line 15, leave out 'or community' and insert—

', or (in Wales) in the county or county borough in which the community,'.

Standing Order 4a, line 37, after 'district' insert—

', or (in Wales) in the county or county borough'.

Standing Order 24, line 1, after 'notice' insert 'under the preceding orders'.

Standing Order 26, line 4, at end insert—

'(see also Standing Order 209 (Time for delivering notices, etc.))'.

Standing Order 27, line 72, leave out 'Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and insert 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.'.

Standing Order 27a, line 33, leave out 'Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and insert 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister'.

Standing Order 29, line 8, leave out ', Local Government and the Regions'.

Standing Order 34, line 11, leave out ', Local Government and the Regions'.

Standing Order 37, line 11, leave out 'Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and insert 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister'.

Standing Order 37, line 19, leave out 'Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions,' and insert 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.'.

Standing Order 39, line 5, leave out ', the Home Office and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions,' and insert 'and the Home Office'.

Standing Order 39, line 7, after 'Industry' insert ', the Department for Transport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister'.

Standing Order 39, line 17, leave out 'General Register Office' and insert

'Office for National Statistics'.

Standing Order 45, line 21, leave out ', Local Government and the Regions'.

Standing Order 47, line 10, leave out 'Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' and insert 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister'.

Standing Order 80 is hereby repealed.

Standing Order 81, line 1, leave out from 'Means' to the end and insert—

'or the Counsel to the Speaker shall, on or before 8th January each year, hold a conference with the Chairman of Committees of the House of Lords or with his Counsel for the purpose of determining in which House of Parliament the respective private bills should first be considered.'

Standing Order 144, line 1, leave out from 'or' to the end and insert—

'its objects, which are—

(a) made by a minister of the Crown, and

(b) presented to the House by being deposited in the Private Bill Office, shall stand referred to the committee on the bill.

(2) Where a recommendation is made in any such report, the committee—

(a) may, if it thinks fit, hear a person nominated by the minister in explanation of the recommendation, and

(b) shall note the recommendation in its report and, if it does not agree to such recommendation shall state its reasons for dissenting.'.

Standing Order 147, line 8, leave out ', Local Government and the Regions'.

Standing Order 147, line 11, leave out ', Local Government and the Regions'.

Standing Order 154, line 13, leave out ', Local Government and the Regions'.

Standing Order 154, line 28, leave out ', Local Government and the Regions'.—*[Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Child Care

1. **Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): What plans he has to increase pre-school and after-school child care provision. [81967]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): On 15 July, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced, as part of the spending review, plans to more than double child care spending and create 250,000 new child care places by 2006. In addition, we shall also be encouraging schools to provide and host a range of services, including child care, for the local community through our extended schools programme.

Linda Perham: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he recognise the work of the Redbridge early-years and child care partnership on delivering excellent pre-school and after-school services with resources provided by the Government through sure start and other excellent initiatives? Will he also congratulate it on the recent award of a new opportunities fund boost of £200,000?

Mr. Twigg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments and I am pleased to congratulate Redbridge on that. I know that she has a long-standing interest in

providing the best possible early-years services in Redbridge. Indeed, she was a founding member of the Redbridge under-fives. The experience in her area demonstrates the importance of investment in such services.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I hope that the Minister has had time to read my Adjournment debate of last night on pre-schools. Sadly, no Education Minister was present to hear it. Will he take up my plea to cut the regulatory burden on pre-schools? They have Ofsted reports every year whereas primary schools have them only every five years. Their child profiles are 16 pages long and they have to have 24 policies, even though some of the pre-schools, like the wonderful Blackditch Bunnies in Stanton Harcourt which I visited recently, have fewer than 20 children.

Mr. Twigg: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not having had the opportunity to read what I am sure was an excellent debate. It is this Government who have invested in early years, including pre-schools, via our funding of the nursery programme. I am happy to look at the detailed points raised by the hon. Gentleman, but I recall that before 1997 pre-schools were closing up and down the country. Thanks to our investment in early years, new pre-schools are opening up and down the country.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Many of our children in Amber Valley benefit hugely from breakfast clubs and out-of-school provision. Will my hon. Friend ensure that funding for the current schemes continues when the new opportunities fund ends? Many clubs cannot be sustained by simply asking parents to pay, because they are in poorer areas.

Mr. Twigg: I know that those breakfast clubs and other out-of-school activities have made a real difference. We want to ensure that they are sustainable because the benefits that they bring are educational, social and economic. In my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham), I said that our extended schools programme has great potential. I think new investment will be available not only for breakfast clubs, but for after-school facilities as well.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Is it not a frightful waste of money that pre-school settings and other educational establishments are employing people they cannot use because of delays in the Criminal Records Bureau system? Is the Minister aware of the length of those delays? What action is he taking with his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to put things right?

Mr. Twigg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question. The issue is serious and I agree with him. We are working with the Home Office and Ofsted to clear the backlog of delays. They are unacceptable and we want the problem resolved as quickly as possible.

Specialist Schools

2. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): What plans he has to allow more schools to obtain specialist status. [81968]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): I am pleased to announce today that the Government intend to remove the cap on national funding to support specialist schools. This means that every school in England which meets the required standard will from today be able to join the specialist schools programme.

In addition, I can say that my Department is announcing a new partnership fund of £3 million in 2003–04 to be administered with the technology colleges trust in accordance with guidelines from my Department. This is designed specifically to help schools that have difficulty in meeting the current £50,000 sponsorship requirement.

Ms Munn: I thank my right hon. Friend for that welcome answer and his announcement. What support will be given to schools that apply for specialist status and do not meet the requirements, not because of financial reasons, but because their plan is deemed to be not good enough? It is demoralising for schools that are in difficult circumstances which want to take advantage of that opportunity to fall at the first hurdle.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right. Support is offered through the technology colleges trust and local education authorities. I congratulate the director of education in my hon. Friend's city of Sheffield for the work that is being done to enable all the authority's schools that want to become specialist to achieve that by 2006, provided that they meet the quality standard. At the moment, 10 out of 27 schools in Sheffield are specialist, but I hope that my announcement today will help all schools to become specialist with support from the technology colleges trust and the local education authority.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Does the Secretary of State accept Ofsted's view that specialist schools should not be assessed as a homogenous group because specialist sports colleges, for example, have seen no real improvement in standards, whereas the best performing are those that specialise in languages; and that diversity does not, in itself, drive up standards? Have not we reached the point at which we must stop obsessing about structure and start looking at the philosophy behind the way in which teachers teach and the way in which they are trained?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's fundamental point, in that it is right to look at particular schools in a particular way rather than to generalise across disciplines. His comments about Ofsted are not entirely accurate. Research by Ofsted confirmed that for the vast majority of schools already in the programme, specialist status has helped to sustain or accelerate the pace of school improvement. "School improvement" is the key phrase, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the purpose of the scheme is to develop school improvement programmes across the whole range.

In evidence to the Select Committee yesterday, Ofsted's director of inspection said that it would be years before the picture became clear, and I accept that

judgment. With a proper research programme, it will be some time before we see how things are going. However, I believe that our approach to school improvement, using specialist schools, is already delivering results and will continue to do so.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will my right hon. Friend look closely not only at Ofsted's evidence to our Committee yesterday but at the evidence from a range of academics who are concerned about the relationship between the investment in specialist schools, which is a great deal of taxpayers' money, and results? We know that good schools become specialist schools, but as yet specialist schools are not producing good schools. However, it would be churlish not to welcome the announcement that many more schools will be able to benefit from specialist status.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome, and I shall look very closely at his Committee's conclusions. I have considered the evidence given to the Committee in hearings earlier this week, and a number of interesting points were made. However, anyone who doubts the contribution of the specialist programme to the process of driving up standards in schools, by providing focus and an opportunity to develop different aptitudes, is missing an important point. That is why I was so pleased to be able to announce today that the opportunity to take part in that dynamic and positive programme will be extended to all schools in the country.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Secretary of State clearly believes in specialist schools. He will be aware that in Northern Ireland, where schools are able to specialise by academic selection, GCSE results are 14 per cent. better than in England, A-level results are 13 per cent. better, and 20 per cent. fewer children leave school with no qualifications. What lessons does he draw from that for the specialist schools programme in England?

Mr. Clarke: I do not draw the conclusion that the hon. Gentleman obviously does, which is that the 11-plus should be reintroduced throughout England. It would extraordinary if the Conservative party nailed its flag to 11-plus selection. The lesson that I learn is that the more focus schools have and the more their ethos encourages learning, the better they do. That is why I think that the specialist programme is positive and why I am so pleased to announce its extension today—it is the right way to go.

Classroom Assistants

3. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): How many classroom assistants are employed in (a) the west midlands and (b) England. [81969]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): The full-time equivalent number of support staff in maintained schools in the west midlands in January 2002 was 23,082. That includes more than 11,000 teaching assistants, more than 5,000 administrative staff, 1,775 technicians and nearly 5,000 other staff.

Mr. Cunningham: What proposals does my hon. Friend have for career development for classroom assistants? Is he happy with their salary levels, which I believe are minimum wage?

Mr. Miliband: My hon. Friend raises an important point. There are 80,000 more classroom assistants than there were five or six years ago. I had the pleasure of seeing, in Liverpool, a pioneering scheme to create a career path to allow teaching assistants to become classroom teachers. Classroom assistants' pay is a matter for local authorities and is determined locally. I know from my area that pay varies throughout the country, but I have not heard that assistants are on the minimum wage.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): Is my hon. Friend aware that the continued heavy investment in education which the Chancellor confirmed in his pre-Budget report yesterday is leading to good results in the numbers of classroom assistants and teachers? Is he aware that in my constituency, for example, Limbrick Wood primary school, which only three years ago was in special measures, has now made a remarkable turnaround and is achieving results above national average at key stage 2? Will he find an early opportunity to visit the school, where he will be most welcome, as in Coventry generally?

Mr. Miliband: That is a very tempting offer. I was in Coventry two weeks ago, and am sorry to have missed that opportunity. I am happy to congratulate Limbrick Wood primary school on its outstanding achievement. My hon. Friend will know that in 1997, about 560 schools were in special measures, but that number has now about halved. I look forward to taking in Limbrick Wood primary school on a future visit to the region.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): As an ex-head teacher, I greatly valued the classroom assistants who worked for me for a number of years. What does the Minister mean by high-level teaching assistants? If he means classroom assistants teaching formally, does he not agree that that destroys the ideal of a full graduate profession, for which we fought for many years when I was a very young man just starting teaching?

Mr. Miliband: I am sure that the young man on the Back Benches agrees that high-level teaching assistants such as language specialists, laboratory technicians and music specialists who come into classes can make a genuine contribution to the learning of young people. It is important to point out that all classroom assistants work under the direction of qualified teachers. Teaching remains a graduate profession, but those graduates will be in charge of a wider range of support staff,

from secretaries right up to high-level teaching assistants. That reinforces teacher professionalism, and is certainly not a threat to it.

Further and Higher Education

4. **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): What steps he is taking to widen participation in further and higher education. [81970]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): Extending opportunity in both further and higher education is central to our aims. We announced the most ambitious programme ever for further education last week—a £1.2 billion expansion. Our excellence challenge programme for higher education is already encouraging wider participation and the strategy that we will publish in January will take that forward.

Paul Goggins: I thank my hon. Friend for her answer, but does she agree that a principal barrier to wider participation, particularly in further education, is the fact that far too many parents at home and people at work simply cannot read, write and add up adequately? What targets have the Government set to improve adult literacy and numeracy?

Margaret Hodge: I fully agree that it is an indictment of us all that 7 million adults do not have the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed to prosper in society and employment. We have set an ambitious target of 1.5 million achieving those basic skills by 2007, and I am proud that in the past 12 months, 250,000 have gained the required qualifications.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): The Minister will recognise that, historically, further education has been a Cinderella subject, particularly in the present debate about higher education. In the City of Westminster in my constituency, we have a thriving further education college which I recently visited. One of the main problems there is funding for English as a supplementary language. Does the Minister have any thoughts about how we can ensure that from all the debate about funding further and higher education there emerges a ring-fenced fund to that end?

Margaret Hodge: We are extremely proud of the fact that we have been able to put a 19 per cent. real-terms increase into funding for further education colleges over the next three years. That will bring them back to the centre by providing them with the resources to deliver wider participation and higher standards. The issue of funding English as a foreign language is critical to building community cohesion among the many people who are joining us in this country. Our difficulty is finding enough teachers, but we are working on that.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I wholly welcome my hon. Friend's statement about extra money going into further education. Does she agree that widening participation in further and higher education is crucial to areas like mine, which is in economic regeneration, particularly for people who have lost out at the age of 18 and discovered their motivation in their twenties and thirties? Will she therefore ensure that in their review of funding for higher education in particular, the Government will do nothing to damage widening participation?

Margaret Hodge: I share my right hon. Friend's passion for widening participation in both further and higher education. My constituency is not unlike his—participation in post-16 education, both further education and higher education, is far lower than I would like. I can give my right hon. Friend an assurance that ensuring that young people, whatever their background, have access to further and higher education is central to our work.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Given the continuing fiasco of the Department's handling of individual learning accounts, it is not surprising that the Chancellor of the Exchequer took it upon himself yesterday to announce yet another new target in that area, this time an increase to 90 per cent. post-16 participation in education and training. Given that it is almost as easy for any Minister to announce a new target as it is to miss an old one, will this particular Education and Skills Minister commit herself to resign if the new target is missed?

Margaret Hodge: I will resign as and when I think that I have acted inappropriately. Sadly for the hon. Gentleman, I do not think that that stage has yet been reached. The target announced by the Chancellor yesterday was a much better target because, for the first time, we have brought together into one target the vocational and the academic education of young people from the age of 16, to achieve a seamless progression. The purpose is to ensure that we deal with the very poor staying-on rates of young people at 16—one of the legacies that we inherited from the hon. Gentleman when he was a Minister with responsibility in that area, which is one of the areas that we intend to put right.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Given that the new target focuses on young people in traditional academic disciplines as well as in modern apprenticeships and craft disciplines, how can we interest young people in the opportunities that exist in further education and training for craft skills and modern apprenticeships, which the economy needs and in which they need qualifications?

Margaret Hodge: I hope that a number of the initiatives we are taking will support that objective, which I share with my hon. Friend. The educational maintenance allowances that we piloted have shown an encouraging increase in the number of young people choosing to participate, in the pilot areas. The reforms that we shall bring forward in the 14-to-19 curriculum will introduce new pathways into vocational education alongside more general education, which again will encourage more young people into that. The taskforce that we established yesterday, which will be led by people in the field—those who require the apprenticeships—will bring more understanding of the problems, so that we can reach the objective that my hon. Friend and I share.

Secondary Schools

5. **Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): What the funding per head is in secondary schools in (a) Leicestershire and (b) England and Wales. [81971]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): In 2002–03 Leicestershire's funding per pupil in secondary schools is £3,390. The average for schools in England is £3,850.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is it not a fact that, like the Government's overdraft, which is getting worse, the amount of money available to children in Leicestershire under the current arrangements is getting worse? Whereas it used to be 10 per cent., current projections—I have checked the figures with the Library—make it look as though it will be 11 per cent. next year, which is the worst it has ever been in the county and certainly worse than it was under the Conservative Administration. Has not the time come to adopt option 5 in the proposals, which would stop the arrangement whereby additional educational needs are made the top priority, and would put more money and more emphasis on the basic allowance per pupil? That would be a much fairer system. What does the Minister propose to do about it?

Mr. Miliband: I am sure the hon. Gentleman would want to congratulate the Government on increasing the standard spending assessment in Leicestershire by £18 million in the past year. I take seriously his concerns about the consultation that is currently under way and on which my right hon. Friend will make announcements in December. We take seriously all the representations that we have had from Leicestershire and elsewhere about the reforms to the system, and the hon. Gentleman will have to wait a little longer to find out our conclusions. However, I can tell him that the basic entitlement will remain the largest element of the school funding formula. That is an important part of any system.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Along with all parents, I, as a governor of a Leicestershire school, welcome the increased expenditure that we have had since 1997, compared with the cuts in the preceding five years. Does my hon. Friend understand the frustration that parents will feel if the announcement that is made in the next couple of weeks does not substantially reduce the gap between the highest and the lowest funded education authorities in the country? Leicestershire is currently in the latter group. Even at this late stage, will my hon. Friend make a last-minute plea to ensure that the positive message that comes out is that we are addressing the enormous gap that exists, and that there is a bright future for Leicestershire schools, which will benefit from increased spending in the next few years?

Mr. Miliband: I know that my hon. Friend is a passionate advocate for schools in his constituency. I assure him that a floor will be included in the new formula to ensure that there are no losers in the system, contrary to some of the disinformation that has been circulated. We are taking seriously the representations that have been made throughout the country and will make our proposals in due course.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Will the Minister explain why, in determining the new formula for Leicestershire and other English and Welsh local education authorities, he has ignored the advice of the LEAs themselves, head teacher associations, governors and managers associations, Ofsted and the Audit Commission, in rejecting activity-led funding? After 18 months of deliberations by all those organisations, why has he simply said, "I'm not having any of it"? Will he explain that?

Mr. Miliband: The hon. Gentleman is referring to the work of the education funding strategy group, which has made an invaluable contribution to the development of the proposals that have been made. His particular allegation relates to something called activity-led funding—the suggestion that we should make assumptions in Whitehall about how head teachers should deploy their resources in every school throughout the country. I do not think that that would be appropriate. What we are proposing is a simpler and fairer system that puts power in the hands of the head teachers. It will ensure that there is a clear basis on which every pupil is funded. At the moment, the system is based on historic funding levels and a 1991 census. That is no way to go forward, and he will see that our proposals live up to that aspiration.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Will my hon. Friend bear it in mind that blunt figures of the sort that he announced for Leicestershire understate the fact that delivery of the service is wildly more expensive in some areas than others? To give one example, an office in Hemel Hempstead costs three times as much as one in Glasgow. Will he therefore bear in mind the fact that figures on disposable income and the quality of service that can be delivered for the money are the most important ones on which he should be concentrating?

Mr. Miliband: I am relieved to say that I am not responsible for the funding of education in Glasgow, but I can tell my hon. Friend that the new system will be based on three very clear principles: every pupil will have a basic entitlement; there will be a recognition of any additional educational needs for every pupil; and for different parts of the country, there will be a recognition of extra costs. That will be a simple system that everyone can understand and in which people can see how the money is being passed from us down to the schools.

Top-up Fees

6. **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): If he will make a statement on his policy on top-up fees for universities. [81972]

9. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will make a statement on the Government's policy on student top-up fees. [81975]

11. **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): If he will make a statement on the review of higher education funding. [81977]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): We will publish in January a strategy document setting out our 10-year vision for the development and reform of higher education. After that, there will be further opportunity for interested parties to comment.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his response. Given the funding crisis in the university sector, does he accept that top-up fees could have a perverse effect, as students might avoid the institutions that are charging higher fees? I understand that applications to Imperial college have fallen dramatically. Does he accept that in Scotland, which is a tuition-fee-free zone, applications to higher education have increased to a 50 per cent. target, whereas in this country, our applications have stayed at the 1998 level? Will he look to a graduate or alumnus tax and to collective provision for the crisis in our education sector?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for that question and I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a funding gap for higher education that is serious and that we must address. We must sort out the question of what the precise funding is, and it is important that individuals who pass through higher education make a contribution. The various arguments about a graduate tax, top-up fees, or whatever are very important. I share his concern that any system that we introduce should not have any intended or unintended consequences in terms of reducing access, as my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) mentioned in his earlier question.

Those are precisely the issues that we are considering in detail. We are having a substantial discussion about such questions, which is a good thing. We also need to discuss the nature of the university system and how it should evolve as a whole between its research, teaching and economic regeneration functions. I hope that we will have those discussions.

Mr. Grogan: When my right hon. Friend signs his name to the White Paper in January, will he make a tough political choice and reject the unelected siren voices of those who advocate student top-up fees, such as that chap Andrew Adonis, and instead bring new year joy and jubilation to the majority of Labour Members, the Secretary of State for International Development, probably most of the Cabinet and, most important, millions of youngsters and parents in hard-working families throughout the country with just enough hard-earned income to ensure that they have no chance of top-up fee abatement?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Member is a good friend, and I appreciate the way in which he put his question. If the matter were as easy as he suggested, we would already be in the position that he suggests. I like to call Mr. Adonis "Mr. Xoffice" after Professor Ted Wragg's article, which said that I had to choose between the advice of "Mr. Tony's Office", whoever he may be, and me. Mr. Adonis is slightly misrepresented in my hon. Friend's question.

Neither my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister nor his staff are wedded to top-up fees. They want to solve the problem that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) identified—of raising money so that world-class, excellent universities such as York obtain the resources that they need. They have considered the various options and reached views on the potential merits of top-up fees, the graduate tax and so on. We are examining that now. The suggestion that a group of people is madly focused on top-up fees against all reason is false. We are assessing the options in the hope that we can present the country and the House with decent proposals in January.

Tony Wright: Is not the fundamental fact that our university system is in crisis? Student numbers have doubled in a generation, while the unit of resource has halved. Many universities are bankrupt, staff salaries are stagnant and some of our most distinguished researchers are leaving the country. If we say what we oppose in funding, we must also say what we support. Do we not need a wider review of the university system that goes beyond the narrow parameters that the Government have announced?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend overstates the case a little, although I acknowledge that the 36 per cent. reduction in funding per full-time equivalent student from 1989 to 1997 has intensified all the pressures that he describes. As he implies, it means that we must confront the choices.

For 35 years, there has been a sense of drift in the definition of a university. We need to identify much more clearly the great research universities, the outstanding teaching universities, and those that make a dynamic, dramatic contribution to their regional and local economies. The funding system flows from the conclusions. The Department's website therefore includes a series of issue papers that cover a range of subjects, not simply student finance. I accept the thrust of my hon. Friend's comments, that one cannot resolve the finance issues without views on tackling the other relationships. I am determined to do that.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): Is not the genuine problem the fact that we have become hooked on increasing student numbers in higher education? That has led to awful funding effects. Would not it be better to fund properly students who will benefit from higher education? We would not then have to consider top-ups.

Mr. Clarke: I know that some hon. Gentlemen, especially on the Conservative Benches, subscribe to the "more is worse" school of thought on higher education. I do not. Our economy will succeed or fail in the next 20 or 30 years, depending on the productivity, effectiveness and education of our people in a competitive world economy. We were right to set our manifesto target of 50 per cent. of the population obtaining higher education qualifications.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there has not been enough serious thinking for a long time about the nature of the higher education qualifications. For example, I believe that higher education in further education colleges and two-year foundation degrees make a major contribution. We need to consider a method of getting the academic and vocational streams to work far better. That matches the announcement that my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education made earlier, following the Chancellor's announcement yesterday. However, it is wrong to say that we should simply abandon an ambition for a large proportion of our population to get higher education.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Secretary of State will realise the importance in university funding of the allocation of funding for research, both for educational purposes and for the relationship with industry and inward investment. Does he share my alarm at the expenditure per head across the four parts of the United Kingdom? In Northern Ireland it is only £15 a head; in England, it is £19; in Wales, £22; and in Scotland, £35. What will the right hon. Gentleman do to increase the research expenditure in universities in Northern Ireland and England?

Mr. Clarke: I have not studied the particular national comparisons that the hon. Gentleman has just given me, but I will certainly do so. I agree with him that research is an absolutely vital dynamic aspect of the regeneration of economies in all parts of the United Kingdom. Universities need to be better—there are issues about the governance of universities in this regard—at going out and identifying the kind of research that will enable them to succeed, and at making things happen in a much better way. We already concentrate our state research allocation, through the Higher Education Funding Council and the research councils, very sharply indeed on a relatively small number of universities.

The only general conclusion that I shall give beyond that is to say that when investors in research—major companies and corporations—are considering their investments, they examine both the quality of the institution and the social and political environment in which it lives. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues need to work, as I know that they are, to get the best possible environment in Northern Ireland, so that people will want to invest there, in research and in other areas.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): It is understandable that the Secretary of State does not want to comment on every speculation that we hear about top-up fees, even—or perhaps especially—those floated by his own Cabinet colleagues. Will he, however, rule out at least one of them, which came in briefing papers from his own Department? It is the idea that every student, including those from poor families, should be paying fees. That sits very oddly with every other part of the Government's rhetoric. Will the right hon. Gentleman disown that idea now?

Mr. Clarke: There is not an idea to disown. What I will disown is any idea that we intend to put in a system that will discriminate further than the current one already does against people wanting to come through from poorer families. There is a massive waste of talent at the moment, involving people who have the capacity to benefit from a university education and to contribute to the economy, but who simply do not come through. The biggest possible indictment of the way in which the university system has evolved over these last years is that, as it has expanded, the proportion of children going into university from working class backgrounds has stayed the same. That is an indictment that we have to address, and I hope that we will do so.

Finally, I am getting representations from various people on the Conservative Back Benches about the issues that we should be addressing, and I would advise the hon. Gentleman as a candid friend, if I may, that he should talk to his colleagues to ensure that he can speak in a united way for the Conservative party in this debate.

Mr. Green: I would like to think that the Secretary of State can speak with a united voice for the whole Cabinet, but that is not true either, so he needs to look closer to home at his own problems. Indeed, it seems that he cannot even speak for his own Department. If he will not disown the document that I have here, all his talk about increasing access to higher education is so much hot air, given the ideas that his own Department is floating, his admission this morning and the admission of the Minister responsible for higher education last week. She said that the Government had not just failed, but widened the social divide in higher education. Does not that show that, six years in, the Government have failed miserably to meet their aim of getting disadvantaged students to university? Will the Secretary of State therefore answer the central question: why does he think—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When I rise to my feet I expect the hon. Gentleman to sit down. Perhaps we might also have a shorter answer this time.

Mr. Clarke: My short answer, Mr. Speaker, is that there was a 36 per cent. reduction in funding per student under the Conservatives.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Does my right hon. Friend agree, as I do, with our noble Friend Lord Hattersley, who wrote last week that a graduate tax was the only fair way of resolving the problems of funding in higher education, and that, to be effective, it would have to apply not only to future graduates but to present graduates such as my right hon. Friend and me?

Mr. Clarke: I read what our noble Friend said with great interest, and I think that he has a real point. That is why, in the article that I wrote for *The Independent on Sunday* on this matter, I referred to the contribution of alumni to universities. It is striking to see how alumni in the United States make a major contribution to the endowment of universities—massively more than happens in this country. That raises precisely the question that my hon. Friend has asked, and we need to look at that matter directly.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): On 8 February last year, in answer to a question on top-up fees from my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), the previous Secretary of State said:

"We introduced the new funding arrangements for students and for repayment precisely to avoid the universities levying additional charges."—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2001; Vol. 362, c. 1061.]

What has changed?

Mr. Clarke: What has changed is that we are having an overall review of all the various funding sources in the round. What remains the case in all respects is that the state will continue to provide, under any possible picture, the absolutely giant lion's share of university funding. The question that arises then is the balance between the contribution that the individual should make—if so, how much and by what route, which is the issue that we talked about earlier—and that which any alumnus might make by the process that we have discussed, as well as that which the economy should make in relation, for example, to business that moves forward. The best way to address that issue is to have a very open debate on it, which is what I am trying to stimulate and encourage. That is the way to proceed, and I wish that other opposition parties would participate openly in the debate rather than simply make opportunist points as they come up.

Eastern Region Schools

7. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What is the forecast spending by his Department on schools in the eastern region for 2002–03 to 2005–06. [81973]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): In 2002–03, education revenue funding in the eastern region totals approximately £2.8 billion. That includes standard spending assessment and grant. Capital funding in the region this year is over £351 million. Figures for general funding for next year and future years will be announced in December.

Mr. Blizzard: Few schools in my area have not benefited from substantial building improvements and more information technology provision to create a better learning environment that results from the Government's decision to invest heavily in education. However, does my hon. Friend agree that successful learning also requires good classroom discipline, which means dealing effectively with disruptive pupils, but not just by throwing them out on the street, where they create more trouble? Will he invest part of the substantial sums that he has mentioned in more pupil referral units and consider in particular areas of the country such as mine, where provision is virtually non-existent?

Mr. Lewis: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that it is important that we continue to give head teachers the right to exclude severely disruptive pupils. Alongside that, however, we take responsibility for ensuring that excluded pupils have access to high quality and full-time education, which is why the Government were delighted to honour their commitment that, in September, all permanently excluded pupils would have access to a full-time education. We have 369 pupil referral units nationally and 60 new units have opened since January 2002. We intend for more to be developed as part of a co-ordinated behaviour and discipline strategy.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Are Ministers aware that although Wymondham high school in my constituency is 39th of 39 in terms of funding in the county of Norfolk, it is first of 39 in terms of GCSE results, despite having 19 mobile classrooms housing a third of the student population? Are they further aware that if Wymondham high school received just average funding, it would have an extra £300,000?

The Minister for School Standards told me in a letter recently that he is unable to visit the school—I appreciate that South Shields is a long way from Norfolk—so will the Secretary of State visit Wymondham high school to see the excellent work being done by Mr. David Walker and his staff, as it is only five miles from the border of his constituency?

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to hear that the Secretary of State has visited the school and regards it as excellent. He is even prepared to visit it again.

Higher Education

8. **Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): What assessment he has made of progress towards the Government's target of 50 per cent. of young people participating in higher education by 2010. [81974]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): Our latest estimate of participation in higher education in 2001–02 is 41.5 per cent. That could be revised upwards after the new census data are finalised and reflected. We need an increase of less than one percentage point each year to achieve our target.

Mr. Stunell: Since I tabled my question, the definition of the target has been changed yet again, for the fifth time. How long does the Minister expect the new target to be in place and can she explain how the House will ever know if it has been met?

Margaret Hodge: The simple answer is that the definition has not been changed and we are on course to meet our target.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Will the introduction of top-up fees make hitting the target less or more likely?

Margaret Hodge: Everything we do in the student funding review will be focused on ensuring that we get more and wider participation in higher education so that we can meet our target to promote inclusion and economic growth.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given what the Minister told the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer), will she guarantee that in no

circumstances, as Government policy evolves, will anyone on or below average earnings be obliged to pay a top-up fee?

Margaret Hodge: Like others, the hon. Gentleman will have to wait until we publish our strategy document in January. I look forward to discussing with him then whether he has any better proposals to ensure that universities are properly funded and that all young people, whatever their backgrounds, have access to them.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I thank my hon. Friend—indeed, I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his entire team—for their close personal interest in and support for my constituency, which contains fewer young people going to university that any other United Kingdom constituency. Is my hon. Friend aware that 30 local educationalists met last Friday to discuss the problem, and that we shall be sending her a report? Is she also aware that one of our key problems is a culture of under-achievement in which parents do not aspire for their children? Will she note the contents of the report, and will she consider visiting my constituency to discuss the future of our young people with local residents and with those educationalists?

Margaret Hodge: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he is doing in his constituency to raise aspirations among young people and to widen participation. I look forward to visiting his constituency and talking to those who have joined him in his attempt to deal with the culture that he has described. I recognise the difficult problem to which he refers—that if we cannot persuade more young people to aim higher and see university as an option for them and not just for others, we shall have failed. My hon. Friend has set himself a major challenge in his constituency, and I support his aims.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): What is the drop-out level in universities today, and what was it four years ago?

Margaret Hodge: I am proud to say that the level has been maintained at 17 per cent. I am proud that, of all countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, we have the best record for keeping people in the system and ensuring that they acquire qualifications and degrees. We are never satisfied or complacent with where we are at, but we are proud of our record. The hon. Gentleman should join me in congratulating universities and students on achieving what they set out to achieve.

Child Employment

10. **Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): What recent assessment he has made of the impact of children's employment on their educational attainment. [81976]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): There has been no recent assessment of the impact that children's employment has on their educational attainment. We recognise, however, that properly structured and regulated part-time work can help children's development and preparation for working life.

Mr. Pond: May I urge my hon. Friend to undertake an assessment as a matter of some urgency? As he will know, evidence suggests that moderate hours of employment can be beneficial to school-leavers' performance, but that excessive hours can be damaging. Will he instruct the Office for Standards in Education to inform schools of the possible damaging of inappropriate or excessive working hours, and also ask it, when considering the performance of local education authorities, to take account of the resources that they invest in enforcing the law on children's employment as it stands?

Mr. Twigg: I am aware of my hon. Friend's long-standing interest in this matter, and I admire his balanced approach. I am not in a position to instruct Ofsted to do anything, and I am not sure that it is the right organisation to instruct; but I agree that serious problems have been identified in surveys by, for instance, the Trades Union Congress and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and I am happy to look into the matter further.

Education Funding

12. **Ann Winterton** (Congleton): If he will make a statement on future education funding in Cheshire. [81978]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and the Regions will be making a statement on local authority funding, including education funding for the coming financial year, in early December, along with the provisional settlement for 2003–04.

Ann Winterton: Does the Minister appreciate that it is totally unacceptable for a child in Cheshire to be worth £355 less than a child of similar age in Hertfordshire, a county with an equivalent cost base, given that Cheshire is one of the worst-funded shire counties in the United Kingdom? Does he accept that it would be fair to allocate the same basic allowance to each child, and that extra weighting given because of, for instance, special needs, or given to areas with specific problems, should be transparent?

Mr. Miliband: I can reassure the hon. Lady that I met some 200 heads from Cheshire at a conference in the north-west, who made a number of points about the funding system. A basic level of entitlement will apply to every child in the country, and the system for the allocation of additional educational needs that she asks about will indeed be transparent. It is based on independent survey work, which will ensure a proper scientific basis for the new funding system.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

CPS

35. **Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): If she will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Crown Prosecution Service in the London area. [82001]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): I believe that CPS London is becoming more effective. We regard sustaining the improvement in CPS London as essential, as Londoners are entitled to the protection of a good criminal justice system. London is the focus for much serious crime, and the reputation of CPS London sets the reputation of the CPS nationally.

Mr. Gardiner: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for her response, but there is a particular aspect of efficiency on which most Londoners—indeed, most of the national population—would like an assurance: that those who perpetrate hoax calls during the fire brigades dispute are being pursued with the full vigour of the CPS in London, with a view to prosecution.

The Solicitor-General: I can reassure the House that that is certainly the case. The Director of Public Prosecutions has issued guidance on charging in hoax call cases, which are being fast-tracked. I am not aware of any such cases in London, but in one case in west Yorkshire, a man is awaiting sentence for making hoax calls, and another man is being prosecuted in Staffordshire for making three hoax calls. A man has been arrested in Manchester, another is awaiting sentence in Cumbria, and an ongoing investigation is taking place in Lincolnshire. These cases are being taken very seriously, as the Prime Minister said on Wednesday.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): My right hon. and learned Friend will know that I take a particular interest in the issue of racism within the Crown Prosecution Service. Can she tell us what progress has been made in tackling racism within CPS London, with particular reference to the staff and the prosecution policy?

The Solicitor-General: I welcome and endorse the stance that my hon. Friend has taken on the issue of race discrimination. It is very important that CPS London, and the CPS as a whole, is a fair and non-discriminatory employer that offers equal opportunities to all staff, both lawyers and non-lawyers. It is also very important that, whether dealing with defendants or victims, it adopts a non-racist and equal attitude. Since investigating the CPS, the Commission for Racial Equality has approved it as having proper procedures, which will be taken forward.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Attorney-General superintends the CPS; he acts as guardian of the public interest and of public safety, irrespective of party politics. In the wake of the firefighters' strike, there is secondary picketing on the tube in London, and the threat of it elsewhere. Yesterday, the Prime Minister said in the House that it was for the courts to decide whether such action is illegal. How can the courts so decide if the CPS, and in particular the Attorney-General, does not initiate a prosecution, and will he do so? Given that the talks have collapsed and that the firefighters' strike is on—and in the absence of CPS prosecution, particularly in respect of London—does the Attorney-General intend, in the light of his reply to me of 18 November, to seek an injunction under section 240 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, before it is too late?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman is right: in these matters, the Attorney-General's approach is concerned with the public interest, not the Government interest. However, if the question of initiating a prosecution arises, the police must first investigate and produce evidence of an offence for the CPS to consider. They have not done so in relation to any picketing offences, so it has not fallen to the CPS to consider files brought forward by the police concerning the suitability of prosecution.

On the second point, about the Attorney-General's powers to seek an injunction in the courts against someone he suspects may be about to commit a criminal offence, if he does that his arguments will be set out to the court first, and thereafter he will explain to the Lords, and I will explain to the Commons, what the basis of that application was.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): There remain grave misgivings about the conduct of the Crown Prosecution Service and others in the Burrell case. In the other place on 6 November, in reply to my noble Friend Lord Thomas of Gresford, the Attorney-General by implication criticised both the prosecution and the judge in relation to a public interest immunity application. Many would argue that more trenchant criticism was deserved. Will the Solicitor-General confirm that the application should never have been made and assure the House that steps will be taken to ensure that there is no further abuse of public interest immunity by the CPS?

Finally—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Finally—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has done very well so far.

The Solicitor-General: There has been no abuse of public interest immunity by the CPS. If there had been, the Attorney-General and I would have taken it with absolute seriousness. If the prosecution has information that could help the defence, it is under a duty to disclose it, and in no circumstances should such information be withheld. That is fundamental to our principles of justice. There was never any intention to proceed in the Burrell case withholding information that could have helped the defence. The question was whether the CPS was to drop the case, in which case disclosure did not arise, or whether it was to proceed, in which case there would have been disclosure. It would have been quite wrong to go ahead with the case without disclosing the information that the Queen had subsequently given.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): But does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that there remains some

public unease about the Burrell case, despite what she has said and what the Attorney-General has said in another place? That unease is certainly not confined to hardline republicans. Have any lessons been learned by the CPS in this case?

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service learns lessons from all its cases, as is right and proper. I reassure my hon. Friend and the House that there is no need for any public unease about this case. If anything was going wrong with prosecutions, the Attorney-General and I would be absolutely on to it, I would disclose it fully to the House, and we would want action taken to sort it out. That is not so in this case. I hope that hon. Members will accept that, and feel reassured accordingly.

Fraud

36. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent representations she has received on prosecution of serious fraud cases. [82002]

37. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): When she next expects to meet representatives of small firms organisations to discuss policy on prosecutions of fraud. [82005]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): I receive letters about serious fraud cases, and the Attorney-General and I regularly meet the director of the Serious Fraud Office, Ros Wright. I have not met small firms' representatives specifically to discuss fraud, but I am well aware that it is a problem not only for big companies and rich individuals but for small business and people on low incomes. The work that the CPS and the SFO do on fraud is very important.

Miss McIntosh: Is the Solicitor-General aware that, in their response to the Criminal Justice Bill, the General Council of the Bar and the Criminal Bar Association of England have said:

"We oppose the suggestion of trial by judge alone in cases of suspected jury interference and fraud cases."?

Does she agree that trial by jury must be maintained for all fraud cases? Were we to dispense with it, it could lead to a flood of actions for breach of the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Solicitor-General: I am aware of the views of the Bar Council on all aspects of the Criminal Justice Bill. We take its views extremely seriously. As the hon. Lady will be aware, the Bill emanates from the Home Office. There will be a Second Reading and a full debate next week. I suggest that she raises those issues with the Home Secretary, and in the House next week.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Solicitor-General aware that small firms often suffer disproportionately from fraud? There have been many scams recently, including the Nigerian e-mail scams, the UBR reduction offer scam and the grant application offer scam. Such scams sap morale among small firms, and divert attention from the creation of wealth and jobs. Is the right hon. and learned Lady going to make an effort to tackle the problem and streamline the prosecution of fraud process?

The Solicitor-General: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who is right to say that fraud is not a victimless, technical offence. It can cause redundancies, real hardship and the loss of homes and businesses. As far as we can tell, it costs the economy about £14 billion a year. We work closely on this matter with the Department of Trade and Industry, the Home Office and the Treasury. We need a cross-Government approach, and sufficient resources to investigate and prosecute fraud. I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman has raised this matter today.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business of the House for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 2 DECEMBER—Until 7 o'clock there will be an Opposition half day [unallotted] on a motion in the name of the Democratic Unionist party relating to policing in Northern Ireland.

A debate on the convention on the future of Europe.

TUESDAY 3 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Communications Bill, followed by a motion relating to estimates.

WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Criminal Justice Bill.

THURSDAY 5 DECEMBER—Estimates [1st allotted Day].

There will be a debate on the Government's drugs policy. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

At 7 pm the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The House will also wish to know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions will deliver a statement on the local government settlement on Thursday 5 December.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 9 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Extradition Bill. Followed by proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill. Followed by proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill.

TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the European Parliament (Representation) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER—Motion on the retirement of the Clerk of the House.

Followed by a debate on European affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER—Debate on DEFRA issues on a substantive motion covering agriculture and the environment.

FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for Thursday 12 December will be a debate on the "Powering Future Vehicles" strategy.

Hon Members: Oh!

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House, especially for that last item, which excited the House hugely.

Recently, we in the House of Commons have been through a so-called modernisation process. Our shift patterns have been changed, and we have a new single control centre—the Government Whips office. We have reduced the opportunities for second jobs and we are also about to reduce our head count, as there will be fewer Scottish MPs. In light of all that, when will Labour Members get a pay rise of 16 per cent?

Just the other day in the other place, Baroness Symons said that

"the Foreign Secretary continues to have overall responsibility for Government policy on the European Union, including the convention. The Secretary of State is the Government's representative to the convention, and will therefore report to Parliament on his role in the convention."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 November 2002; Vol. 642, c. 635.]

A number of matters arise from that to which the Leader of the House would do well to give some thought. First, two Secretaries of State are responsible for one thing—the convention. Secondly, we have a Minister of State who answers oral and written questions on the convention in this House. Next Monday, however, one of the two Secretaries of State to whom I referred, the Secretary of State for Wales, will lead the debate on the convention. However, the real question is this: how can two Secretaries of State be responsible for exactly the same thing? More importantly, how will we have an opportunity in this House regularly to question and hold to account the Secretary of State for Wales on his role in the convention? The Foreign Office may well answer questions routinely at Question Time, but we want to get at the main man—we want the Secretary of State for Wales to be here, regularly, to answer questions. How will the Leader of the House arrange for that to happen?

On 26 November, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"We have campaigned long and hard for Members of Parliament to have only one job in the House, and that is what I have done for the past 30 years since I have been a Member."—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2002; Vol. 395, c. 183.]

Can the Leader of the House confirm that the Deputy Prime Minister's rather astonishing statement represents the Government's policy on this important matter? Can he clarify whether the recent modernisation moves are a sinister hidden agenda to ensure that Members can and should have no interests outside this House?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for inciting bids for a 16 per cent. pay rise. I have consulted the representative of the control centre with me on the Front Bench, and he wishes to discourage any such anticipation on the part of my colleagues.

Like many other Members, I have been offended to see claims that Members of Parliament have had a 40 per cent. pay increase. That may have come as something of a surprise to them. For the record, and for the avoidance of doubt, since the 1997 election, the first four years showed an average increase in MPs' pay of 3 per cent. In 2001 and again in 2002 we have had increases of around 5 per cent., which were, of course, the product of precisely the kind of independent review that is being resisted by the Fire Brigades Union. I hope that that will restore some balance to some of the imbalanced reports that we have seen.

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me this opportunity to explain to him the principle of collective responsibility, which is the basis on which the Secretary of State for Wales and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs work in total harmony. It is a principle that may have escaped the

right hon. Gentleman, since I believe that he holds the record in the previous Parliament for rebelling on the Tory Benches against the Tory Whip. We, however, have a situation of total harmony and unity between those two Secretaries of State, both of whom speak for the Government. The right hon. Gentleman asks how Members can question the Secretary of State for Wales. My right hon. Friend will be here to take part in the debate on the convention of the future of Europe. If I may say so, that debate is the result of a request at business questions that we should have a debate on the Floor of the House on the future of the convention of Europe. For that reason, I hoped that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House would welcome it.

I am frightfully sorry, but the right hon. Gentleman's third point has slipped my mind.

Mr. Forth: The Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Cook: The Deputy Prime Minister speaks, as always, with great wisdom on these matters. I do not resile at all from what he said on that point. Indeed, if hon. Members consult *Hansard* about our debate on the change of hours, I made the very point that those who choose to spend their morning working on other matters should not dictate the hours for those in the House who are full-time professional Members of Parliament. The balance of the House has changed during my membership of it. The majority of Members are full-time Members of Parliament who are here on the precincts in the morning, and that certainly includes those on the Labour Benches. Of course we have no proposal to ban those who carry out other work. It is a matter for them and also for their constituents, who will no doubt bear it in mind.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The Leader of the House has, on many occasions since he took up his present post, emphasised the need for better scrutiny of the Government's legislation and has said that better scrutiny makes for better government. Can I draw his attention to the fact that the Criminal Justice Bill, which was published a week ago, with 293 pages, 273 clauses and 26 schedules, still has no explanatory notes? Members of Parliament who seek to get to grips with this controversial and complicated Bill are receiving no help whatever. Since it is not apparently to be the subject of any pre-legislative scrutiny, does the right hon. Gentleman think that this is a good example of what he has been promoting? Does he not think that Ministers should be told firmly that they are not to publish Bills until the explanatory notes are available?

I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the fact that, despite the useful change to ensure that written ministerial statements are listed properly instead of being hidden in the charade of planted questions, of the 22 listed in today's Order Paper only 18 were available in the Library immediately preceding business questions. I know that he understands that the purpose of the change—as the Modernisation Committee pointed out—was to ensure that all Members of the House, not just those who planted questions, were made aware of what was intended in the written statements. Will he please examine the matter again?

I understand that yesterday there was a written statement on wind power policy, which was accompanied by a useful briefing document. However, sufficient supplies of that document were not available yesterday for all Members to be able to read it. That completely undermines the proposals made by the right hon. Gentleman and his Committee, so will he look into that?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman's references to power confirm what a high-powered Government we are.

I am aware of the difficulties in providing an explanatory memorandum for the Criminal Justice Bill and I have expressed my concern that it should be made available to Members at the earliest stage. I am advised that the text will be supplied today to the Clerk of Legislation in the Public Bill Office who is responsible for ordering it to be printed and laid before the House, and it will be available from tomorrow. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. It should have been made available sooner.

I felt that the hon. Gentleman slightly forced his point when he said that only 18 of the 22 statements were available. To put it the other way around, it means that when he inquired—the situation may have changed since then—only four of the 22 were not available. The House should keep a sense of perspective. As I have said before, we aim to get all the written statements in by 12.30, but in the old days of planted questions, the planted answers would have been available only from 12.30 and many of them would not have been produced until long after that. We should not regard the change as a step backwards; on the contrary, it is very much a step forward in terms of transparency and ease of access and identification in *Hansard*—witness the way in which Members are now able to tease me on the point.

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): My right hon. Friend may be aware that Candy Domestic Appliances Ltd., based in my constituency, recently announced the closure of its plant in Bromborough. He may also be aware that the company has made major investment in the site and that the unions and the work force have been exemplary in reaching productivity agreements to maintain and improve competitiveness. Despite all their efforts, however, the competitive disadvantage of the pound-euro exchange rate has proved an insurmountable barrier, and as a result about 200 dedicated and hard-working people may find that their jobs are at risk. Will my right hon. Friend try to arrange for an early debate on the pound-euro exchange rate, as Candy is not alone in facing that often insurmountable barrier to competition?

Mr. Cook: On my hon. Friend's specific question, he will have heard the pre-Budget report yesterday, when the Chancellor said that the Government would complete their economic assessment in June. Whatever the outcome of that assessment may be, I am sure that the House will want to hold a number of debates on the issue.

On the issue that affects my hon. Friend's constituency, may I record our concern and regret that after such sterling efforts by both work force and management it has not been possible for the plant to continue? I know that my hon. Friend has worked hard

[Mr. Cook]

to try to secure a future for the company in his constituency and that he will do all that he can to ensure that every possible provision is made for those men and women who may be facing redundancy. I can assure him that he will receive full support from Departments in those efforts.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Further to the question put by the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman), the Leader of the House will know that during the many years that he has been a Member, it has been our custom to debate, in the autumn, in Government time, either the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement or the autumn statement. The Leader of the House is denying us that opportunity this year. Will the House thus not conclude that, given the changing fortunes of the economy, as set out yesterday, the Government no longer wish to be held to account on that subject?

Mr. Cook: I am not denying the House anything. I have always sought very hard to accommodate the wishes of the House to debate matters of common interest to hon. Members on both sides of the House. As I have just said, we have a full programme of Second Reading debates, which reflects the Government's activism and the crowded legislative programme that we have announced, but I am well aware of the point that the right hon. Gentleman raises. I will discuss it with my colleagues, and we will, of course, consider what opportunities we can find to remind the House of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's excellent record in maintaining a sound economy, with the lowest inflation for a generation, the lowest unemployment that any of us can remember and the fastest growth of any of the big economies in the world.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): My right hon. Friend will be aware that yesterday the Chancellor announced a review of employers' liability insurance. Will he arrange for an early statement to the House to spell out exactly what that review's remit will be? For example, will it address not only the huge escalation in premiums, but the way that they are set? Will it also address the fact that many companies in my constituency are experiencing grave difficulty achieving renewals and that, even when their policies are renewed, they are fearful of making claims unless they face non-renewal in future? In the interests of joined-up government, will the Government consider the wider range of essential insurance policies that businesses need, for which they also face huge escalations in cost?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend helpfully underlines the importance of the review and why it is necessary. I am well aware of the concern among a number of hon. Members about the increase in premiums. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) raised this issue only the other week. My hon. Friend requests a statement; we will not be short of statements to the House in the weeks ahead, but I certainly think that this may be an occasion when, at an appropriate time, the Treasury may wish to consider using the new innovation of written statements, which we have provided.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): May I invite the Leader of the House to spend an evening with me in Lichfield? We could perhaps go to one of its elegant restaurants—perhaps the Eastern Eye—and then to Lichfield cathedral to hear one of the many concerts that are put on there. Perhaps then he might like to speak to his right hon. and hon. Friends about the contents of the Licensing Bill, which, if passed, will mean no more concerts in Lichfield cathedral and no more Lichfield festival; nor will there be any concerts in Worcester or Hereford cathedrals, or many others in the United Kingdom. When will the Licensing Bill appear for its Second Reading in the House?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his invitation to dinner, which I shall communicate to my diary secretary, with my secret marking to put it at the bottom of the pile.

On the issue of substance that he raises, I reassure his constituents that the proposed provision on licensing public events in places of worship does not embrace any religious act of worship, for which no licence will be required, and that it will permit churches to hold five events a year, on each of three days, making a total of 15 days without licence. Of course the premises may be regularly used not for acts of worship, but for secular entertainment, however worthy and excellent.

Michael Fabricant: It is very worthy.

Mr. Cook: I am sure that it is extremely worthy and extremely excellent, so the hon. Gentleman owes it to his constituents to ensure that they can hear it with the peace of mind of knowing that those premises are safe and that they can leave them in the event of an emergency. For that reason, any responsible Government must ensure adequate provision for places of public entertainment. If there were to be—God forbid—any disaster in Lichfield cathedral, the hon. Gentleman would be the first to criticise the Government for not safeguarding it.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 96, on the child rescue alert scheme that has been piloted in Sussex?

[That this House welcomes the launch of Child Rescue Alert which will interrupt radio and television transmissions with urgent appeals if a child is in real danger of harm or death; feels that the system which is being pioneered in Sussex will save many lives; believes that the scheme will assist in the capture of the abductors of children before they can cause any harm; and furthermore hopes that this scheme will be used throughout the United Kingdom as soon as possible.]

Given that we live in a world of paedophiles and perverts who put children at risk, will he make time to debate the scheme when the report comes from Sussex so that we can implement it throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has just made a statement on sexual offences and unveiled a White Paper, which will in turn,

of course, result in legislation. His proposals have been widely welcomed. Of course that will provide the House with an opportunity to debate such matters further, and initiatives of the kind that my hon. Friend describes should certainly be considered carefully and assessed to discover whether they can have wider application.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent debate on the cost of living indices? I ask that because it is about time that we had an updated view of what people spend their income on week by week. He has just announced that we will hear about the local government settlement next Thursday, but it is becoming ever more difficult to explain to pensioners why, on one index, the state pension is increased, but by an amount that does not even cover the increase in their council tax bill. Whether council tax, the purchase of a car or mortgage interest should be included in the various formulae should be debated, and those formulae brought up to date.

Mr. Cook: A number of issues need to be discussed and examined, and I have no doubt that the matter will be discussed inside and outside the House, particularly in relation to whether the general retail prices index adequately reflects the spending of a pensioner household. Having said that, I would make two points. First, whatever measure we have of RPI, inflation is lower than it has been for three decades, which is an achievement that we intend to maintain. Secondly, under this Government, substantial funds have been made available to local government in a way that was not experienced under the previous Conservative Government. Local authorities must live within their means, and must consider carefully decisions on taxation within their remit, but there is no local authority in Britain that has not done much better over the past five years than it could have dreamt of doing in the previous five years of the Conservative Government.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Could the House have an opportunity to debate the document "Agenda for Change" that appears to have been launched in today's press. It would seem to offer a public sector pay settlement that is based on double-digit pay increases for the lowest-paid public sector workers, increased investment to raise the standards of public services, a modernisation agenda written by the unions themselves, and, crucially, no job losses. In the space that exists in the current firefighters' dispute, will the Prime Minister invite the Fire Brigades Union to No. 10 Downing street to discuss its agenda for change and to help get us out of the hole into which we appear to have been digging ourselves?

Mr. Cook: On my hon. Friend's latter point, we have repeatedly invited the Fire Brigades Union to return to the negotiating table and to discuss proposals for modernisation. Those modernisation proposals must not simply be the agenda of the Fire Brigades Union—which it is welcome to put on the table—but must embrace the interesting proposals in the Bain review on where real efficiency and productivity gains can be made. For instance, there could be an end to the current practice by which full-time firefighters decline to get on the same fire engine as part-time firefighters—

Alan Simpson: Not true.

Mr. Cook: I am afraid that that is the case.

On my hon. Friend's other point, I presume from what he says that he welcomes the conclusion of the "Agenda for Change" outcome. I certainly think that there is much to commend it to the House and to the public, particularly in the way that it will address some of those who are lowest paid in the public service. I hope that my hon. Friend will find it in himself wholeheartedly to welcome and support that, without necessarily using it as a ramp for other settlements.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will be aware that in a knowledge-based age our best assets are well-trained young people. Could we therefore have a statement from the Minister responsible for education in Northern Ireland on why, when some young people are told that no discretionary awards are available, education boards are not able to award all the money that has been allocated for discretionary awards? Is there a case to be made for lowering the standard of assessment so that those awards can be effectively used?

Mr. Cook: I know that my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for education in Northern Ireland is active in trying to make sure that we build on the success that has been secured in the Northern Ireland education system. I shall happily draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to her attention, and I am sure that she will want to communicate directly with him.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I recognise the pressures of the Government's legislative programme, but could consideration sometimes be given to allowing two days for debates on vital issues such as Iraq? Last Monday, despite a stringent time limit on speeches, which tended to restrict interventions, many Members were still waiting to speak at the end of the debate, while others had given up. Surely such momentous matters merit thorough consideration.

Mr. Cook: I do not disagree that the matter requires thorough consideration and I know that there is substantial interest in it throughout the House. There is significant pressure on the available time in the Chamber for business of the House and, in present circumstances, I cannot hold out the promise of a two-day debate on Iraq or any other subject. However, I am mindful of the interest in such matters and will obviously bear in mind how much time we can provide in future.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on procedures for the listing of buildings? It is possible for a building to be listed without the knowledge of the owner and without disclosure of the identity of the applicant. That has happened to a church in my constituency, Cranham All Saints, which wanted to knock down and rebuild a Victorian church hall that had gone beyond the point of

[Angela Watkinson]

easy maintenance and repair. It has caused enormous complications in the planning process and there seem to be injustices in the listing procedures.

Mr. Cook: No doubt there are opportunities for ensuring that the process works better and more transparently, and there will be a chance to examine such issues in the forthcoming planning Bill. As a matter of principle, the consent of the owner of a building should not be a condition of the listing of a building. There will be times when the opinion of a building's owners is at variance with that of the general community on the value of the building, its importance to the community and townscape, and the importance of preserving it.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): My right hon. Friend will know that there have been two recent debates on local government finance. Both were curtailed and many hon. Members did not have the chance to put the case for their boroughs or districts. Most importantly, I have not been able to put the case for the London borough of Havering, which has traditionally been caned by the standard spending assessment, although we have done marginally better in the past five years. Will it be possible to debate the statement when it is made on 5 December?

Mr. Cook: It would be wrong to have a debate on 5 December because the figures will have only just been shared with the House. We announced that statement today because we know of the considerable interest among Members, such as my hon. Friend, in what will be allocated to their local authority, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and the Regions was keen that there should be advance notice of that. I look forward to a well attended statement next Thursday.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the Leader of the House find time for an early debate on the pressing issue of shortages of general practitioners around the United Kingdom, not least in my constituency of Rayleigh, which has the fourth highest ratio of patients to GPs? The debate would allow us to press the Government on their proposals for increasing the supply of domestically trained GPs instead of relying, as they increasingly do, on the sticking-plaster solution of desperately trying to recruit doctors from abroad to plug the gaps.

Mr. Cook: I gently point out to the hon. Gentleman that more GPs are in Britain now than ever before and more people are in training to become GPs than ever before. There are certainly more than there were when the Government he supported were in office. That is a substantial step forward.

Of course we recognise that things are not satisfactory in every part of Britain and we shall continue to address the problem. That is why we have considered a number of solutions, especially providing financial incentives for people to become GPs and to stay GPs. We are looking at where it might be possible to find people with the appropriate training and standards to come to Britain to help us to achieve our objective of ensuring that we serve the British public. We will consider all solutions, not just one. Let us not lose sight of the fact that more people are working as GPs than was ever the case under the Conservative Government.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Has my right hon. Friend seen this week's report by Lord Carlile, who was appointed by the Government to oversee the workings of the Terrorism Act 2000? It described the network of small ports and small airstrips in this country as a "soft underbelly" that could be exploited by terrorists trying to smuggle in deadly materials. As someone who represents a small port, Lowestoft, which I know my right hon. Friend has visited, may I ask him whether a Minister could come to the House to make a statement about the report, to reassure people and to explain what can be done to minimise the risk identified?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend does his constituency an injustice: Lowestoft is not that small a port, but one of considerable significance. I am aware of Lord Carlile's report, which is the product of the new system that we have put in place. We welcome the general tenor of the report. It makes a number of detailed suggestions, and we will want to consider carefully how we respond to them. I can assure my hon. Friend that the matter is being taken very seriously in government, and we will certainly want to respond positively where we can.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): As a patriotic Scot, the Leader of the House will know that on Saturday we celebrate St. Andrew's day, so I wonder whether he is open to the suggestion that in future we hold a general debate on Scottish issues on or around St. Andrew's day, similar to that afforded to our Welsh colleagues on St. David's day.

Hon. Members: What about St. George's day?

Mr. Cook: Of course I am well aware that Saturday is St. Andrew's day; indeed, I intend to spend it celebrating in my constituency at a St. Andrew's day dinner in the excellent club of the very successful Livingston football team. I hear the bid for St. George's day too, and I say to hon. Members that not a week goes by in Parliament without our debating issues of considerable interest to Scotland and to England. I will take the hon. Gentleman's suggestion on board. St. Andrew's day will not come round for another full year and we will have to weigh the matter then against the pressure of business. I am confident, however, that it will fall on the same date as it has this year.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): My right hon. Friend will be aware that at Prime Minister's questions yesterday the Prime Minister answered a question on hoax calls by saying that 7 per cent. of calls are hoaxes. That figure applies only to the present situation with the fire service; the total proportion, as BT intimated to me today, is 50 per cent., which means that there are about 12.5 million hoax calls a year. Will my right hon. Friend secure a statement or a debate about that practice, which puts people's lives at risk?

Mr. Cook: I do not think that by referring to the figure of 7 per cent. the Prime Minister was in any way trying

to minimise the scale of the diversion and danger caused by hoax calls. Even 1 per cent. is far too many. I am sure that all hon. Members would join me in deploring those who frivolously and wilfully divert important resources, with what could be life-threatening results. I assure my hon. Friend that the Government and the forces of law and order take a severe view of that practice, but I hope that the community will exert pressure to make sure that people realise that it is in their own interests to behave responsibly and not to wantonly misuse the rare resources available to deal with emergencies.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): First, may I say to the right hon. Gentleman that I am sure that the whole House is pleased to see his Parliamentary Private Secretary in his place, further dispelling press reports that he was a rebel on Iraq?

Secondly, on a much more serious note, the Leader of the House will be aware that the situation in Zimbabwe deteriorates daily. Surely, as we have responsibilities in that country, it is important that Ministers come to the Dispatch Box to make statements and to lead debates in the weeks ahead.

Mr. Cook: First, I say to the right hon. Gentleman that of course I always rise with greater ease of mind knowing that my back is being safely guarded. He also gives me an opportunity to put right the error in the *Hansard* of the other night: if he consults the Division list he will find that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) allegedly appeared in both Divisions. I am authorised by my hon. Friend to state that he voted only once, and it was with the Government.

On the serious issue of Zimbabwe, I fully share the right hon. Gentleman's concern. The situation continues to deteriorate. Familiar though I am with the behaviour of the Mugabe regime, even I have great difficulty comprehending a regime that will deny food aid to starving people on the basis of political preference, and I am sure that everyone in the House would condemn that activity. We will continue to do all that we can to exert international pressure for a more responsible attitude on the part of that regime.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Can I return to the subject of employers and public liability insurance? Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate? For some months I have been trying without success to secure an Adjournment debate on the subject. In my constituency, not unlike others, businesses are going out of business simply because of the exorbitant premiums that they are being asked to pay or because they cannot get insurance which they are required by law to have. The opaque reference yesterday from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to a review by the Department for Work and Pensions suggested that that should be informed by the experiences of hon. Members, who I am sure have useful information to impart to the Government.

Mr. Cook: I am relieved to tell the House that I have no influence on the allocation of Adjournment debates and do not seek any, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will persist in the hope of greater success in future. On the issue of substance, he raised a matter that has now been raised in business questions in the past two weeks by a number of Members. Plainly, it is a serious constituency issue in many quarters. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will note what has been said. Plainly, the Department for Work and Pensions will wish to consider an appropriate follow-up to the Chancellor's remarks to provide fuller information on the intended review.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the Leader of the House consider approaching the Minister for Sport for a statement or preferably a debate on the growing feeling that it is time to consider introducing safe standing areas at Premiership football grounds? That debate has been called for by *The Southern Daily Echo*, which serves Southampton and the New Forest. Experienced people such as former Southampton manager Lawrie McMenemy, who was present at the Hillsborough disaster in 1989, told the *Echo*'s campaign:

"There is enough evidence now to prove that standing areas should be allowed and would not cause any problems if they were in areas behind the seated portions of the ground."

This is an occasion where a past tragedy should not be allowed to obscure the advances in technology that enable safe seating to be considered in future.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the reasoned way in which he made his point. My own experience of attending Livingston football matches is in a modern all-seater stadium—*[Interruption.]* No, there is a large attendance, and we have sought to foster a family atmosphere, which is important and provides for the future of football audiences. There are divided views on the issue raised by the hon. Gentleman. I have long realised that if I wish to maintain a position as a consensual Leader of the House I should avoid expressing too strong an opinion about football, but I will convey his point to the Minister for Sport.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Can we please have a debate on small businesses? The annual staging of such a debate was once an established and welcome feature of the affairs of the House. Given that more than 99 per cent. of companies in the United Kingdom employ fewer than 100 people; that they account for approximately 50 per cent. of the private sector work force; and that they generate roughly two fifths of our national output, does the right hon. Gentleman concede that we need urgently to consider the sea of regulation facing them, as it is deeper and more hazardous than any with which they have previously had to contend?

Mr. Cook: On the last point, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that for a period I spoke for the Opposition on trade and industry at the Dispatch Box. During that time, I witnessed a flood of regulation from the Conservative Government.

Mr. Bercow: That was not my fault.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to accept that the hon. Gentleman is not responsible for anything done by the previous Government, but we yearn for the day when an Opposition Member stands up and says, "It was my responsibility."

[Mr. Cook]

On the issue of a debate on small businesses, I am happy to take that on board and consider it against other competing priorities. Yes, we would very much welcome an opportunity to debate initiatives that we have taken on small business, particularly the introduction of the zero tax rate for small businesses, which only yesterday was extended to many more small businesses and has been widely welcomed in today's press.

Airports Consultation

1.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short statement about the Government's consultation on airports capacity.

As I set out in my statement to the House in July, the Government intend to publish a White Paper on air travel. As part of that, we will set out our views on how much additional airport capacity is needed and where it should be sited. In advance of the White Paper, we published seven consultation papers seeking views on a wide number of options throughout the United Kingdom. Part of that consultation included consideration of capacity in the south-east of England. A number of options were canvassed. One of the key questions was the importance of an international hub airport in the south-east and where it should be sited.

As I said in July, one option was to build at Heathrow, a second option was at Stansted, and a third option was a completely new airport at Cliffe. As well as the question of a hub airport, the south-east consultation paper looked at other matters, including where any new capacity should be located. I told the House in July that I had decided to exclude further development at Gatwick because of a legal agreement ruling out the construction of a new runway before 2019. That decision was challenged last month, when Kent county council and Medway council applied for a judicial review of that decision. On Tuesday the court upheld that challenge.

It might be useful to remind the House why the Government took the decision to exclude Gatwick. I also want to set out how the Government intend to proceed in the light of the court's ruling. The facts in relation to the Government's decision were set out in a witness statement put before the court. I have arranged to place a copy of that statement in the Library. I have also sent a copy of it to the principal Opposition spokesmen, along with this statement, in the usual way.

Briefly, the facts are these. The Government, prior to publishing the consultation papers, had to consider whether to include proposals in relation to Gatwick airport. In particular, they had to consider whether they should ask Parliament to overturn an agreement made in 1979 between the then publicly owned British Airports Authority and West Sussex county council.

The Government decided that it would be highly undesirable to do so as a matter of policy. We considered it important that people should be able to continue to rely on such a legally binding agreement. Accordingly, the Government reached the conclusion in respect of the 1979 agreement that although they could ask Parliament to overturn it, they would consider it appropriate to do so only if there was demonstrably no alternative way forward. That was clearly not the case, having regard to the other options before them.

As the House knows, the court took a different view. It held that people ought to have an opportunity to present their case on expansion at Gatwick. As I made clear in my written statement yesterday, although the court granted leave for the Government to appeal against this decision, I have decided not to do so.

Inevitably, an appeal would be a lengthy and prolonged process and would result in an extensive period of uncertainty for people up and down the country. That is in no one's interest.

I have therefore decided that the consultation, due to end on 30 November, will be kept open until we have consulted on options in relation to Gatwick. It is only two days since we received the judgment and its implications need to be considered further, but I wanted to keep the House informed about how I intend to proceed. I intend to publish a further paper, following the decision to include Gatwick in the consultation. I will publish these further options in the new year. The consultation period will run for four months from then.

It follows, therefore, that all representations received so far will be considered, together with additional representations that follow from the decision to include Gatwick. As I told the House on 19 November, this is an opportunity for anyone in the country to express their views on all the options in the consultation, as well as to put forward reasonable alternatives. Inevitably the White Paper, which I had hoped to publish in the first part of next year, will be delayed, at least until the autumn of next year.

The Government took the decision to exclude Gatwick because they wanted to honour an agreement. The court has taken a different view. Rather than contest that judgment, I have decided that the right thing to do is to accept it and consult, but inevitably and regrettably, it means an extended period of uncertainty for everyone. The important thing now is to get on and reach a conclusion on what is a critical matter for the future of this country.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): May I thank the Secretary of State for his typical courtesy in providing a copy of his statement in advance? I should also like to wish him a happy birthday. I suspect that this judgment is not the birthday present he would have chosen, but I none the less offer him my congratulations.

Does the Secretary of State accept that his entire consultation exercise has been flawed from the start? The High Court's conclusion that it was irrational comes on top of criticism from many quarters that it was rushed and based on inaccurate and misleading figures; contained misprints that required copies to be recalled and reprinted; involved four-week delays for some people in getting hold of copies of the consultation documents; and included questionnaires that many people saw as profoundly loaded.

Is it not the case that Gatwick was not the only important option to be left out? Why was the preferred option of Birmingham airport omitted? Why did the right hon. Gentleman consult on a sort of runway layout for Heathrow that even BAA Heathrow does not want? Will he comment on the belief of many in the Rugby area that some of the figures in his documents for that area relate to a completely different site two miles away from the one described? Given the immense importance of the issue to large numbers of communities, many of which had no idea before 23 July of what was being contemplated for them, would it not have been more sensible from the start to allow more than a 16-week period—most of it in the summer—for people to respond?

We very much welcome the Secretary of State's decision in the light of the court judgment to extend the consultation. The Opposition were calling for such an extension even in advance of the judgment. However, will he clarify one point from his statement? Does the extension apply to the whole country or only to the south-eastern regional consultation? Does he recognise that many groups, and not only those in the south-east, will wish to revisit their evidence in the light of the re-inclusion of Gatwick?

Does the Secretary of State accept that, while he is right to say that decisions cannot be indefinitely delayed, they must be taken in the right and proper way and after genuine consultation? Will he pledge to publish the results of the full consultation well in advance of reaching conclusions, so that everyone can judge the basis on which he will make decisions? Will he give an undertaking that he and his Ministers will visit every affected site before announcing conclusions? Does he not recognise that he owes those communities that assurance at least?

Does the Secretary of State accept that if his final conclusions are to be seen as fair and reasonable by all involved, he and his Department need to listen more, consult properly and start getting things right, rather than hopelessly wrong?

Mr. Darling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his good wishes in respect of my birthday. Last year, my former private office was kind enough to present me with a CD containing the greatest hits of Leonard Cohen. This year, the courts have not been quite so kind to me. I have always found Leonard Cohen more uplifting than many court judgments.

Let me deal with the points that the hon. Gentleman raised. I remind him that when I announced the consultation in July, he was kind enough in making a very reasoned response on behalf of the Opposition to commend me for the spirit in which I had launched the consultation. He rightly went on to urge me to bring it to a swift conclusion. I have endeavoured to do that, but I recognise that a problem has arisen in relation to Gatwick that I must deal with.

On the specific points that the hon. Gentleman raised, Birmingham airport and options there are included in the consultation, as is Heathrow. I have always made it clear—I did so not only in July, but as recently as November, when we had an extended Question Time on this matter—that it is open to people not only to respond to what the Government canvassed in their options, but to bring forward any alternatives. After all, we are considering one of the most profoundly important decisions that will be taken in this Parliament about what to do in relation not only to a hub airport, but to other airport capacity. That is why I agree with him that it is important to get it right. People must remember that they can make whatever representations they think appropriate. The Government will then publish a White Paper, but afterwards, any decision to build an airport will be taken on a commercial basis by that airport's operator. It is not as if the White Paper is the end of the road. What it does is provide a framework against which everyone can plan.

I regret that as a result of the judgment, the process will take longer than I anticipated. It will give people four months longer. The hon. Gentleman asked whether

[Mr. Darling]

the consultation was open to the whole country or only the south-east. The whole consultation remains open, because, manifestly, a decision on any of the London airports has implications for the rest of the country.

The whole consultation will therefore remain open and I hope that people will enter into the spirit of it by accepting that they have a chance to make representations on Gatwick, but that, for everyone's good, we must try to reach a conclusion by the end of next year. Waiting longer is in nobody's interests, especially those who might be affected by expansion.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I join the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) in thanking the Secretary of State for advance notice of the statement and wishing him a happy birthday. However, he has left us dangling in uncertainty about his birthday present from his new private office.

Although I welcome and acknowledge the need for the Secretary of State's decision, does he recognise that the High Court's judgment knocks a further hole in a set of deeply flawed consultation documents? Does it not provide an opportunity for the new documents to tackle not only the Gatwick issue but some of the other flaws? Does he accept that the current documents are based on the long discredited predict-and-provide approach rather than managing demand? Does he also accept that the growth figures in the documents unjustifiably assume that the current tax benefits to the airline industry, such as no aviation fuel duty or no VAT on tickets will continue, when that is unlikely?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is an incorrect assumption about the economic benefits to continued air expansion in this country and that it is not necessarily beneficial for Britain to become an international airport transit lounge? Does he further accept that the new document provides an opportunity to cover sustainability, which is missing from the current documents? Is it not now time for the Government to live up to their categorical commitment that aviation should meet its external costs?

The Secretary of State has an opportunity to correct some of the flaws; let us hope that he does that.

Mr. Darling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his good wishes. For those who are interested, my new private office gave me a nice train set. At least they run on time!

Let me deal with the hon. Gentleman's subsidiary points. There is no question of anyone building airports on a predict-and-provide basis. As I have often said, the private sector will build and pay for any new airport capacity. It will not build an airport on spec; people do not do that.

Our objective must be to provide frameworks in which the commercial sector—the airlines as well as the people who run the airports—and people who live near airports can plan.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned economic benefits. The aviation industry, not only airports, greatly benefits this county, indirectly as well as directly. Heathrow must employ more than 100,000 people. The decision that we make, especially on London airports, is therefore immensely important not only to the people involved but to the country.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): During my 18 undistinguished months as aviation Minister, I learned two lessons about the aviation industry. First, its demands are insatiable; secondly, successive Governments have always given way to them. May I put it to my right hon. Friend that the time has come to make a stand? Instead of building more runways, airports and terminals, he should consider a little demand management. Air travel is not a basic human right and it should be matched by environmental considerations.

Mr. Darling: I remember that my hon. Friend spent 18 months as aviation Minister. Perhaps I take a slightly different view from him. Half the country flew at least once last year. My hon. Friend may believe that that is wrong. By demand management, he means increasing the price of air travel. That will prevent some people from travelling. It is problematic for hon. Members to say that to our fellow countrymen.

I agree, and the consultation documents make it clear, that the aviation industry should pay the price of its environmental impact. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made an announcement about that in the pre-Budget report. This is not, as my hon. Friend puts it, a question of giving in to the industry. We have to work out what we think the likely demand will be—of course it is critically important that we take into account the environmental impact—and to make sensible plans for that demand. As I said a moment ago, this industry is of immense importance to the country, and it is important that we get this right. I am in no doubt about this. I look at the issue from the point of view of the country, rather than the industry, because that is what the Government do. I do not, however, have the slight reluctance—I will not say antipathy—that my hon. Friend has in accepting that the industry might have something to contribute.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Leaving aside the irony of a court of law reproving the Government for their reluctance to overturn a binding legal agreement between two public authorities—and leaving aside the merits of the case, which I believe are substantial—does the Secretary of State accept that his original decision to exclude Gatwick was correct, if only on the basis of that legal agreement? Does he also agree that the case for a new airport for the south-east, located on the coast—whatever configuration or option is chosen—remains very powerful, in that the flight paths of the growing aviation industry could be located over water rather than over people's houses? Given that a number of alternative proposals to the one in his original options paper for Cliffe have been put forward, will he use the enforced opportunity of an extended consultation period to ensure that those three or four different options for a new airport are fully exposed and consulted on?

Mr. Darling: Yes, the whole point of the consultation is to receive recommendations and representations, and if we receive serious, worked up proposals, of course we will look at them. That is the whole point. On the right

hon. Gentleman's first point—I remember that he said something similar in July—it is an irony, but it is one of those things that we have to live with.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I firmly believe that my right hon. Friend has made the right decision not to appeal the judicial review, because to have done so would have left us with more discontent and a greater sense that there was no future for our airports in the south-east. Gatwick wants to be part of the future, and I therefore firmly believe that the right decision has been made. Will my right hon. Friend assure me and my constituents in Crawley that the process of deciding the future of airports in the south-east will be dealt with in Parliament? My constituents want to know where we are going and what the future will hold, and that we have a proper plan in place.

Mr. Darling: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. It is very important that we publish a White Paper next year, because to let the matter drag on would do no one any good. On my hon. Friend's point about an appeal, I do not think that any good would come of the Government's engaging in lengthy litigation that would take months and months. Whatever else the Government do, I do not think that it is our job to provide a living for more and more lawyers when we could be getting on with the job. I speak as a former lawyer, and I am not too bitter, although when I see what some of my learned friends are getting up to these days, I wonder whether I made the right decision all those years ago. It would be quite wrong to prolong this process, and I want to bring it to a conclusion as quickly as possible.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): To please the Secretary of State, I shall tell him that I was responsible for the last review of airport policy in the south-east, so I know how difficult the issues he faces are, and I commend his statement today. In that review, we were careful to leave open the possibility of an additional close parallel runway at Gatwick, not least because it would be less disruptive than building a new runway at one of the other airports, or, indeed, at Gatwick. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House how much importance he attached to that possibility when he made his decision to exclude Gatwick from the consultation?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his initial remarks. I know that he was involved in these considerations in 1995, and I always find it instructive to look back—so far as we are able, within the normal constraints—to see what happened to Ministers in earlier years. It is often very clear why nothing ever came of various proposals, and that does not apply only to transport.

In relation to Gatwick, as I told the House a few moments ago, because the Government decided as a first step, for the reasons that I set out, that it would not be right to overturn the 1979 agreement, it followed that we could not ask what were the best options for it. Clearly, however, they were considered earlier as part of the studies carried out before the consultation. Now, that Gatwick has to be considered as a result of the court ruling, we need to publish a further paper that will give options, no doubt including the question of the close runway referred to by the right hon. Gentleman.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): May I commend the Secretary of State on his urgency? It is clear to me that, whether or not the court's decision is right, it can only be right for our economy and our environment to reach a conclusion on this important matter as swiftly as possible, because the longer we delay, the more damage will be done on both issues. In the consultation, will he ensure that people have an opportunity to raise the question whether we need only one hub airport for London or whether a different approach might be possible?

Mr. Darling: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend in relation to urgency and whether there ought to be one hub airport or more. That is one issue that is canvassed in chapter 4 of the south-east study. There have been almost 50,000 respondents so far, some of whom have addressed those points. She is absolutely right that they are matters that we need to consider and we will consider them.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Whatever the rights and wrongs of the consultation process, does the Secretary of State agree that the overarching priority must be an early decision and early action, which is why I welcome his decision not to drag matters out by appealing? Does he accept that the UK, the south-east region and Heathrow are already suffering from delay and uncertainty? Will he make it his new year's resolution to summon the courage to complete the consultation process and start building runways as soon as possible?

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Where?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is right about the fact that the south-east is already congested. The analysis of the problem is relatively easy; the solution as to where is rather more problematic.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Leonard Cohen has a lot to answer for:

"Like a bird on the wire,
Like a drunk in a midnight choir
I have tried"

always to be true. If we are to be true in the next stage of the consultation process, will my right hon. Friend consider re-issuing the documents so that they are accurate, including, in particular, information on compensation; information on public meetings, which should be advertised locally in my area, not in the *Evening Standard* only; BAA's commitment to a sixth terminal linked to the third runway; and BA's proposal to shift the runway to the east, which would demolish another part of my constituency? Also, will he meet community representatives, as he has met industry representatives over the past few months? Even if the decision were not one that my constituents could be happy with, at least they would be able to accept the process as relatively fair.

Mr. Darling: I am glad that we have found something in common. Clearly, we both listen to Leonard Cohen.

[Mr. Darling]

On Heathrow, as I have said to my hon. Friend and, indeed, to others, if there are problems with the consultation exercise relating to either documents or procedure, he should let me or one of my fellow Ministers know and we will try to put them right. The matter is important and it is important that we get it right. We shall endeavour to do so.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): For my constituents in Bishop's Stortford, east Hertfordshire and the surrounding communities, the 16-week consultation process was rushed and ill prepared from the beginning. Now it has turned from tragedy to farce. Having accepted that the High Court judgment says that the Secretary of State's original decision was irrational and unjust, does the right hon. Gentleman now accept his responsibility for any resulting blight?

Mr. Darling: The court reached its decision on the narrow question of Gatwick. The judge held that people ought to be able to have their say; he was not asked to address the entire consultation.

It is regrettable that the delay and uncertainty will continue for longer than any of us wanted, but we are where we are. We have the court judgment and I sense that the majority of Members want to bring matters to a conclusion, certainly next year. That is precisely what I want to do.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): May I tell my right hon. Friend that an early decision is essential? We do not want a repeat of the fiasco surrounding the uncertainty about the channel tunnel rail link's final route, which caused years of blight and other problems in my constituency. May I also tell my right hon. Friend that I deeply regret the action taken by Kent county council, which will cause blight, delay, uncertainty and misery for my constituents? Will he do all that he can to shorten the process? The four-month period he has recommended is too long: it will allow yet more months, possibly even years, of blight and uncertainty.

Mr. Darling: I understand the position of my hon. Friend and other north Kent Members who have made representations about the delay. When Kent county council took that action, it asked the judge to set aside what we were doing. The delay is a direct consequence of that, and we will just have to live with it. As I have said, this means that the White Paper will not be published until later next year, but I cannot try to short-circuit the process, not least because I do not particularly want to provide a fertile hunting ground for yet more lawyers who may seek to challenge the decision. The thing must be done properly, and I think that it can be done properly with a four-month consultation period. We must then try to reach a conclusion, because there will be an awful lot more debate to come.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): It is difficult to imagine a greater cock-up—the most magisterial Government consultation, made more pompous by statistical assertions, extrapolations, tendentious questionnaires and bogus economics, all now in ruins. What comfort has the Secretary of State for those of my constituents who would have been well content with natural growth at Birmingham airport within its existing perimeter?

Mr. Darling: When I spoke to the hon. Gentleman the other day, he was rather more reasonable. If he still wants to come and see me to discuss these matters, he would be well advised to go on being reasonable. However, I understand that he has a point to make, and I understand why he is doing so. Many people have made the same point about Birmingham, not least when I was in Birmingham recently. I would be happy to discuss it with the hon. Gentleman—and with one of his hon. Friends, who I think wants to come along with him.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): I realise that my right hon. Friend has been put in a difficult position by the court decision, but does he appreciate the implications for the west midlands of what he has said about extending the consultation period? The siting of a new international airport near Rugby is being considered. The area has been seriously blighted by that proposal, and people were looking forward to an early resolution of the matter; but now the consultation period has been extended by a further four months. Can my right hon. Friend say anything of an interim nature about the west midlands, or must everything be delayed for four months?

Mr. Darling: As my hon. Friend knows, I wanted to bring the matter to a conclusion early next year. I expected to do so well before the summer, precisely to deal with the concerns felt by him and by other Members, not just in the west midlands but elsewhere. Unfortunately, because of Kent county council's action and various issues raised by it, I must proceed in a manner that is entirely proper and does justice to all the consultation. That means that the White Paper cannot now be published until the end of the year, which is regrettable, but people are perfectly entitled to go to court if they think it right. The judge took a different view from the Government. I have explained a number of times why I think it better not to prolong matters by spending months in the appeal courts—I think we should now get on with it—but I entirely understand what my hon. Friend has said, not just today but on previous occasions.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I welcome what the Secretary of State has said, but given this opportune hiatus he will clearly have to republish a number of documents. Could the Government spell out more clearly their position on such questions as mitigation and guarantees, especially in the context of noise of pollution and air quality? As the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) implied, during the consultation process hitherto people have raised such matters repeatedly with us, as their representatives.

Mr. Darling: As I said, my intention is to publish a further consultation paper that flows from the Gatwick decision. However, the existing consultation continues, and it is important to make it clear to people that they need not resubmit everything that they have submitted already. As I have pointed out, some 50,000 representations have already been received.

I shall reflect on mitigation and the various environmental concerns that the hon. Gentleman and others have raised, but I want to avoid prolonging matters for month after month, because that is in nobody's interests. For a start, that is not fair on those who live near airports; nor, indeed, is it good for anybody. I want to proceed as efficiently as I can, consistent with my obligations to consult and to behave in a way that is beyond criticism.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, and for the speed with which he has entered into the undoubtedly sensitive area of tackling this country's long-term aviation needs. That is in marked contrast to the Conservatives, who simply ran away from this subject during 18 years in government. Could he ensure that public consultation is advertised much more widely than in just those areas closest to Heathrow airport? My constituents suffer—as do many people in London and the south-east—from overflights, and it would help if public meetings were advertised much more widely across London. On the environmental concerns, I hope that my right hon. Friend will confirm that this Government are arguing in the international community for a date by which a tax will be placed on aviation fuel.

Mr. Darling: On the latter point, as the consultation documents make clear, we believe that this issue ought to be resolved. My hon. Friend is doubtless aware from her previous experience that achieving international agreement on these matters is difficult, because many countries start from a completely different point of view.

As for the next few months, I should again make it clear that it is open to anyone throughout the length and breadth of the country to make representations. There is no restriction on that—indeed, I understand that some quarter of a million letters and pieces of information have been sent out to people across the country. In publishing the further document that will flow from the Gatwick decision, I want to ensure that people are aware of that point, but it is not necessary to retramp over every inch of the ground that we have covered; we simply need to ensure that we pick up what is necessary following the Gatwick decision, while emphasising that it is open to anyone, anywhere to make representations. Of course, whatever we decide on the London airports has implications not just for London and the south-east, but for the rest of the country.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): Twice the Secretary of State has said that he regrets the extension of the period of uncertainty as to the future of several of the communities affected by this lengthening process. What message will he give to those communities affected by the blight of this uncertain period, who live under flight paths and very close to airports? I am thinking of villages such as Kirkliston and Newbridge, in my constituency, which the Secretary of State knows well.

Mr. Darling: I do indeed know them well. Because Kent county council challenged the Government and succeeded—at least to the material extent of getting Gatwick back into the process—we have inevitably had to consult on these issues. There is no getting away from that. It is of course regrettable that the period of consultation has extended as a result. It would have been nice to be able to say, "Let's treat Gatwick separately," but we cannot because, as one of the major London airports, it clearly has an impact on the rest of the UK—not least on Edinburgh, which the hon. Gentleman has in mind. There are many Edinburgh flights to Gatwick, as well as to London Heathrow, and I am afraid that we must consider that. I hope that we can bring these matters to a conclusion as quickly as possible next year, but I am certain that we are now talking about the autumn, because we cannot possibly do justice to a consultation and get something out before the summer recess.

Paul Clark (Gillingham): May I commend the Secretary of State on his clear response to the situation within 48 hours of the judgment—an action that will be warmly welcomed by the people of north Kent? Yesterday's written statement, which pointed out that he will not seek to appeal, was also warmly welcomed by the hundreds of people who lobbied Parliament against the Cliffe proposal.

The Secretary of State said that a White Paper should be published next year. I urge him to stick to that, for all the reasons of continuing blight and anguish that have been given. In light of the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), is he aware that the people of Essex were very concerned yesterday that they had had no exhibition or involvement, even though some of them, for example at Canvey Island, are very close to the Cliffe site?

Mr. Darling: There is no need for people to wait for an exhibition or an invitation to respond. There is no reason why anyone with a view on Cliffe or Stansted, whether they are affected or not, should not make representations. About 50,000 representations have been received on the White Paper, as I have now said two or three times. My hon. Friend knows that my original intention was to publish the White Paper early next year, and I hoped to resolve the matter in that way once and for all, but unfortunately the decision taken by the county council resulted in the very delay that, I suspect, many people in Kent did not want.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): What scale of fees is NOP charging for its involvement in the questionnaires, and will the Secretary of State refuse to pay those fees? Is he aware of the serious flaws in the questionnaires from the midlands and, I understand, from Wales? They talk about the number of flights currently going from the midlands to the south-east, but there are no flights scheduled from the midlands—or, I understand, from Wales—to the south-east. As a lawyer, does he consider that there might be grounds for judicial review or challenge if any decision is based on such a flawed questionnaire?

Mr. Darling: I was always taught never to give free legal advice, and I intend to stick to that. One can get struck off for it.

The questionnaires were issued because it was put to us that there were some people who, for whatever reason, did not want to write but wanted some way of expressing a view. Questionnaires can never be conclusive in themselves. The Government will look at

[Mr. Darling]

them, because they are one way of gauging opinion, but we will also look at all the letters and representations, including those from Members of Parliament, before reaching a view. When we publish the White Paper there will certainly be an opportunity to debate it in the House. I expect that hon. Members will have many views—not, I suspect, along party lines—and those will help to inform our decision. Of course, there are other opportunities to raise these matters in the House well in advance of the White Paper.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): My right hon. Friend will know that this is the worst possible news for my constituents, and especially for the 3,000 who signed the *Kent Messenger* petition that I delivered to him yesterday. They will welcome his sense of urgency, but he will be aware that, in addition to the anxiety that this is causing, it is holding back many of the infrastructure developments and other plans in the Thames gateway, and in particular the north Kent end. Will he give whatever reassurance he can to both the public and the private partners in the Thames gateway developments that he will reach a decision and publish the White Paper as early as possible, as the uncertainty is really starting to cost us dear?

Mr. Darling: We will do whatever we can to resolve the uncertainty. It must have been within the contemplation of Kent county council that if it went to court it might win, and that if it won there would be consequences. It had a perfect right to do that, but we have to accept the fact that the court reached a particular view and get on with it as quickly as possible. Of course, if there are specific problems in north Kent, I—or my colleagues, who may be more directly involved in some of the matters that my hon. Friend has in mind—will certainly consider them.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The Secretary of State said that people can respond without having a public exhibition, but the majority want one, to try and find out the facts. I wrote to his Department some considerable time ago—I am still awaiting a reply, and perhaps my asking this question will help—about the perception that the process for Heathrow could have been done much better and more fairly. In the interests of fair play, therefore, would it be possible for the right hon. Gentleman to give a commitment to hold another exhibition for Heathrow? I know that the London borough of Hillingdon would be able and happy to facilitate that.

Mr. Darling: I shall reflect on that. The hon. Gentleman mentioned that he wrote and asked for a meeting. I asked my officials to provide me with a note of which colleagues had asked for a meeting with all Ministers in the Department, not just with me. The hon. Gentleman's name did not appear in that note, but I shall check again and find out what the position is.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): The Secretary of State has adopted a very reasonable tone to the House, which is to be welcomed. Residents of Bexley and north Kent hope that he will be as strong an environmentalist as he is polite to the House. Will the right hon. Gentleman say whether the consultation documents will be reissued in the south-east of England only, or is he considering the whole package? If he is considering only the south-east of England, can something be done about the cost? The documents are very expensive, especially for residents' groups. Would the CD option be a possibility? Could some money be saved to allow more people to understand the impact of the vector flight paths?

Mr. Darling: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was present earlier when I was asked a similar question. I made it clear then that the consultation will cover the whole country and not just the south-east. That is because the London airports are such an integral part of UK air transport as a whole. I am not planning to re-issue all the documents that have been issued already, but I am planning to issue a further document on the consequences of the Gatwick decision. There will, of course, be effects outside Gatwick, but the document is primarily on that decision. The new consultation period will run for four months from the publication of that document, and will allow people to make representations in respect of the entire country.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I welcome the decision to extend the consultation across the whole country. Developments at Manchester airport such as a third runway or a fourth terminal would further blight the lives of people whom I represent. Picking up on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend), may I urge the right hon. Gentleman to make a virtue of necessity and ensure that, when he makes a decision about where airport expansion will take place, that decision will be accompanied by a series of measures to protect people from excessive aircraft noise, pollution and the misery of night flights?

Mr. Darling: As I said earlier, the environmental impact of extending airport capacity will be taken into account. The consultation documents make that clear.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): I welcome the extended consultation period, but the Secretary of State should understand that the vast majority of my constituents consider the consultation over the Alconbury proposal to have been inaccurate and unfair. The single public meeting that was held was moved from Peterborough to Huntingdon at only a few days' notice. Those who were able to attend found that the information was inaccurate, not least in that no night noise statistics were provided in relation to an airport that will have flights 24 hours a day. Will he undertake to hold a further public consultation meeting, at which more accurate information will be provided?

Mr. Darling: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman writes to me setting out his concerns on that matter. I shall then reflect on how best to deal with them.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May I remind the Secretary of State that the court case in question was supported by Essex county council on behalf of residents in the south of the county who would be adversely affected by the proposals on Cliffe, and on

behalf of residents in the north of the county who would be adversely affected by the Stansted proposals? My special plea, on behalf of my constituents in Rayleigh and of people in surrounding constituencies, is that those in the south of Essex are allowed to play a fuller part in any expanded consultation period. In that way, they would be able to put across their worries about Cliffe. As has been noted already, there is considerable feeling in the south of Essex that, so far, people there have not been consulted properly on the implications of the proposals that may affect them.

Mr. Darling: As I have said several times this afternoon, there is nothing to prevent anyone living in any part of the country from making representations about any airport, whether it is nearby or distant. The Government want to encourage that. After all, the decision in the White Paper will have profound implications for air transport over the next 30 years. That is why it is important that we hear from people as much as possible. We have to reconcile people's concerns about airport development with the undeniable fact that more and more people are flying. Moreover, much of this country's prosperity depends on our ability to move people and goods about, nationally and internationally. There are decisions that we have to face up to, and we must take them next year. However, I appreciate that hon. Members want constituents to be well informed. If the hon. Gentleman has specific concerns, I suggest that he writes to me or to one of my ministerial colleagues. We will see what we can do to ensure that he has the information that he and his constituents need.

British Energy

1.55 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement on British Energy.

British Energy operates eight nuclear power stations in the United Kingdom, supplies over a fifth of our electricity and employs 5,200 workers in Britain. In May this year the company announced in its preliminary results a pre-tax, pre-exceptionals, profit of £42 million in its British and north American operations, but an overall loss to its UK operations of £41 million. None the less, the company chose to maintain its dividend, paying out £48 million to shareholders.

During the summer, British Energy decided to attempt a bond issue in the United States, which was unsuccessful. On 13 August, one of the reactors at the company's Torness station was taken out of service due to unforeseen problems, reducing the company's income by £56 million. The next day company executives told investors that there were no immediate cash flow problems.

Throughout the summer, British Energy engaged in discussions with British Nuclear Fuels Limited to renegotiate the terms of its contracts. These were entirely commercial discussions between the two companies. At the beginning of September, British Energy realised that its financial problems were far greater than it had thought and that any conceivable deal with BNFL would not be enough to meet its requirements. On 4 September the company wrote to inform me of a significant worsening in the company's financial position and about liquidity problems. It said that the board would have to decide, on legal advice, whether it could continue to meet its liabilities and therefore trade legally, and it asked for Government help.

On the next day, I announced that the Government were entering into discussions with the company. On 9 September I announced a loan facility of £410 million to support its trading operations both in the UK and north America. On 26 September, after a further request from the company, the Government decided to extend the loan facility until 29 November and increase it to £650 million. That was designed to give the company sufficient time to clarify its full financial position and to come to a clear view on its future options.

Both the initial loan and its extension were notified to the European Commission under state aid rules, and I can tell the House that the Commission announced yesterday that it has approved the loan. I offered that loan because it was the best way of securing the safety of the nuclear power stations and the security of electricity supply to the grid and consumers. Those remain my overriding objectives.

British Energy has submitted a plan to the Government for the solvent restructuring of the company. We and our financial advisers have assessed its implications, and I can announce to the House that the Government have agreed to play their part in allowing the company to attempt solvent restructuring.

Both the company and my Department have made statements to the stock exchange today; I have placed copies of both in the Library of the House and in the Vote Office.

[Ms Patricia Hewitt]

The company has announced that it will continue to make payments to a fund that is used to pay for the costs of decommissioning its power stations, give the fund £275million of bonds in the company and surrender to the fund 65 per cent. of its available cash each year.

The Government will underwrite those arrangements to ensure safety and environmental protection. In addition, we have recognised that if this restructuring is to work, we must contribute significantly to the company's £2.1 billion of historic nuclear fuel liabilities that are managed by BNFL and extend to 2086. The cost to the Government will average £150 million to £200 million a year for the next 10 years and will fall thereafter.

If the company does very well, surpluses from British Energy's contribution to the decommissioning funds will help meet those costs. However, I also intend to look at how the contracts are managed as part of the creation of the liabilities management authority. In addition, BNFL is today announcing that it will agree new contracts with British Energy for fuel supply and for spent fuel services in respect of future nuclear electricity generation.

If the company's proposed restructuring is to succeed, first the existing creditors will have to accept both a temporary freeze on payments and subsequently a significant write-down in the value of what they are owed. Secondly, the company will have to complete the sale of all its north American operations. Thirdly, it will have to implement the new trading strategy that it announced today. Agreement to all that must be achieved by the middle of February.

The Government are prepared to continue to fund BE's operations while the restructuring plan is agreed and implemented. The existing credit facility will be extended to 9 March, with its size remaining unchanged at £650 million. Of that existing facility, £382 million had been drawn down by yesterday. Under the proposal, the money will be progressively repaid as the company's financial situation improves. In the event of administration, we have taken security to protect the interests of the taxpayer and rank above other creditors.

I also intend shortly to bring forward legislation to enable me to carry forward the Government's part of the proposed restructuring or, if it fails, to acquire the companies or their assets. This proposal for solvent restructuring will, of course, need state aid approval by the European Commission. Once the company has reached agreement with its financial creditors, we will notify the plan to the Commission.

In September, I said that, if possible, we would look to a solvent restructuring. However, we did not rule out the possibility that the company might decide to go into administration. We have therefore prepared detailed contingency plans for administration, in discussion with all the key responsible regulatory bodies, to ensure that whatever happens, nuclear safety and security of supply will be maintained.

I stress that if British Energy were to go into administration, all its nuclear liabilities would fall to the Government. We cannot walk away from them; no responsible Government could. That is why the situation with British Energy is different from that of any other generator.

I take this opportunity to thank the staff at British Energy. Their skill and dedication is essential in ensuring nuclear safety. This has been an unsettling time for them, but whatever happens, nuclear power stations will continue to generate electricity and will continue to employ staff. Pension entitlements will be met. Trade suppliers will be paid. Customers' lights will stay on.

I understand that today's news will give little comfort to British Energy's financial stakeholders but they, too, must take their share of the pain if the company is to survive. The stakeholders now need to decide whether they are willing to support solvent restructuring; if they are not, the Government are fully prepared if British Energy decides that administration is the only option.

Today, the company announced that Robin Jeffrey is stepping down and that Adrian Montague will succeed him as chairman. Mr. Montague is an experienced executive who brings key business experience, from both the public and private sectors. It is clear that there have been management failings and it is right for the company to seek to strengthen its management team at this critical time.

I have set out the limits of what the Government are willing to do to support solvent restructuring. It is now up to the company, its new management and its financial stakeholders to determine the future of British Energy.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I welcome the statement that the Secretary of State has made. a copy of which I received about half an hour ago, some time after Greenpeace helpfully e-mailed my office with details of the press release issued by British Energy in connection with the statement.

The statement at last gives Parliament a chance to question the Secretary of State about her decision, taken almost three months ago, to commit £650 million of taxpayer's money to bailing out British Energy. The statement, which was made at the last possible parliamentary moment, raises a number of questions that I shall come to later. Unfortunately, it does not address the central absurdity of the Government's policy: the imposition of the climate change levy on British Energy.

The Government claim that the climate change levy forms part of their strategy to meet our climate change commitments. As nuclear power is the main energy source that does not produce carbon dioxide emissions, the Government's policy is an absurd contradiction.

The fact is that British Energy will not enjoy fair trading conditions until the burden of the climate change levy is removed. An essential part of the solution to this crisis is for the Government to abolish the climate change levy—an arbitrary tax that does nothing to address climate change—and replace it with a single economic instrument, such as an emissions trading system or a carbon tax.

Is the Secretary of State aware that that is not only our policy, but that of the Royal Society, whose policy document was published a couple of weeks ago? Will she explain why the Government reject the arguments authoritatively put by the Royal Society? Does she recognise that that approach would improve the position of both nuclear and renewables compared with fossil fuels and that it would also make it possible to

guarantee that targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions would be met? Alas, I fear that, even if she accepts those arguments, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, downgraded though he is, still remains higher in the pecking order.

I welcome the news that British Energy has been allowed to negotiate new terms with BNFL. Perhaps the Secretary of State will explain why that has taken so long. Has it not been clear for months, long before the bail-out was announced in early September, that that needed to happen? Will she confirm whether British Energy reached a commercial agreement with BNFL some time ago on terms that had her blessing only to have the deal blocked by the Treasury? Can she now reveal how much British Energy will save as a result of the new contract terms with BNFL?

Does the Secretary of State realise that the Government's muddled approach to nuclear power is damaging confidence in the industry? On 17 November, the Minister for Energy and Construction told *The Sunday Times*:

"We need that supply so, come what may, nuclear generation will continue."

Just eight days later, the Secretary of State for Wales—a former Energy Minister—told *The Western Mail* that he wanted to shut down nuclear power stations. With such contradictions inside the Government, it is no wonder that the Secretary of State has difficulty in resolving what the Government's policy should be, but does she understand that, with one member of the Cabinet attacking nuclear power, the attempt at solvent restructuring that she has just outlined will be much harder to achieve? Will she therefore repudiate the remarks of the Secretary of State for Wales?

What additional cost to the taxpayer will arise if solvent restructuring cannot be achieved and British Energy is forced into administration? Perhaps the Secretary of State can explain that in terms of the immediate cash outgoings in the next year and the longer-term liabilities. Can she say whether the costs that she now acknowledges will arise to the Government were included in the higher Government borrowing figures announced yesterday by the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Will the Secretary of State explain what legislation is needed to take forward the Government's part of the proposed restructuring? Does her statement mean that the Government are now considering taking British Energy back into public ownership? If so, will she explain how that will reduce British Energy's costs by a single penny or help it to become more viable in the future?

Delaying decisions about measures such as replacing the climate change levy, which would help to secure British Energy's future, will not make solvent restructuring easier to achieve. The fact that the liabilities management authority Bill is still only a draft suggests that the Government are having difficulty in acting in a timely manner on that issue as well.

The problems of British Energy were caused by a fall in the price that generators receive—a fall that has been sharpened by the new electricity trading arrangements—and British Energy is not the only generator in financial trouble. Is the Secretary of State satisfied that the operation of NETA is consistent with the overriding importance of security of supply? Does she consider that the regulator's remit adequately reflects the priority that must be given to maintaining the security of supply, especially when energy markets are about to experience their biggest change for a generation? Does she believe that Britain's energy needs and its climate change obligations can be met in the long term without any contribution from nuclear power?

The Secretary of State has tried to reassure us that throwing a little more taxpayers' money and allowing the company a bit more time will somehow resolve the Government's dilemma over nuclear power. The truth is that the Government's actions and omissions created problems for British Energy that would not otherwise have arisen. The bill for those actions and omissions will fall significantly on the taxpayer, regardless of whether solvent restructuring succeeds. The statement confirms that the Government's handling of this crisis has been bad for the taxpayer, and perpetuates uncertainty about the Government's energy policy.

Ms Hewitt: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for the late arrival of the statement, although I am assured that it was faxed to his office at 10 minutes to 1. I would always seek to ensure that he receives copies of my statements in accordance with the normal parliamentary courtesies.

I shall now turn to the substance of the hon. Gentleman's response. In relation to the climate change levy, we made our policy absolutely clear in April 2001, when we introduced it. It is not designed to be a carbon tax but to give clear incentives to industry and commercial users to improve their energy efficiency. We will, of course, consider the whole question of whether further changes are needed to the entire policy environment, including the climate change levy, in the White Paper that we will publish in the new year. As I have said, we will not change policy, for instance, in relation to the climate change levy, simply for the sake of one company that has got itself into difficulties, however serious those difficulties are.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the negotiations that have been taking place with BNFL. Let me stress again that they are entirely a commercial matter for the two companies. Although the Government own BNFL, we are not managers of the company, we do not interfere in its day-to-day operations, and we leave the management to get on with those commercial negotiations. It is untrue to suggest, as he did, that there was a deal earlier in the summer, or that it was blocked by any part of Government. The final impact of that deal will depend on future wholesale electricity prices, since the new commercial contracts will be pegged to those market prices.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the costs of restructuring, and particularly about whether they would vary were the company to go into administration. Let me make it clear that there is no real difference in the cost to the taxpayer between the solvent restructuring that we are giving the company a chance to put into

[Ms Hewitt]

place and falling into administration, should that happen. I draw his attention to what the Chancellor said yesterday in the pre-Budget report:

"The Government expects the loan facility to be managed within the planned totals for Departmental Expenditure Limits and the financial implications of any restructuring to be consistent with the forecast of the public finances and performance against the fiscal rules published in this Pre-Budget Report."

That was the position yesterday, and it remains the position today; it is not affected by this statement.

The hon. Gentleman asked about legislation. I hope that we will introduce the legislation to which I referred in my statement before Christmas. As I indicated, that will allow us to fulfil our part of the restructuring, either in the event of a solvent restructuring or, if administration proves to be the company's decision, in the event of administration.

In relation to the impact on the company of NETA, let me make it clear that even before the new electricity trading arrangements were introduced, prices were falling due to liberalisation and changes in the marketplace. We introduced the new trading arrangements after extensive consultation with the entire industry, including British Energy, to remove the distortions inherent in the old pool system of fixing prices, and to put in place a much more transparent system of arriving at prices than ever existed under the pool. The hon. Gentleman needs to remember that the overcapacity in the electricity market, which is now unwinding itself, and which has led to the reduction of prices following changes to the market environment, was the direct result of the pool arrangements and artificially high prices that led to the unnecessary investment that existed under his Government. He really does need to look at the history.

The hon. Gentleman referred to environmental targets, the importance of climate change and the role of nuclear power. All those issues are considered in the White Paper that will be published in the new year. We are absolutely committed to playing our part in dealing with the enormous problem of climate change. We will have much more to say about the appropriate targets on reductions, especially in carbon emissions, following Kyoto. British Energy's nuclear generators are responsible for 20 per cent. of total electricity generation and it plays a part in contributing to the reduction of CO_2 emissions.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): One of the few welcome aspects of this worrying statement is the tough conditions that the European Commission attaches to the loan. Perhaps we should be grateful that it is more concerned than Ministers are about the prudential use of British taxpayer's money.

How much is involved? The Government cite the figure of £650 million, but I received a fax yesterday from the Commission that said that it had approved a loan of £900 million, with additional contingencies of £275 million. Which figure is right? The Government seem to have contingent liabilities for the company greater than those provided for the Iraq war. If the figures double every three weeks, how can we have confidence in the numbers that the Government use?

The nuclear safety issue is paramount. Am I correct in understanding that there is no regulatory provision for the protection of nuclear safety if British Energy becomes insolvent? If that is the case, it reflects badly on the people who privatised it, but why did the Government take five years to notice the problem and prepare for it?

Why is there a fundamental problem with security of supply? National Grid states that British Energy provides 15 per cent. of capacity—not 20 per cent. as the right hon. Lady said—and there is 25 per cent. of spare capacity to meet demand. The industry's regulator, Mr. McCarthy, who presumably knows something about the industry that he regulates, says that the problems of British Energy pose no threat to security of supply, either in whole or in the event of some of its older reactors ceasing production. If the Government are at such odds with their regulator, why is he still in his job?

On competition, the Government have arranged a rescue operation for a failed and badly managed company and its shareholders. What answer does the Minister give to the workers and shareholders of other companies in the energy industry, such as renewable power generators and AES Drax, in which people are losing their livelihood and money as a result of competition with the enterprise that the Government are rescuing?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman refers to the tough conditions supposedly imposed by the European Commission. He takes that phrase from the title of its press release issued yesterday. Had he read on, he would have found that we imposed the "tough conditions" as a condition of making the loan in the first place. In other words, the loan facility that we made available was not handed over to the company. It was put into a separate account and every bill or guarantee met from the facility is first checked and cleared by our accountancy advisers. The European Commission welcomed the fact that we had put in place such tough controls.

So far, thanks to the extremely tough and prudent management of the facility that we put in place, only about 60 per cent. of the total facility has been used, so we do not propose to increase it. However, we have discussed with the European Commission the maximum amount that may be required for the six-month period for which rescue aid has been approved. That is why the Commission has approved a figure higher than the £650 million that we already have in place; in other words, the Commission's approval relates to the maximum that may be required but our objective is to pay only the minimum. We will continue to do everything necessary to achieve that through the tough management of the account.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the safety and regulatory conditions would apply if the company decided to put itself into administration. We have spent a large part of recent weeks in discussions with the various regulators to ensure that even if the company decides that it needs to go into administration, health and safety, including nuclear safety, will be properly secured. One of the main reasons why we were not prepared, many weeks ago, to risk letting the company fall into unplanned administration is that, at that time, the question of health and safety, among others, was not clear.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about security of supply. The difference between the figures of 13 per cent. and 20 per cent. is simply a matter of the base that one uses—whether one measures production against capacity or against total generation. As a result of the significant mothballing of plant that has taken place over the past year, particularly in recent months, the capacity margin, although certainly adequate to ensure security of supply throughout the winter, is significantly lower than it has been.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We have an important Bill to discuss this afternoon and many hon. Members want to take part in that debate. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that she will shortly introduce legislation, so we will have an early opportunity to return to this subject. I do not intend, therefore, to run this on much beyond 2.40 pm. I hope that I may have the co-operation of the House in that respect, and I ask for short questions and short answers.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): I congratulate the Secretary of State on her robust and intelligently constructed position, which puts the onus for the financial recovery and solvency of British Energy firmly on the company itself. She has created a position in which, over the next few months, we can debate the implications of NETA and its current operation—it is not an entirely satisfactory replacement for the pool, as she no doubt realises—and other aspects of energy policy, notably the security and diversity of supply that we seek. It is entirely to her credit that she has created that opportunity for us, and I hope that all parties in the House will engage constructively in a debate that is in the national interest.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. On NETA, perhaps it will help if I stress that we are already supporting changes to its operation, in particular to assist smaller generators and to improve the way in which the balancing mechanism works. He is right to say that we will need to return to that and many other issues in the White Paper.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The manufacturers of British Energy's fuels, namely, the workers in my constituency at Salwick, will be grateful to the Secretary of State for the help that she has given the company. However, will she confirm that the revised arrangements with BNFL will not harm that company's profitability? Will she also explain to the House how the revised arrangements will affect the cost of generation of each kilowatt-hour of nuclear energy from British Energy? Will the company thereafter trade profitably within the constraints of NETA?

Ms Hewitt: The new contracts that British Energy is putting in place with BNFL are part of a strategy to reduce its costs and establish new longer-term contracts with the energy suppliers to protect itself against possible further downward movements in prices. As for BNFL's profitability, I elaborated on that matter last year in a statement on the creation of the liabilities management authority.

Anne Picking (East Lothian): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State's statement. Torness is in my constituency and her remarks about the staff, their commitment, hard work and loyalty were welcome. I visited the station on numerous occasions when both reactors were down and everybody, including the station master, the staff and unions, was working together. I also welcome my right hon. Friend's reaffirmation of the Government's commitment to nuclear power generation and a balanced energy policy.

Ms Hewitt: I thank my hon. Friend. I thank her constituents and those of the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) for their continuing commitment to the safe and effective operation of nuclear power.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Before the Secretary of State introduces a policy for British Energy, she needs a policy for nuclear power. Will she comment on the fact that over the next 20 years, all Britain's nuclear power stations except one will be decommissioned? Even on the most optimistic projections for alternative energy, emissions of carbon dioxide will therefore rise, whereas the Government are committed to reductions. Why, after more than five years in office, have the Government still not got to grips with that? Why have they not practised joined-up government and brought their energy policy into line with their environmental commitments, which other sections of the Government are pleased to boast about?

Ms Hewitt: We are taking tough action to try to improve energy efficiency and achieve an increase in renewables generating capacity of 10 per cent. by 2010. The broader issues raised by the right hon. Gentleman, including the role of nuclear power and the much broader energy framework needed to achieve continuing reductions in CO_2, are matters for the White Paper.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the Secretary of State confirm that none of the measures that she announced in her package prejudices security of supply, which will be considered in the White Paper? Will she go further and give a commitment to meet coalfield Members and people from coalfield communities to explain how a package of £650 million and an ongoing commitment of £150 million to £200 million a year to nuclear energy can be set against the limited aid given to coalfield communities?

Ms Hewitt: I should be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and other colleagues from the coalfield communities. I am happy to confirm that, far from jeopardising security of supply, my statement and all my actions have been designed to secure it.

My hon. Friend asked about support for the coal industry and coalfield communities. We have invested £150 million since 1997 in operating aid to coal companies, particularly through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. We have invested hundreds of millions of pounds more in helping people in the coalfield communities, including the one represented by my hon. Friend, to cope with the costs of the brutal restructuring of the mining industry under a previous Conservative Government.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): Given that both Hinkley A and B are in my constituency—one owned by BNFL, the other by British Energy—is the Minister happy that money being put aside for the decommissioning of one at the moment and another in a decade's time is sufficient to sort out the entire Hinkley Point area, which, the House will appreciate, is extremely important to my constituency?

Ms Hewitt: I completely understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. I confirm not only that we are strengthening arrangements for the nuclear decommissioning and nuclear liabilities fund in the steps that I announced today but that the Government, as always, stand as the guarantor of last resort for those nuclear liabilities.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): My right hon. Friend referred to the aid that the Government have given the coal industry in the past. To enhance her reputation for even-handedness and fairness, will she look at the modest amount that the coal industry is making compared with the nuclear industry—nothing like £150 million to £200 million a year—and agree to lift the cap on operating aid to UK Coal?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is aware that the operating aid scheme has come to an end, although we extended it until the end of this year in order to deal with one particular problem. We succeeded earlier this year in securing, within the new European aid framework, provision for investment aid to that industry and we are now consulting on the nature of that investment aid scheme.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Does not the abject failure of British Energy spell the beginning of the end of nuclear power in this country and certainly rule out new build for the future, as announced by the Secretary of State for Wales? Will the right hon. Lady take the opportunity to put on the record what the excess generating capacity is at present and what advice she has received from the regulator? Does she accept that this is a wake-up call to her Department to get moving on energy efficiency and renewables?

Ms Hewitt: No statement has been made about the future of nuclear electricity beyond what I have said in relation to both British Energy and BNFL. For the longer term, those are matters that we will consider in the energy White Paper, which, as I have said several times today, will be published in the new year. Of course we need to do more on energy efficiency and on renewables. We are already doing a great deal—with the hon. Gentleman's support, I hope—and we shall have more to say on the subject in the White Paper.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): With regard to the security of energy supply, may I draw to my right hon. Friend's attention a concern shared by many miners throughout the country that one company, UK Coal, could change the position within the United Kingdom? It is imperative that a single company should not be allowed to determine the policy of this country.

Ms Hewitt: As I understand the position, in the eventuality that my hon. Friend describes, the coal resources would revert to the Coal Authority. The broader issue of the place of coal in securing a diverse and safe electricity supply will be considered in the White Paper.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The answer that the Secretary of State gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and to the hon. Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton) is not good enough. The fundamental reason for the insolvency of British Energy is that the market price of electricity, low as it is and welcome as that is, is lower than the production cost of nuclear energy. In making a commitment of public money, the right hon. Lady must have a policy on future nuclear build. What is that policy? If there are to be no new nuclear power stations, how does that fit in with the Government's policy of reducing CO_2 emissions?

Ms Hewitt: The question of new nuclear build has nothing whatever to do with the issue of British Energy and how it will manage its responsibility for existing nuclear stations. It seems to me that the causes of British Energy's problems are many, but a company that has constantly changed its strategy, constantly sought—but failed—to secure alliances and mergers with supply companies, gone through three chief executives in about five years and lost a deputy chairman earlier this year is a company in which there have been very serious management failings. Its problems cannot be blamed on the market environment, particularly when British Energy itself, publicly and privately, welcomed the introduction of those market arrangements.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): I thank my right hon. Friend for her support for British Energy. She may well know that its national headquarters are based in Barnwood in my constituency. Does she have a message for the people of that ward who voted Liberal Democrat when the Liberal Democrats gained the seat in May this year, bearing in mind that the Liberal Democrats would take away the £650 million loan and jeopardise more than 1,000 jobs in that ward?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an extremely interesting point. The Liberal Democrats in Gloucester told the voters of Barnwood in my hon. Friend's constituency that they oppose the policy of immediate administration that was proposed today by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats on these matters. As ever, what we are seeing from the Liberal Democrats is opportunism and confusion combined.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Secretary of State confirm—I admit that I have made my calculations while we have been sitting here—that a minimum of two thirds of the £2.1 billion discounted cost of the historic waste liabilities of British Energy will be transferred to the taxpayer? Will she clarify the relationship with the liabilities management authority, which will get from BNFL liabilities, a fund and the management of assets? What does she propose to transfer to the LMA from British Energy?

Ms Hewitt: As I said, we anticipate that the costs of the historic nuclear liabilities for British Energy will

average between £150 million and £200 million a year for the next 10 years, although if the situation improves British Energy will be expected to put more into the nuclear liabilities fund. We are making good progress on the legislation and practical arrangements necessary for the establishment of the liabilities management authority. We will consider whether it would be appropriate for British Energy's historic liabilities to be managed through the LMA; we have not yet made a decision about that.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): I applaud the Government's attempts to sort out this mess. I note that they are underwriting a rescue package, that the creditors are not going to be paid in full and that they will assume all nuclear liabilities if the company goes into administration.

Will my right hon. Friend tell the House how many nuclear reactors have been built around the world in the past 25 years without direct or indirect subsidy for building, operating or decommissioning costs?

Ms Hewitt: I do not have that figure, but I know that several countries are now commissioning new nuclear power stations in order to meet their judgment of how best to achieve their carbon reduction targets.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Given the management failings that my right hon. Friend mentioned, I welcome the fact that there are to be changes at the top of the company. Will she assure us, however, that an example will not be set whereby the people responsible for presiding over massive losses in their business walk away with massive payouts as compensation for their troubles? Will she assure us that there will be no rewards for failure on this occasion?

Ms Hewitt: I have made my views about big rewards for big corporate failures very clear on several occasions. In this situation, there are certain contractual requirements, but I would be very concerned about large remuneration payments to the former chairman. I have no doubt that he we will want to face up to his responsibility for the position in which the company finds itself. Large payments to the former chairman or anyone else involved would send a very damaging signal when all the other stakeholders face either considerable uncertainty, as in the case of employees, or are directly bearing a share in the pain. I hope that the former chairman will take the same view as me, which is that he should play his part in sharing that pain.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Despite my right hon. Friend's previous replies, if British Energy is taken into administration that surely must have an impact on the Government's consideration of what part nuclear energy will play in providing sustainable energy in the future. Even if that does not mean excluding nuclear energy completely, a reduction in its use is something that many of my constituents would welcome.

Ms Hewitt: The problems that we are dealing with today relate to one company. They do not arise specifically from the nature of nuclear power, whose future role will be considered in the White Paper. I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents will be as interested as everybody else to see it in the new year.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Orders Nos. 107 and 108 (Welsh Grand Committee),

That—

(1) the matter of the Government's Pre-Budget Report as it relates to Wales be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration;

(2) the Committee shall meet at Westminster on Thursday 5th December at five minutes to Nine o'clock and at Two o'clock to consider the Government's Pre-Budget Report as it relates to Wales under Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)); and

(3) at the meeting—

(a) the Chairman shall interrupt proceedings at Four o'clock; and

(b) at the conclusion of those proceedings a motion for the adjournment of the Committee may be made by a Minister of the Crown pursuant to Standing Order No. 108(5) (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)).—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I should inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. There is also a 10-minute limit on Back-Benchers' speeches.

2.39 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Today's older people are the generation who created our great public services. Labour Members believe that they, above all others, deserve to get the best from them. Indeed, the mark of a civilised society is the way in which it treats its most senior citizens. The Bill is, therefore, first and foremost about promoting the well-being and independence of older people. It is about ensuring dignity and security in old age.

Labour Members are proud of the progress that we have already made. The average pensioner household is £840 a year better off today than in 1997. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said yesterday, there is more help to come for Britain's pensioners.

Eye tests are again free for pensioners; that also applies to nursing care. For the first time, almost 150,000 women over 65 have been invited for breast screening. In the next four years, more than 1 million more will be screened.

It is for others in the House to explain their opposition to reductions in VAT on heating, extra winter fuel payments and free TV licences. More than 11 million pensioners have been helped by those measures, which the Labour Government introduced.

Ours is an ageing society. We should not fear but celebrate that. However, it poses formidable challenges for our key public services in providing better, faster care to higher standards for older people. It means providing services that promote what older people say they want: independence not dependence, and breaking down the Berlin wall between health and social care. Older people need one care system, not two competing systems.

When I visit health and social care services around the country, I am always impressed by the power of partnership. When the services work well together, older people receive first-class care; when they do not, older people suffer.

Delayed discharge from hospital occurs when partnerships do not work. The Bill is designed to tackle that problem. On any single day in England, approximately 5,000 people—mainly older people—are trapped in a hospital bed when they are fit to be cared for at home. Consequently, everyone loses.

For patients who are ready and able to leave, hospital is not the right place. The longer that they are forced to stay, the greater the risk of losing their independence and confidence. For the patient's family and carers, normal living is suspended, doubt replaces certainty and lives are put on hold. Hospitals incur unnecessary costs from looking after patients who are not their responsibility, and the beds that they need are lost. Other patients who are waiting for the beds pay in longer waiting times for treatment and, in the worst cases, in cancelled operations.

That vicious cycle has existed for too long and we must find a way to break it. Of course, there is no magic wand that can be waved to make the problem disappear. In the past few years, we have tried to introduce policies to deal with it. The Bill builds on what we have done so far.

We have introduced national standards for the first time and a national system of inspection to improve the way in which services work together for the benefit of older people. There was a time when there were no national standards and a local lottery in care. No one who is serious about ensuring equity in social care wants to go back to those days.

We have provided extra investment for the health service and social services. Many of my hon. Friends have long argued that social services have too often been the health service's poor relation. The evidence is on their side. I am pleased that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) nods his head. In the last five years of Conservative government—I believe that the hon. Gentleman was a Health Minister then—spending on social services increased by only 0.1 per cent. a year in real terms. Today, it is growing by more than 3 per cent. From next April, the rate of growth will double to an average of 6 per cent. a year for the next three years.

Some people, even some of my hon. Friends, will say that that investment is not enough. Perhaps I can do more to help social services. I want to say a little more about that shortly.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Milburn: In a moment. I shall not take lectures from the Conservative party about how social services cannot afford the Bill's provisions. In government, the Conservative party failed to make the necessary investment, and failed to commit the resources that we are providing. In opposition, it fails to agree to match the extra resources that we are committing for the future. Its record on social services is compound failure: the failures of the present are piled on those of the past. The Conservative party offers only failure for the future. Speaking of that, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson).

Mr. Waterson: Before the Secretary of State leaves the subject of funding, is he aware that his proposals would mean a fine of £2.5 million, on current figures, for East Sussex, equating to 240 residential or nursing placements or 800 home care packages?

Mr. Milburn: I am sure that that is what the hon. Gentleman has in front of him, but whether it is true is an entirely different matter. As I shall say in a moment, there are growing resources for social services. Indeed, I made a statement to the House in July this year, in which I set out an earmarked package of measures specifically

to build capacity in elderly care services. I do not believe for a moment that local government or social services simply will not spend that money. They want to spend it; they are the people who have been arguing for it. We have listened to their argument, and conceded it. We have provided extra resources for social services, and we now expect that they will use them to build up the necessary capacity.

That brings me to my third point, the question of building up extra capacity across the care system. In the NHS, for the first time in 30 years, the number of beds in hospitals is rising, not falling. In the community, while it is true that the number of care home beds has fallen, the quantity of care provided in other settings has risen. Our latest estimates are that the number of people helped by intermediate care services has risen by 126,000 in the last couple of years, and that 43,000 more older people receive intensive support at home today than in 1997. As I told the House in July, we will build up capacity further still in the next few years, with a £1 billion package of measures for elderly care services. These resources will allow local councils to pay higher fees to care homes, if that is what is needed to stabilise their local care home market. Although care homes are a good option for some older people, they are not—and must not become—the be all and end all of elderly care services in our country. A broader spectrum of services is needed for older people, to widen choice and to promote independence.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Is the Secretary of State aware of the independent research by Exeter university, which shows that, in Devon, the 100-plus intermediate care beds allow discharge to take place approximately seven days earlier than would normally be the case, thus saving the NHS about £3 million? Devon county council is concerned, however, that, having achieved that—no doubt, with support from the Secretary of State—it will now be penalised by £1.5 million as a result of having provided that care.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. This is interesting because, all too often, we hear from Conservative Front Benchers—I cannot speak for Conservative Back Benchers; I cannot speak for Front Benchers, come to that—that extra resources in public services do not produce results. But they do, and the hon. Lady is right: intermediate care is working. We have provided extra resources, and, as a consequence, capacity is being built up. We are also providing further extra resources for the next few years. If I know local government and social services at all, I know what they want to do—not least from my discussions with directors and members of local authorities. They want to spend more on social services provision. We have given them the opportunity to do that over the next few years, and we will do so further into the future, too.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): So as not to confuse the House, on the question of help for the elderly outside the residential care setting, will the Secretary of State confirm the answer given by the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), on Monday that the number of households receiving domiciliary care has fallen since September 1997 by 97,900?

Mr. Milburn: What the hon. Gentleman is alluding to is simply the number of households receiving some form of home care. However, that is not the only category of people who receive help. Indeed, the number of older people helped, through the public purse, to live at home has increased, not decreased—I can give the hon. Gentleman the latest figures—from 638,000 to 661,000, so his allegation is simply not true.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Will my right hon. Friend clear up a tremendous confusion in my local authority in Durham? At Question Time recently, he promised to investigate whether the money given to deal with bed blocking in Durham has been used for that purpose. Durham county council's social services department tells me that it has not received the money from the primary care trust; the PCT says that it has. I am not sure how many beds were unblocked by the money that was supposedly given—£1.8 million. He said that he would come back to me, but he has not. Can he clear this up?

Mr. Milburn: I am amazed that confusion is reigning in Durham. That sounds a very unlikely state of affairs. The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), who has responsibility for social services and community care, is looking into the matter. Two things are necessary. First, the local community bodies concerned—PCTs, social services and the acute hospitals—must come together and agree a course of action. That has not always happened. Secondly, if we can be helpful nationally, we will be. If our investigation or our involvement can help, we will be glad to provide such help.

The situation described by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) is the nub of the problem. When partnership works, it is great; when it does not work, it is a disaster. The problem is that it relies purely on voluntary endeavour. If relationships are good, they are good; if they are bad, they are bad. We do not have an incentive in the system that allows each part of the partnership—health services on the one hand and social services on the other—to accept their responsibilities. That, fundamentally, is what the Bill is about.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Will the Secretary of State please answer my question simply? If relationships are to improve under the Bill, why are three of the 10 clauses about dispute resolution?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman knows fine well why that is so. If the world were a perfect place and if partnership were happening everywhere, there would be no need for my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham to stand up and complain, no need for Opposition Members to stand up and complain about the same issue and no need for the Bill to be introduced. Partnership is a very cosy idea and, like every Member, I support it, but to make it work everybody has to accept their responsibilities. Sadly, sometimes they do not do so, which is why legislation is necessary.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): When I met consultants at Pinderfields hospital in my constituency over the summer, they told me that about a third of the

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

hospital's beds were occupied by people who did not need to be in them. Some were delayed discharges, but others had been admitted inappropriately by GPs. Does my right hon. Friend intend to extend the principles behind the Bill to fining others who are involved in health care? Is my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate), who is a GP, likely to be fined for wrongly admitting his patients to the local hospital?

Mr. Milburn: No, I do not think that that is needed, partly because there are incentives in the system in respect of that. However, my hon. Friend makes a good point. It is perfectly self-evident that one problem that bedevils health and social services is the fact that people are all too often in the wrong part of the system at the wrong time. We are putting the incentives in place to correct the deficit in the NHS that he rightly describes so that in future—not before too long, I hope—I shall be in a position to give PCTs budgets for the longer term rather than just a year. They will have discretion over how to spend that money, whether on primary care, community care or hospital-based care.

One thing is absolutely certain, and my hon. Friend has argued this over many years: the problems for hospitals will not be resolved purely in hospitals. This country, and elderly people more than anyone else, require a broad spectrum of services—services in hospital, in the community and in primary care and, crucially, social care services.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): My right hon. Friend is very generous in giving way. May I clarify the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe)? GPs sometimes admit patients inappropriately purely because they cannot get the care packages in the home that they would like and which would keep people in their home. Improving social services care would make that a thing of the past.

Mr. Milburn: I agree. I was coming to that. The Opposition, however, all too often seem fixated with the idea that the only form of care that counts is either hospital care or care in a care home. Care in homes is important, giving frail and disabled older people in particular the opportunities that they need; but there should be a broader spectrum of care choice, not just for those older people but for general practitioners and others working in the community who want to ensure that patients are placed appropriately.

Our extra investment in social services over the next few years will help to finance a 50 per cent. increase on the 1997 total in the number of extra care housing places, or very sheltered accommodation. A further 70,000 older people will receive rehabilitation services each year to prevent them from having to go to hospital unnecessarily in the first place, and to help them leave hospital speedily when it is safe for them to do so. The Bill, moreover, will make those and all intermediate care provision—whether provided by the health service or by social services—free to the user.

More older people will be able to choose to live at home. In the past, too many have faced a choice between going into a care home and struggling on in their own homes. As a result of our investment, by 2005 twice as many older people will receive the intensive help they need in order to live at home as received it in 1995.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): When he next visits Lancaster, would my right hon. Friend care to join me in visiting the Beck View extra sheltered housing project? He would see a tremendous example of partnership between Lancashire county council's social services department and Lancaster city council. Exactly the sort of work he has described is being done, enabling older people to remain in their homes for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Milburn: If I visit Lancaster—of which, as my hon. Friend knows, I am extremely fond—I will certainly do as he suggests. Recently, when I was in another great city—Leeds—I saw a superb example of extra care housing. If I remember rightly, it was supported by a local authority, a housing association and the national health service. As my hon. Friend suggests, such things can happen and are happening. What we need to do is build up the capacity, and Opposition Members must recognise that that can be done only if the necessary resources are committed to social services—which is precisely what we are going to do.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of the support for carers that exists throughout the House. In view of what he said about ensuring the availability of a range of care options, will he, during the Bill's passage, return to the need to ensure that the current guidance on consulting and providing information for carers about hospital discharge is given the force of law? Will he also consider the provision of free care services for carers when they are needed as part of the care package relating to discharge?

Mr. Milburn: I can give my hon. Friend an assurance on the second point. As for the first, we will want to issue guidance to those in all parts of the care system, but particularly to those in hospitals, about how discharge procedures should work. An important part of that is ensuring that not just patients but their families and carers are involved from the outset. Carers do a fantastic job, and the Government have no intention of trying to bypass their role. Indeed, we want to enhance it.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I refer my right hon. Friend to another great city, Stoke-on-Trent? How does he intend to secure the necessary accountability in the efforts to produce joint strategies for integrated care for elderly people?

The Edwards report on services in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire resulted in the transfer of £300,000 from the NHS to social services. However, the money was not actually spent on the services that it was originally provided for. What measures will he introduce in respect of accountability, because we need to ensure that money intended for a specific purpose is used just for that purpose?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The Bill provides a partial answer, and

in a moment I shall discuss the question of ensuring that responsibilities are also matched by resource responsibility. However, I can assure her that during this Session, we will introduce further legislation to ensure a better audit trail—in the health service and in social services—of where public money is being spent. We aim to strengthen the inspectorates on the health and the social care sides of the fence, and we intend to impose a legal obligation on both new inspectorates to work together. Otherwise, not only do elderly and vulnerable patients fall through the gap in the middle; sadly, public money sometimes does as well.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), but then I must make some progress.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): The Secretary of State has already acknowledged the concern of some of his hon. Friends that the additional resources that he has announced are not adequate. Given that the Government's inquiry into health service funding—the Wanless report—made a case for extra investment, and given that the report time and again flagged up the fact that no equivalent work was being done in social services, is it not time for a Wanless inquiry into social care, so that we can be certain that the additional resources are sufficient to deliver on this Government's commitments?

Mr. Milburn: We have made our decisions on social services for the foreseeable future—for the next three years—and as the hon. Gentleman knows full well, until very recently social services faced an annual cycle of budgets, because they had no real idea what they were getting. That is changing, and we must maintain that change and provide as much certainty and stability as possible in social services funding. I shall say something more on the matter in a moment, but we will continue to assess what social services actually need to fulfil their obligations. That is the right thing to do, and in particular we want to ensure that they have the resources to build up services in the community and at home.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, people are charged for community equipment such as handrails, walking frames or bath seats. This equipment can make the difference between an older person's becoming dependent, or remaining independent in their own home. The Bill's provisions will remove these charges altogether. Ring-fenced funding for up to 500,000 extra pieces of community equipment will be provided to an estimated 250,000 additional older people, and for the first time they will be provided free of charge.

The resources are therefore in place to establish capacity in the communities where it is needed by older people. Extra support in the community will, in turn, help to relieve pressure on hospitals. However, resources alone are insufficient to crack the problem of delayed discharge from hospital: reforms are needed alongside resources. Of course, some reforms are already beginning to bite. The first care trusts are now in place, and there are more to come. Under health legislation flexibilities, more than 180 local partnerships are now delivering services worth more than £2 billion a year. Finally, a single process for assessing older people's health and social care needs is being put in place.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): Given the huge welcome for the long-overdue additional resources that have been spelt out, and given that further resources are planned, why has my right hon. Friend taken it upon himself to introduce this punitive legislation before thoroughly evaluating the use and impact of that money?

Mr. Milburn: I do not think that the legislation is at all punitive.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): It is punitive.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman will doubtless have an opportunity to make his speech in a moment or two, but it would be helpful if he would not shout at me during mine. The legislation is not punitive; it is about ensuring that the needs of the older person, rather than of any one part of the care system, always come first.

The Conservative party is in severe danger of becoming the party of the producer, and I know that it would not want to do that. It always used to pride itself on being the party of the consumer, but perhaps that has gone, too, along with its tradition of economic competence—or indeed being the party of the vulnerable.

Partnership is the key to delivery, but it works only when both health and social services are clear about their respective responsibilities. It is about giving as well as taking, and about being clear that what comes first is not the needs of any one service but those of every individual user of the service. When older people get trapped in hospital, that is a failure in partnership working.

Patients can be delayed for many reasons. In too many cases, they are delayed in hospital because social services departments are not fulfilling their responsibility to provide care in the community. Almost 1,000 older people are trapped in hospital simply because they are waiting for their needs to be assessed and their future care planned. Under the current system, for as long as elderly people remain in hospital, they do so at the cost of the national health service. There is no incentive for local government to tackle the problem. Indeed, there is every incentive to leave them stuck there. The Bill is not about imposing wholly new responsibilities on social services departments but about ensuring that they fulfil their existing ones.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): The Brighton and Hove authority has done exactly what my right hon. Friend is asking: it has entered into close partnership working with the local health bodies, and a care trust is emerging, but despite its best efforts there is still a serious problem of bed blocking, which is outside its control. Under the Bill, it is quite possible that the extra resources that the social services department has

[Dr. Desmond Turner]

been given—thank you very much—could be used to pay punitive fines because of bed blocking that is outside its control.

Mr. Milburn *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Secretary of State replies, let me say to the House that interventions are getting longer and longer, and hon. Members should really learn the art of the concise intervention, especially when they are taking time out of the time that they might hope to have later, if they catch my eye.

Mr. Milburn: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will take that as a hint to get on with it.

On my hon. Friend's question, that is precisely why we are making resources available to social services. Of course, there is a choice. We are giving £1 billion of extra cash, largely earmarked for elderly care services, and social services departments have a choice—although earmarking restricts their discretion to some extent, I suppose—about whether to use those extra resources to build up capacity, which is what they tell us they want to do, and is indeed the reason why we agreed to give them the extra money, or whether they want to transfer resources to the health service. Our understanding is that they want to build up services in the community, and they now have an opportunity to do just that. I perfectly understand that, in the days when budgets were rising by 0.1 per cent. a year in real terms, that was not possible, but we are now moving into an era in which resources will be rising by 6 per cent. a year in real terms, not only for one or two years but for three whole years.

It is not as though social services departments have not known that this measure was coming. Indeed, there are already extra resources in place. The day after the Budget in April, I stood here and announced precisely that this measure was coming. In October, we provided £300 million through the building capacity grant, so that social services could start the process of building up services in the community. However, I take my hon. Friend's point and I shall return to it later.

In all fairness, the costs of care should surely fall where they belong. Under the new system proposed in the Bill, when patients are ready and able to leave hospital but care is not provided for them in the community when it should be, the costs will indeed pass to social services, but there is also a requirement on the national health service to play its part in the discharge process by giving advance notice to social services that a patient may need community care on leaving hospital.

Under the Bill, where social services do not fulfil their responsibilities, they will have to meet the costs that the hospital incurs in providing care for patients whose discharge has been needlessly delayed. Where similar approaches have been used in other countries, they have worked. Opposition Members are always saying that we should learn from those experiences, and we are trying to do just that. The precise details of the scheme in Sweden are not the same as what we propose here—not least because the structure of health and social care is rather different—but the number of hospital beds occupied by delayed patients was halved in that country, and the average wait for discharge was reduced to just three days.

Some have objected that the Bill will create a perverse incentive for hospitals to discharge patients too early, only for them to have to be readmitted. I understand those concerns, and that is why we have put in place the necessary safeguards to prevent that happening. In future, hospitals will be rated—and therefore rewarded—according to how well they do in reducing emergency readmission rates. What is more, under the new system that we are introducing to pay hospitals for what they do, they will not receive funding for patients who, within a certain period, are readmitted to hospital with the same complaint or a complication of it. Again, the incentive will be on the hospital to discharge appropriately, not inappropriately.

The fundamental objection to the Bill, however, has been that it is all stick and no carrot, as my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) noted. The criticism is that social services are being given a new responsibility without adequate resources. Let me address that in two ways. First, this is not a new responsibility: it exists today. The system simply does not ensure that costs fall where responsibilities lie. Secondly, the Budget provides substantial extra resources for social services, and the means to increase capacity in community services. Incidentally, we took account of any likely costs to social services of this measure in making those resources available.

However, I have considered this point carefully and listened to the representations that have been made today, and on previous occasions, by some Labour Members and by local authorities and local government organisations. The maximum cost that social services would face in payments to hospitals under the Bill would be about £100 million in any one year. That estimate presumes three things.

The first is that councils make no progress whatever beyond the targets that they themselves have already set to reduce the level of delayed discharges from hospitals. Secondly, the £100 million estimate pre-supposes that social services do not use the 6 per cent. annual increase in resources to put in place new services to help reduce delayed discharges from hospitals still further. Finally, the estimate presumes that none of the £1 billion—most of which is earmarked for elderly care services, as I said earlier—gets spent on those very services. I do not believe for a moment that that is what local authorities will do—indeed, they will not be able to do that, as so much of the money is earmarked. Therefore, I do not believe either that social services will have to pay £100 million to the health service.

None the less, I have decided, for each of the next three years, to transfer an extra £100 million, on top of the resources already made available, from the NHS budget to social services for each full year in which the scheme operates. I am doing so in order to provide a positive incentive to ensure that the regime is not punitive and to make the system work. This extra £100 million will now enable individual councils to gain rather than lose from the system—provided, of course, that they make available the community services needed to reduce delayed discharges from hospitals. Hospitals can gain too. As social services reduce the pressures on hospitals, their costs will fall.

My intention is not, and never has been, to punish local government but to pursue a real and sustained reduction in delayed discharge from hospital. Frankly,

there can now be no excuse for social services not to fulfil their responsibilities to older people. I have tried, therefore, to address the legitimate concerns that have been raised by my hon. Friends and others during the course of the debate.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I appreciate the purpose of the Bill, particularly the point about giving the social services extra funding to ensure that they are not punished. However, I have been listening carefully and there seems to be one omission from the Bill—the older people themselves. It seems that they are being treated rather instrumentally. Will my hon. Friend comment on what consultation might be available to older people or their families, or advocacy services if they are not capable?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The philosophy at the heart of the Bill is straightforward. What counts is the user of the service, not health services or social services. They exist for a purpose—to serve the public and, in this case, to serve older people. For a variety of reasons—some to do with resources, some to do with historical capacity, some to do with the structural deficit in our health and social care system—too often older people are let down. That is simply not good enough.

The Bill is about doing what older people want. Older people always say that they want to be independent, not dependent. They want to live in their own home; they do not want to be in a care home, by and large, or in hospitals. Hospitals are not places where people choose to go—they want to get in as quickly as possible and to get out as quickly as possible. The philosophy of the Bill is about ensuring that the older person's needs are fully taken into account. As I said earlier, it is important that the views of individual older people and those of their carers and families are fully taken into account in the discharge process, and that is what we will do.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I will give way and then I really must wind up.

Mr. Lansley: If the Secretary of State were to act on what he said in response to the previous intervention, would the Bill reflect that patients exercising their choice under the choice directive would not lead to fines on social services? What guarantee will he give that the exercise of patient choice will not lead to costs and fines for social services?

Mr. Milburn: There are two issues about the exercise of choice. The hon. Gentleman talks about the direction on choice. There are two groups of people. Self-funders effectively pay for their own care and are not the responsibility of social services. However, social services have an obligation towards people who are their responsibility. There is a direction on choice, of course, and people should be able to exercise choice. However, the direction on choice has never, under the previous Conservative Administration or ours, been about older people being allowed needlessly to occupy hospital beds when they are ready, willing and able to go home. There are important issues surrounding the direction of choice, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, but what most people want is simple. They want to get in and out of hospital as quickly as possible.

I have today provided further resources to local government because we have been told that the problem is resources. I have provided the extra resources; we have assessed the cost of the fines. I have covered the cost of the so-called fines and frankly, there can now be no further excuses for social services not to fulfil their responsibilities.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): My right hon. Friend is being very generous to local authorities, but he has not provided any extra money. He has actually taken £100 million out of the NHS, and that is a worry to me.

Mr. Milburn: That is true. *[Interruption.]* I hope that I am not intruding on private grief. I have transferred £100 million from the national health service to social services. It will help the national health service do its job because if we do not build up social services, NHS hospitals will not be able to do their job. I realise that the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) is hurriedly rewriting his speech as a consequence of my announcement, but it is no use for him to complain about transfer of resources—he is against resources. He is against resources going into the health service. He is against resources going into social services.

For the sake of people in hospital who need to come out and for the sake of people who need to be in hospital, we must address delayed discharges once and for all. The Bill is about making the system work for older people who are needlessly stuck in hospital. It is about putting older people first. It is about helping them to get the right care, in the right place, at the right time. For the first time, the Bill introduces a positive incentive to ensure that the resources of health and social services are directly linked to the responsibilities that they share. It will help to ensure that resources provided for social services are actually spent on social services. The Bill is fair to the national health service, it is fair to local government and, above all, it is fair to older people. I commend it to the House.

3.21 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill because it would be divisive and undermine successful working partnerships between the NHS and Social Services Departments; imposes a negative fining system on local authorities rather than promoting positive policies to tackle the problems facing community care; fails to redress the loss of capacity due to over 60,000 beds being closed down in residential care since 1997 and the closure of over 2,000 care homes; fails to recognise that the number of households receiving domiciliary care has fallen by almost 100,000 households; and unfairly penalises local authorities without improving the system of discharging patients from hospital."

As ever, whether it be the shambles of the fire dispute, the mishandling of the economy or the Government's increasing failure to deal with the woes of the national health service, their approach is exactly the same: to ignore criticism and to pass the buck. However, the problem with which the Bill deals is entirely of the making of the Secretary of State for Health and his Ministers.

[Dr. Liam Fox]

For the past few years, we have been warning of the inevitable consequences of Government policy, and our predictions, unlike those of the Chancellor, turned out to be right. In April 2002, there were an estimated 511,300 places in residential settings for the long-stay care of elderly and physically disabled people across all sectors in the United Kingdom. That is a drop of more than 60,000 places since Labour came to office.

By April 2002, capacity in all those sectors had decreased by 64,300 from the 1996 peak—a decrease of 11 per cent. If we correct those figures to take account of population change, the decrease is even greater: about 20 per cent. from the peak. Most frightening of all, despite all that Conservative Members and even some Labour Back-Benchers have said, 14,000 places were lost last year—the biggest single fall since Labour came to power.

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us about the quality of those residential places? Why should elderly people have to opt for residential care rather than for the wide range of options that will keep them in their homes and support them in the community?

Dr. Fox: Indeed. The drop in the number of care home places would not be so worrying were it not for the drop in the provision of domiciliary care. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) has pointed out, almost 100,000 fewer households have been supplied with domiciliary care since the Government came to office.

What is the effect of all that on the NHS itself? First, as a result of delayed discharges the number of cancelled operations has risen by almost a third since 2000. The Government's own figures show that 77,800 operations were cancelled in 2001, compared with 50,000 in the year they came to power.

Secondly, the number of emergency readmissions has increased as patients are discharged early to try to meet the Government's targets. Over the past year, more than 500,000 patients had to be readmitted; in 10 health authorities the increase in readmissions was more than 10 per cent.

Some of the Government's answers and the Secretary of State's response to the problem are ludicrous. Hospitals will not be funded if patients are readmitted, so presumably if a patient with angina is discharged from hospital, suffers a myocardial infarction and has to go into coronary care, the hospital will not be funded for that. What a brilliant proposal—extremely helpful to NHS trusts, I am sure.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): I admire the hon. Gentleman's concern about delayed discharges. What resources would he commit to ensure that discharges were not delayed? How much money would he give?

Dr. Fox: It is a matter of priorities. If we were in office we would not be wasting hundreds of millions of pounds on the Government's pointless waiting list targets. We would not be employing the extra tens of thousands of bureaucrats that the Government require for an endless paperchase which today's proposals will make worse. We want to talk about whether the measure will make whatever funding is available work better or worse for patient care. The answer is clear: it will work worse because the situation is getting worse.

In the first quarter of this year, 8 per cent. of elderly patients who were discharged were readmitted within 28 days, and 3.2 per cent. were readmitted within seven. That is a massive increase even on just a year ago. What is the Government's response to this very complex situation? They have produced this pointless, ill-thought-out, punitive—a word used by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara)—contradictory and self-defeating Bill.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood) *rose—*

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West) *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I shall give way to one of the revenge of the clones later. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. The House must quieten down; this is a debate, and we should have reasoned argument on both sides.

Dr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Martlew: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it right for an hon. Member to refer to another as a clone?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have heard quite a number of expressions which on the whole I would prefer not to be used, but I do not think that that word has been classified as non-parliamentary language.

Dr. Fox: You can always tell when hon. Members are getting desperate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The trouble with the Bill is that it tries to blame local authorities for something that is beyond their control. It will place new burdens and costs on them. It is based on false assumptions. It is will increase bureaucracy and red tape, damage health and social care relationships, produce perverse incentives and increase the likelihood of decisions on care being taken inappropriately. In other words, the Bill runs the risk of producing exactly the opposite of what the Government claim it will produce.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The central thrust of Conservative party policy on the care of the elderly appears to involve more and more institutional care. On the hon. Gentleman's travels around Europe—I met him on a plane a few weeks ago—has he dropped in on Denmark, which has a similar proportion of elderly and very elderly people to this country, but no old people's homes at all?

Dr. Fox: That is a very useful point. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I would agree on one thing: for elderly patients, as for all other patients, the most important phrase is "appropriateness of care", which involves having a full range of provision. Some patients require and want long-term care in nursing or residential homes,

but that will not be available if the capacity decreases as quickly as it has in the past five years, and the Bill will do nothing to help.

The Bill will add substantially to the burdens on already hard-pressed local authorities. At least the Government are being consistent. Let us consider the list of obligations imposed without proper funding in recent years, starting with flooding. Emergency grants from central Government are not even remotely covering all the costs of recent floods, as millions of council tax payers are about to find out. The Homelessness Act 2002, passed during the previous parliamentary Session, imposed new burdens on local authorities to draw up new homelessness strategies. Air targets have been devised by Brussels and announced by the Minister for the Environment but are being funded by no one. Waste recycling will cost at least £55 million, and there are asylum costs, travel concessions and the huge burden of children's services, the costs of which fall on local government and accounted for 64 per cent. of the total overspend last year.

Dr. Desmond Turner *rose—*

Dr. Starkey *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I have given way already and will do so again later.

There is no point in Ministers saying that they are giving more money to local authorities, because the rate at which they are piling on responsibilities is greater than the rate at which funding is being applied to local authorities to cope with those responsibilities.

Most absurd of all, the Secretary of State said today that the Government have introduced the Bill because bed blocking is costing the NHS money and local government must play its part in sharing responsibility, but what are they proposing to do? They will fine the NHS £100 million and give the money to social services so that, when they fine them, they can give back the money. If that is not complete bureaucratic madness, I do not know what is. It can only help bureaucrats and produce paperchases; it will do nothing to help local government, hospitals or the patients themselves.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's giving way on that point because I was lost earlier when I heard that health service costs would be reduced. Is it not a fact that the procedures in the health service put up the costs, so if beds are vacated—for which we would be thankful—there will be more operations, more procedures and increased costs and therefore health service costs will not be reduced?

Dr. Fox: The hon. Gentleman may be right. It is certainly true that despite the increased amount of money that the Government have undoubtedly put into the NHS in real terms, the level of activity coming out is very much less than predicted. Funding has increased by almost 11 per cent. in real terms, but the level of activity is up by less than 2 per cent. Clearly, therefore, there is a huge amount of wastage.

It seems that Ministers are not yet content with the amount of costs that they are imposing on local government. When one asks local authorities how much they think the scheme will cost, one finds that their estimate is a lot higher than that of the Secretary of State. The Association of London Government estimates that the cost to it alone will be £25 million a year. Buckinghamshire estimates that it will cost £2 million; Essex that it will cost £3 million; Cambridgeshire, £1.4 million; Surrey, between £6 million and £7 million; and Kent, £5.5 million. What are Ministers trying to do? Do they have any understanding of the real problems of local government in the real world? I shall now give way to the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey).

Dr. Starkey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for at least demonstrating, unlike the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), that he notices women and realises that they are individuals, not clones. Is he suggesting that councils should not fulfil their current obligations unless they get additional money from Government? Why does he think that some councils can fulfil their obligations but not others? Does he not think that the councils bear some responsibility for that?

Dr. Fox: Of course, they are supposed to work in a partnership wherever possible. But the whole point of the debate is to examine whether the Bill will improve the working relationships between health and social services, or whether it will make them more difficult. As I pointed out to the Secretary of State, if he thinks that the Bill will improve the relationship, why is 30 per cent. of the entire Bill devoted to new bodies being introduced to resolve disputes which, as the Bill admits, do not currently exist? That is not an improvement in the working of the current system, which is what everybody would like.

Much of the Government's case has been based on their interpretation of the system in Sweden. On 18 April 2002, the Secretary of State made a statement in the House of Commons, announcing the Command Paper, "Delivering the NHS Plan", in which he said that the Government were impressed by the success in getting delayed discharges from hospitals down of the system in countries like Sweden and Denmark. Had the Secretary of State made a visit to examine the project? No, he had not. According to the *Health Service Journal*, the Government's decision to bring in cross-charging was taken without even consulting Gert Alaby, the architect of the Swedish model on which Mr. Wanless had placed so much emphasis—although it was also reported that Mr. Wanless had not met Mr. Alaby either. Yet the Department of Health said recently that there had been conversations with a "number of people" in Sweden.

If the Secretary of State or Mr. Wanless want to know about the problems in Sweden, they can ask the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound), who made a telling intervention in the Queen's Speech debate:

> "May I point out some of the differences between that model and what we have been discussing today? In Sweden there was a two-year lead-in time before the proposals were implemented. In addition, local authorities had responsibility for a vast range of alternative provision, including direct commissioning of health care."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 231.]

The hon. Gentleman seems to have a much greater grasp than the Secretary of State. Had the Government looked at the model, they would have found that Swedish local authorities are responsible for social care as well as hospital care, so they can affect patient flows into the

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acute sector. That is not possible in our system, because the primary care trusts have discretion over the flow of patients into the hospitals, but local government is to be made financially liable for discharging—it will be punished for something over which it has absolutely no control. Where is the fairness in such a proposal? Do Ministers have any idea of the damage that they might be inflicting on the ground?

Several Labour Members, including the Secretary of State, have mentioned working relationships. The central proposal in the Bill risks undoing what has undoubtedly been a recent improvement in the NHS: the increased willingness of health and social care departments to work together. That still has a long way to go but, in the words of one Labour Member, "the direction of travel is positive when viewed as part of the complete patient journey," which in English means that things are getting a bit better on the ground. The real change that the Bill might introduce was well expressed by the British Medical Association, which fears that the plans will seriously damage working relationships:

"the BMA supports co-operation and improving co-ordination between health and social services to provide seamless high quality services for vulnerable patients who may be adversely affected by the barriers that exist between social services and the NHS. The proposal for fines has the potential to damage some of the good relationships that have evolved with the greater opportunities for joint working."

It is not alone in that view. The Association of Directors of Social Services, the NHS Confederation and the Local Government Association made the following joint statement:

"Real progress has been made in forging partnerships between health and local government, including the particularly successful joint work to alleviate winter pressures."

We would all welcome that. The statement continued:

"A recent Audit Commission report endorsed the successful partnerships already in place. We want to build on these to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, reduce delayed discharges and provide integrated health and social care services. It would be a retrograde step if the current proposals undermined this trust and led to the development of adversarial relationships rather than cooperation between health and local government".

Mr. Martlew *rose—*

Mr. Steinberg *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I will give way in a moment.

It is typical of the Government to believe that they know better than those on the front line who are already responsible for these services, and so like them to produce yet another one-size-fits-all blueprint designed in Whitehall against all the advice of those with hands-on experience.

Mr. Steinberg: I have some sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman says, although I do not necessarily agree with all his comments. What would he do to a social services department that receives money to use to unblock beds in hospitals but does not use that money accordingly? What sanctions would he use against authorities that do not use the money for the purpose for which it is given?

Dr. Fox: When we in the House talk about sanctions, I think we are in danger of believing that Whitehall always knows best about resolving these problems. What has been happening on the ground—I am the first to admit that the approach has definitely improved—is an evolution of understanding between health and social care and an improvement in the working relationship. That is not universal, and the relationship still leaves a lot to be desired in some parts of the country, but it is improving. Why risk undermining all that by introducing a Bill that will set one part of the system against another? That cannot make any sense. When all those on the ground are saying that this is mistake, why are the Government pushing ahead with a proposal that can only lead to greater acrimony?

Under the proposals, local authorities will come under pressure as never before. The question we must ask is whether these changes will increase or decrease the probability of finding the most suitable care and type of placement for individual patients' needs. Alternatively, are the proposals likely to mean that, to avoid financial penalties, patients will be removed from hospital to the first available place, whether it is the right place or not? That is a major problem. Are we likely to see a repeat of some of the awful cases of inappropriate care being provided for elderly people? Elderly patients have a right to feel less secure under these changes—for the first time, they are being regarded in the system as a financial liability to be moved around for cost reasons.

The potential for perverse incentives as a result of the Bill is equally worrying. The hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) raised the issue of the impact on general practitioners. Let me tell him one of the problems that the Bill will produce. GPs who are already finding it difficult to get their patients placed in a care home will come to understand something new: precedence will be given by local authorities to patients who are already in acute wards in a hospital. What will be the inevitable result? It will be the creation of a perverse incentive whereby GPs know that they are most likely to be able to get a patient into a care home by first getting them into an acute unit. That has the potential to cause more delayed discharges, by blocking more hospital beds, than we have at present. I am sure that that is not what the Government intend, but that will be the effect in the real world. It is the inevitable result of the Government not understanding how the system works in reality.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): As the Secretary of State was unable or unwilling to answer this point, perhaps my hon. Friend can touch on it. The logical extension of what he is saying is that a problem that is already bad will be made worse. One of the principal causes of bed blocking is that families will not accept the provision that is being offered and want choice. How will that dispute be resolved within a three-day time limit? Will not beds be even more blocked as a result of what my hon. Friend describes?

Dr. Fox: As I said, there is the great possibility that things will deteriorate rather than improve as a result of the Bill. I am sure that Ministers do not intend it to have that effect, but that is what will happen, and it is the Bill, not the intention, that we are discussing. We have to take into account what we judge to be its effect on real patients in the real world, not what we think Ministers might want to happen.

The Bill leaves far too many questions unanswered. Those who followed the sad affair of the Government's creation of the care home crisis will be aware that there was much consensus on the Care Standards Act 2000, and that the damage came not from the contents of the Act itself, but from the ministerial regulations that were applied later on, which were recently subjected to a U-turn. Indeed, the Government's standard approach is to produce the merest skeleton of a Bill only to flesh it out later with mile upon mile of red tape and regulation. It is usually a sign that they are making it up as they go along.

The Bill falls neatly into that category. Far too much of it depends on subsequent regulation to make it work and many of the important questions go unanswered. For example, who lays down the level of fines? The Secretary of State estimates that local authorities will be liable to pay a total of £100 million, but who sets the fine? How often will it be changed? Will there be an upper limit or will it be at the discretion of a future Secretary of State? Will fines apply if there is no appropriate bed, no other placement or no individual care available? Who will make those decisions? What will the Secretary of State do to determine who is, or is expected to become, a qualifying hospital patient? What procedures will be used and how does he justify such a ludicrous level of mismanagement when uses such achingly funny rhetoric about devolving power?

Then we have the problem of the dispute resolution mechanism. The disputes do not exist at the moment, but the Government admit that they will arise when the Bill is implemented. Three clauses out of 10 relate to the resolution of conflicts. Strategic health authorities are being established to steer the panels, which means that the NHS will be judge and jury in disputes between the NHS and local authorities. What sort of people will sit on the panels? What qualifications will they need? Most importantly, how much time and money will this nonsense divert from patient care into unnecessary, pointless and mindless bureaucratic squabbles?

Mr. Waterson: Is my hon. Friend aware of Age Concern's opinion that the Government's proposals may be in conflict with standard 2 of the national service framework for older people, which specifies that older people should be treated as individuals and enabled to make choices about their care?

Dr. Fox: I am sure that that is the correct approach. To be fair, I am not saying that the Government intend to do otherwise. Regardless of their intentions, however, the Bill could become another Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and have the opposite effect of that intended. The Bill is a bad piece of legislation. Although it includes some good things that could command support on both sides of the House, they are totally outweighed by the dreadful provisions that I have outlined.

The Bill will not achieve its aims. It may well result in exactly the opposite. It is unfair to local government; it will divert time and effort away from patient care into bureaucratic games; it will create perverse incentives; and it will increase the risk of inappropriate care, especially for the elderly. It is part of the paperchase NHS created by the Government. It is about throughput not outcomes. It is about a "Never mind the quality, feel the width" health service. It punishes one group for the failure of others over whom they have no control. Of all new Labour's crazy ideas, this is the craziest. I urge the House to oppose the Bill before untold damage is done.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

3.44 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Setting aside the somewhat hysterical contribution of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), I think it would be impossible to find anyone in the House or the country who would argue against the basis of the Government's proposal to have a national and properly integrated, multifaceted, high-quality service for older people. I do not think that anyone would argue with the Government's attempts to ensure that taxpayers' money earmarked for the provision of integrated social services for the elderly is spent. There can be no possible argument with the fact that the Government have their heart in the right place. They are clearly committed to ensuring that care for the elderly is not limited exclusively to residential care or nursing care, or to the practice of keeping elderly people in hospital long after their medical condition warrants a discharge.

Local authorities have been criticised for failing to spend the taxpayers' money that is accorded to them. That criticism could not, by the widest stretch of the imagination, be levelled against my local authority, Camden. It is not only council of the year, but a beacon authority for the care that it provides to elderly people. It has also more than spent the money that was earmarked by the Government for the provision of social services. It has exceeded the £30,876,000 given to it by more than £2 million. There is no doubt that the authority takes on board the thrust of the Government's policies, and not only in the provision of integrated services for the elderly. It is the first local authority to create an integrated mental health and social services trust. I pay tribute to the Government and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for ensuring that that was created.

Having been as polite as it is possible to be, I come to the difficult bit, which is to be critical of the Government. I would be less than honest if I did not say that it is my bounden duty to criticise aspects of their proposals. I am most critical of the idea that social services are exclusively responsible for ensuring that an elderly person does not remain in hospital longer than necessary. My constituency is part of an inner-London borough. Like other such boroughs, we have a suppliers' market for residential nursing home places. The homes charge and obtain higher fees for clients from the private sector. My local authority has received additional funding for the building care component, but there is still a desperate shortage of places, not least because patients in the two main teaching hospitals in the borough of Camden are not exclusively Camden residents. Social services departments outside Camden find places for their residents within my borough's boundaries because the treatment there is best suited to their needs.

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There is another problem. It arises, curiously, from the fact that the Government have been hoisted on the petard of their own success. They listened to what hon. Members said about providing individuals with the ability and, indeed, the money to arrange their own domiciliary care. That has had an impact on local authorities, especially ones like Camden, because it removes the ability for authorities to block buy domiciliary care when elderly individuals return home.

Difficulties also arise in hospitals and medical teams when they have to determine whether an individual is ready to leave hospital. If they agree that someone can leave, the next problem is ensuring that that person can return to an independent and healthy life.

As I said, Camden has spent more than central Government gave it to provide integrated services for elderly people. It has increased the numbers of step-down beds and domiciliary beds and transformed some of its housing stock so that it can take people in wheelchairs, but there is still an element of bed blocking.

In some cases the failure to remove an elderly person from hospital has to do with limited capacity in occupational therapy. That point is anecdotal and I do not have figures to support it. As a Conservative Back Bencher said, there may be difficulties because the family disagree with what is proposed for their relative. It is not unusual for an elderly person to have no family or for the only person capable of caring for them to be as old and, in some instances, as frail as they are, so a return to home, even with a properly integrated programme of domiciliary care, may not be the best solution for that individual.

There seems to me to be gross inequity in the Government's proposals. I listened with interest to what the Secretary of State said about setting a ceiling of £100 million on the fines that may be imposed on local authorities and about taking that money out of the NHS. The fact remains, however, that local authority social services are not exclusively responsible for delayed discharges.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): The hon. Lady makes a good point with which I agree. Does she also agree that readmission is not exclusively the fault of hospitals? She referred to the multidisciplinary teams responsible for discharge delays, but they may also be responsible for high readmission rates, so it would be wholly wrong to fine hospitals for those rates, for the same reason that it would be wrong to fine social services departments.

Glenda Jackson: I hesitate to agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that it is wholly wrong to impose fines because there are examples of best practice, certainly in hospitals. I know that some hospitals—not, I hasten to add, in my constituency—are dilatory in tackling these issues, and I am perfectly prepared to accept that some councils are less than good and do not spend the entire amount earmarked for social care for the elderly. However, we delude ourselves if we believe that the integrated, high quality care that we all want our elderly people to receive will be delivered by proposals that, in targeting bad councils, have a deleterious effect on local authorities that are committed to, and doing their best to deliver, those services.

I am concerned about the time afforded by the Government for consultation. There is an opportunity to reconsider the model on which the proposals have been based. I am not for one moment saying that they will not be effective, but this may not be the best model for achieving the aim to which the Government are clearly committed. There should be an opportunity for local authorities that are delivering high quality services and want to improve their delivery to make representations to the Government about the model that they would introduce. There are also justifiable concerns about the additional costs to local authorities, which are inherent in the Bill.

There is no uniformity among the many agencies responsible for ensuring that elderly people, once discharged from hospital, receive the care that is best for them. There are variations in practices and disagreements about which produces the best care. I am fully prepared to accept that the Government's heart is in the right place, but the basis of implementing their proposals is partnership, which means that the constituent partners who will eventually deliver these high quality services have at least to agree on the basics. It would be nice if they all had similar information technology, but they do not, so any attempt to track down the best person to provide a service among a wide range of service providers is time consuming. As we know, time equals money, so additional burdens may be placed on local authorities.

As I said, I strongly believe that the Government's heart is in the right place. We all want to see the highest quality services delivered, but I urge the Secretary of State to consider the points that will undoubtedly be made because there are dangers in the Bill, even though I will, of course, vote for its Second Reading.

3.55 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): The Secretary of State told us that there is no magic wand to deal with delayed discharges, and I agree. The Bill is not a solution to that problem; it will simply exacerbate it and cause further problems in the NHS and the whole care system. The right hon. Gentleman's announcement of a £100 million sweetener will do nothing to remove the bitter taste of the Bill. The fact that that money is to be taken from the NHS, given to social services and then returned to the NHS is an admission that the Bill is fundamentally flawed because it is based on a crude market mechanism that does not reflect the complexities of the situation.

The Secretary of State told us that the proposed penalty system is based on one that was introduced 10 years ago in Sweden, but the penalties introduced there were only part of a much wider set of reforms to that country's care system and they were arrived at after a good deal of consultation and debate. They aimed to shift the centre of gravity in the Swedish care system out of the acute sector and into community care systems. That is not the aim of this proposal, which is grafted on to a system that includes a large amount of private and independent provision, whereas care in Sweden is largely provided by the state, through local govt. By contrast, in the UK, we have seen the NHS withdraw from long-term care, and a fragmented, unplanned set of arrangements put in its place.

Reading the report of the Health Committee's inquiry into delayed discharges earlier this year, I found that some of the most interesting hearings were those with the Department's officials. Their ideas do not appear to have got through to the Ministers framing the policy and the measures in this Bill. For example, the chief inspector of social services told the Committee in February:

"Our concern about the over-75s is that delayed discharges here are a symptom that we need to do something about the totality of the system for older people. Actually just homing in on the issue of delayed discharges is concealing that there is a systems issue."

It is a systems issue, yet the Bill provides a quick fix by introducing a single incentive that will have a series of consequences, many of which are not those intended by Ministers. It is certainly not a solution for the whole system.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The Bill deals with England and Wales, but both health and social services are devolved responsibilities, so I hoped that this would be enabling legislation within the spirit of the devolution settlement. In Wales, the Assembly already provides free care for six weeks after discharge from hospital. It would like, if it had the power, to provide free long-term care for the elderly, which it believes would prevent unnecessary admission to hospital and promote prompt discharge.

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend has made an important point about whether the Bill should apply equally to England and Wales. It is one thing for English Health Ministers to want to put the proposal into practice, but it is entirely different for it to apply automatically to Wales. I hope that as the Bill proceeds through the House, we will find a way for Wales to have discretion. Given the Government's commitment to devolution, I hope that the Bill will include powers to enable the Welsh Assembly to go as far as it wants in providing long-term care and making personal care free on the basis of an assessment of need.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): My interest in these matters derives from the fact that I introduced a measure as far back as 1986 covering the whole UK, so I am interested in seeing how the Bill progresses. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the Secretary of State, who made an important point—not mentioned by the Opposition spokesman—when he said that of course we want to consult patients, their families and their advocates?

Mr. Gale: How do you do that in three days?

Mr. Burstow: The Bill does not stipulate the patient's right of consent to discharge arrangements. Nothing in the Bill stipulates the carer's right to be consulted about whether or not they wish to continue to take on a caring duty or, indeed, take it on in the first place. There have been representations from many organisations about the absence of those issues from the Bill. I hope that in Committee we can move beyond the vague promises that that will be dealt with in regulations to cast-iron commitments that it will be dealt with in the Bill.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) asked how consultation could be completed in three days. We have been told that the Government are satisfied that we will have a partial assessment of someone's needs while they are in hospital. What on earth is that? How does it relate to the single assessment that the Government said would be in place from April this year? We now have the spectacle of the Government wanting to rush through discharges and implement an assessment procedure that does not include everyone who ought to be part of the process, shunting patients into an unsatisfactory interim provision and leaving them there too long.

Dr. Starkey: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many local authorities, including my own, have already attempted to solve that problem by providing heavily supported, if I can so describe it, accommodation for patients who have been discharged—in my local authority's case, for up to six weeks—to give them time to decide whether they need to go into full-time residential care or go back home? Is that not better than leaving those patients in a hospital bed, which is unsuitable for elderly patients?

Mr. Burstow: It is better, but there will be a short decision-making process of three days to get someone out of hospital, which does not address their long-term care. We need a process that ensures that appropriate judgments are made. The hon. Lady must address the fact that the provision that her local authority has been able to make does not exist universally across the country, and is unlikely to come on-stream when the Bill is enacted. I want to try to explain why that is the case.

The Bill is all about treating symptoms, and does not tackle causes such as lack or loss of capacity upstream and downstream in our care system. Budget pressures have forced social services departments in the past 10, 15 or 20 years increasingly to ration access to care. Eligibility criteria have been drawn ever tighter as a result. Indeed, the Local Government Association says that two thirds of local authorities have narrowed their criteria still further in the past two years. They have done so by denying help to people with moderate needs or carers; by making people with high needs wait, often in their own home; and by setting limits on price, quantity and quality of care. In the past 20 years, social services departments have withdrawn home help services that offer domestic help and have concentrated care on the most disabled and dependent, in stark contrast to what is done in Sweden—the exemplar that the Government have chosen to use for the Bill. In Sweden, people still have home help services, which cover such activities as cleaning, shopping, outings, social contact and so on. The penalty system to be introduced by the Bill will undermine efforts to develop the preventive services that the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) and many other Members believe should be widely available. Investment in prevention can postpone the onset of disablement, disability, illness and dependency, and has the biggest long-term impact on the problem of inappropriate admissions to hospital that result in delays in discharge.

It is not only upstream that there are capacity problems—there are serious capacity constraints downstream as well. We have serious staffing problems in the care system across the country, including a 15 per cent. vacancy rate for occupational therapists. Indeed, 40 per cent. of local authorities report severe difficulties in recruiting occupational therapists, who are key

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players in facilitating a speedy discharge from hospital, enabling adaptations and changes in someone's property to be made quickly. If the OT is not there, who will do the assessments? That issue was considered by the Select Committee, but I do not think that it reached a final conclusion on how to progress the matter.

Mrs. Humble: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that in Lancashire occupational therapists are employed by the health authority. If the OT is not there to provide a service, that is not social services' fault, but the fault of the health service. That complicates the situation.

Mr. Burstow: Basically, there are not enough OTs to go round. There is also the spectre of social services and the health service competing for a scarce resource. Until additional OTs are in place, we shall continue to have logjams in the system, as there is a fundamental lack of capacity. Those capacity constraints also apply to home care staff—the latest figures suggest that there is a 10 per cent. vacancy rate. We have serious problems recruiting such staff because they are low paid and undervalued. Unless we tackle that, we shall continue to have problems and will certainly not fulfil the Government's ambition to have more people cared for in their own homes.

Because of rationing, fewer people, as has been said, are receiving home care. The figure may be disputed, but 110,000 fewer home care packages are being delivered. Ministers say that that is because people are getting other services instead, such as meals on wheels, day care and so on. It is clear, however, that the figures for home care support have gone down. People who get such care, however, are getting it for more hours because they are more dependent. The Government's mantra is prevention. In practice, however, when they are judged on the figures, their emphasis is on dealing with crises and the most dependent people, and not prevention.

Capacity has also been lost in the care home sector, and is not being replaced by more care in people's own homes. The loss of 60,000 beds over the past five years has been mentioned but, more importantly, in the past three years closures have exceeded new registrations, which have been flatlining for at least three years.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): The hon. Gentleman has just referred to the loss of 60,000 care home places, as mentioned by the Conservative spokesman, and also referred to the report by the Select Committee on Health on delayed discharges. Has he not seen the part of the report dealing with care home places, which suggests the loss is nothing like 60,000?

Mr. Burstow: I read that and the dissection of the Government's figures. The Committee was fair, and acknowledged that the figure of 19,000, which is regularly trotted out by Ministers, is probably more misleading than the figure of 60,000 cited in Laing and Buisson's report.

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, whatever Ministers may say. Before he is led astray by the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), may I point out that there was not a unanimous decision by the Health Committee on the number of beds lost? The report was actually rammed through by a majority of aspiring Labour Back Benchers.

Mr. Burstow: I am sure that the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) is one of those aspiring Back Benchers.

I want to focus on the figures from Laing and Buisson's report for 2001, which give the net position—the gross figures have given cause for concern. In 2001, 107 new homes, amounting to 3,800 new beds, were registered. During that period, however, 828 homes closed with the loss of 16,600 beds. There is therefore a clear downward trend in the sector, which, in some parts of the country, has contributed to the problem of delayed charge.

The Minister told us in a statement in July that the Government aim to stimulate the care home market to get more care home beds back into the sector. They stated in their document that they want an extra 6,000 beds by 2006, the majority by 2004. I hope that the Minister can tell us how those beds are to be achieved, where they will be provided, and how the barriers posed by the development value of land will be overcome, given the investment costs and the risks involved, and given the fact that the rate of fees has still not gone up sufficiently to bring new players into the market. Why would anyone come into a market where the fee rates are unsustainably low? Work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation clearly shows a shortfall in the resources going into the sector.

Dr. Stoate: The hon. Gentleman is generous in giving way yet again. He is exercised by the number of care beds in the system, and of course that is important, but is he aware of a recent national audit commissioned by the NHS executive, which found that 17 per cent. of elderly people living in nursing homes no longer needed nursing home care at all? Surely it is more important to make sure that the right people are in the right homes than to worry about the absolute number of beds, given that 17 per cent. of elderly people were apparently in the wrong place.

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman makes a self-evident but nevertheless valuable point. I am not arguing that care homes are good and anything else is irrelevant but that there is a fundamental problem of capacity, not just in care home places but in home care places. We need more investment upstream to ensure that we can postpone or prevent the onset of the disability and illness that result in admissions in the first place. That ought to be a key priority for investment, but I fear that it will be denied because of the penalties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) has drawn my attention to figures produced in Surrey. I understand that 225 people are experiencing delayed discharge from hospitals in the county, and 120 of them are believed to be the responsibility of the county. Of those 120, 30 are funded but no placement is available because of care home closures and the lack of capacity that I have described, and the other 90 are unfunded.

From next April, the building capacity grant about which the Government have spoken a great deal, and which has been paid for the past one and a half years,

comes to an end. That grant has been used to provide ongoing services, new care packages, the fees paid to care homes and for other purposes. Those are ongoing commitments that arise from a specific grant, and in future years they will have to be funded out of the 6 per cent. real-terms growth. However, the funding commitments that councils have already made will leave little of that new money available for new investment in new services.

I shall give an example from Kent county council, which received £2.12 million through that grant in 2001–02. In a full year, the council believes that the cost of its investments amounts to £6.5 million, but in 2002–03 its grant for building capacity was £4.7 million—a gap of £2 million. The gap continues to grow because the people for whom the council is providing services continue to need those services. Why will not the Minister confirm that the penalties system is simply designed to give the Treasury its pound of flesh for giving extra money to social services in the Budget this year? Even that extra money, welcome though it is, leaves social services behind the curve in terms of meeting demand and reducing rationing in the care system.

During the Select Committee hearings on delayed discharge, officials told the Committee that dementia

"is a principal cause of delayed discharge because of the complexity that having dementia plus a physical illness produces in terms of developing a good discharge plan."

and that the latest figures

"suggest that about 70 per cent. of people in nursing homes, not EMI homes but nursing homes, have a level of cognitive impairment that affects their mental function."

There is not enough provision in this country, whether in people's own homes or in care homes, to provide a decent standard of care to people with dementia, and nothing that I have heard today suggests that that is to be addressed in the near future. In the national service framework for older people, the targets that have been set for dementia care do not require anything to be done until 2004.

The Bill undermines partnership arrangements. It is a recipe for conflict. As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said, it is wrong to blame social services as though delayed discharge were their sole responsibility. The Bill turns patients into commodities labelled as bringing in or losing money, depending on one's point of view. The wording of the Bill sounds like a fed-up parent mediating between two scrapping children. It is not surprising that the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services oppose the Bill, but it might be surprising that the NHS Confederation does. Those are the managers who will have to live with the consequences of the Bill that the Government are trying to foist upon them.

Why do not the Government instead take forward the ideas suggested by the NHS Confederation for joint local protocols and building on existing partnerships? The Government say that they will aid partnership through the Bill, but it is a strange sort of partnership where one partner is given a stick with which to beat the other. That sounds more like domestic violence than relationship building.

The Bill ignores the patients' and carers' perspective. All the submissions from charities representing older people and carers that I have read oppose the penalty system. The Bill as drafted makes patients the passive recipients of care, rather than active participants in their own care and recovery—

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): So what does the patient stuck in NHS provision—it may be an older person or a person with a mental illness—do when, despite all the protocols and all the good intentions, nobody will help them move?

Mr. Burstow: Under the Bill, such people will not have access to advocacy services to help them with their discharge and they will not even be asked, because the Bill does not address their right to give consent to be discharged. It does not even address whether the carer should be consulted. Such considerations are absent from the Bill. We have the vague promise that the discharge workbook, which the Government have been promising for two years to update, will be updated. The hon. Gentleman should address his question to Ministers, not to me.

Why does the Bill make no provision for patient consent or for consulting carers? I hope that we can persuade the Government to do that in Committee. As Carers UK has documented in its report, "You can take him home now", 77 per cent. of carers said that they were not given a choice about taking on a caring responsibility. Carers UK also found that emergency readmissions had increased from 19 to 43 per cent. among the carers surveyed, and carers increasingly saw early discharge as the reason. Emergency readmissions have been increasing. The latest figures available show that 122,357 people experienced emergency readmissions, which is an 11 per cent. rise in two years. In its representations, the Royal College of Nursing points out that that is symptomatic of inappropriate discharges.

In the NHS plan, we were told that there would be an equivalent penalty system for emergency readmissions. What we have heard today is a watering-down of that, so there is no equivalence between emergency readmissions and delayed discharge. Instead, they are to be linked to star ratings and nothing else.

Dr. Murrison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burstow: I must make progress, so I will continue, if I may.

Standard 2 of the national service framework sta[illegible] that older people should receive care that meets th[illegible]r needs as individuals, and [illegible] the role of the NHS and social services departments is to enable people to make choices about their own care. The penalties will not facilitate that. Health care should be driven by the needs of patients, but the Bill puts tick-boxes and spreadsheets first. Ministerial obsession with delayed discharge is distorting priorities. Penalties to incentivise one part of the system will have knock-on effects.

What happens to the elderly person in their own home who is waiting for an assessment? What happens to their care? The Bill means that social services departments will be forced to prioritise the person in a hospital bed ahead of the person in their own home—a case of them being out of sight and out of mind, and certainly not being a priority when it comes to avoiding penalties.

[Mr. Burstow]

The message that the Bill sends to the House and the country is that the Government are setting up a system that creates perverse incentives where the only way in which some people can get appropriate care and ensure that they are fast-tracked is through hospital admission.

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman estimated that the cost to local authorities of the provisions on fines would be approximately £50 million. What mathematical formula did he use to arrive at that figure?

Mr. Burstow: That is a very fair question. Indeed, we will be asking some questions about how the Secretary of State arrived at the £100 million figure that was mentioned today, which is very interesting and double the Liberal Democrats' estimate. We decided to adopt a conservative approach. The basis of the calculation was to use the most recently available delayed discharge figures and apply the rates differentially, based on £120 for London and the south-east and £100 everywhere else. We applied those levels to the figures that are provided on a regional basis, and that is how we produced our estimate. It is interesting that the Government's estimate is now twice as large. Perhaps that shows that they have figures that they have not yet made available that should be brought into the public domain.

Mr. Burns: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman asked his question and had his answer, so he cannot really expect me to give way again.

The Bill is fatally flawed and will create a blame game between the national health service and social services. It will distort priorities, leave people waiting still longer in their homes to get the care that they need and result in patients and carers being left out of the equation. Delayed discharges are a symptom of chronic under-investment not only by this Government, but over decades, and of the rationing of care. The Bill does nothing to address those underlying problems; if anything, it will make them worse. That is why the Liberal Democrats will vote against it.

4.22 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): When we debate a Bill on Second Reading, we basically debate its principles. I fundamentally disagree with the principles of this Bill, which I think is flawed and will ultimately prove damaging to many positive policies that the Government have promoted.

My hon. Friends on the Front Bench deserve congratulation on many of the initiatives that they have developed, such as joint working, community care, the flexibilities in the Health Act 1999, limited pooling of budgets and care trusts. They have introduced a range of initiatives that have genuinely improved joint working locally, as the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said. However, I fear that the Bill is taking us in the other direction. I welcome the Government's increase in funding for local authority social services, but it is a belated recognition of the serious difficulties that many local councillors face.

The Select Committee on Health considered the figures for 2001–02 in its recent public expenditure inquiry. It is interesting to compare the real-terms growth of the national health service, at 9.4 per cent., with that of social services, which is 1.3 per cent. We are making assumptions about the Bill on the basis of the experience in that year and previous ones when that huge discrepancy existed in the funding of those two areas. An extra £100 million has been promised by the Secretary of State—it will be taken from health funding to go into social services—but the Health Committee estimated in its public expenditure inquiry, on the basis of the Government's figures, that local authorities are already spending £200 million more than their budget on social services in 2001–02. That puts his £100 million figure into context. Some 10 per cent. of English local authorities are spending more than their standard spending assessment levels.

It is fair to say that we have treated social services as a poor relation—a term that was used by the Secretary of State. We are now putting the boot into that poor relation and we need to think the matter through very carefully. As my right hon. Friend made his speech, one of my hon. Friends asked me, "Who thought this one up?" In trying to work out some of the measures in the Queen's Speech whose logic I cannot understand, having believed in Labour party health policy for my whole adult life, I have concluded that some adviser or civil servant has been rooting around in the cellars of Richmond house and found in a file some dusty papers that were prepared for a Tory Secretary of State 20-odd years ago. That is the only conclusion that I can draw on the logic of foundation hospitals.

The supposed logic behind the Bill is based on thinking that is completely outdated, because it is rooted in the social services environment of at least 20 years ago, when social services were direct providers of care and could offer care home places and accommodation under part III of the National Assistance Act 1948. I worked in social services for many years in the 1970s. I went to hospitals, saw patients who were deemed fit for discharge, assessed their suitability under part III, and could then arrange a direct placement under those provisions. That is no longer the case. The previous regime rapidly got rid of local authority direct care provision, and in answer to the Health Committee, the Government now describe the role of local authority social services as managing the private care market. The arena is now fundamentally different from the one in which I worked 20 years ago, when the thinking behind the Bill emerged.

I am concerned about being told that we are considering practice in Sweden. I have always had a great interest in Scandinavian social policy, as I think that Scandinavia is light years ahead of the UK, having been there a number of times. I also found out recently that the origins of the Hinchliffe family are Norse, so perhaps I am genetically programmed towards Scandinavian social policy. However, I know enough about Sweden—indeed, I shall be there on Sunday evening with one or two of my hon. Friends—to know that its health and social care system is fundamentally different. As other hon. Members have mentioned, the Swedish system is better resourced and Sweden has higher taxes and better services. There is also far less reliance on the private market, much greater direct

provision and different charging regimes. We are making the same mistake that Tory Front Benchers have made on several occasions—that of going to Timbuktu, plucking out an obscure policy and trying to apply it to the UK. That is a ludicrous thing to do because the systems are fundamentally different.

Reference has been made to the Health Committee's recent inquiry into delayed discharges. I should like to quote from some of the evidence that we heard. Mike Leadbetter, the former president of the Association of Directors of Social Services, said that the measure was "a perverse incentive" and added:

"when you look further in Sweden, there is still the exact same number of delayed discharges in Sweden per population as there is in England."

Dr. Gill Morgan, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said:

"people do not believe it is an effective incentive and that in places which have worked hard to have good relationships it could bring contesting back rather than partnership . . . It could be counterproductive."

Dr. Chris James of the NHS Alliance, speaking from a primary care viewpoint, said:

"If health fining social services is the Department's answer to facilitating partnership working, then we have a long way to go."

Those are the people who will be doing the jobs, and John Ransford from the Local Government Association agreed with all those points. We got a clear thumbs down. My recollection is that we did not hear any support for the Bill apart from that of the Department of Health. Indeed, the support expressed by some of the officials whom we interviewed was muted, as they could envisage some of the likely problems.

As I indicated in my intervention on the Secretary of State, my concern is that many factors outside the control of social services result in delayed discharges. For example, why do we not fine home nurses for failure to arrange home nursing packages because that sometimes results in delayed discharges? To my knowledge, that is a factor. What about ambulance service failures? I have come across cases in which people cannot get transport to enable them to leave hospital, especially if they have to travel some distance. What about the failure of housing authorities to arrange appropriate accommodation for people who can no longer go back to their homes because they need ground-floor accommodation or some form of specialised sheltered housing? What about resistance from relatives? I have encountered cases in which relatives have said, "No, she's not coming out, because in our view she's not fit to do so." What should we do in such circumstances—fine the relatives? The Government do not seem to have considered that question.

Mr. Dawson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No, because my time is limited. I fundamentally disagree with my hon. Friend's position on this matter, as he knows, although I have a lot of respect for him on many other issues.

What about choice? People may not want one care home. We have choice on one hand but contradiction at the heart of the measure. What about a private company's delay in supplying equipment required to enable someone to leave hospital and be at home? Do we fine the private company the costs of the patient's remaining in hospital?

What about delays caused by the national health service's failure to admit people from social services establishments? Admitting them would create vacancies for people who want to leave hospital. I have come across that problem in what little remains of our part III accommodation. We cannot get people out because we cannot get people in. It is ludicrous to concentrate on one small part to resolve a big problem.

The Bill has not been thought through. Some of its provisions are vague. As has been said, the disputes procedure under the strategic health authority is not objective. Why should the strategic health authority, which is clearly in one camp, referee? It is not neutral, so there is no objectivity.

What about the period for social services assessment that regulations will establish? A set period for an assessment does not take account of the huge differences in the ability of social services departments in different parts of the country to recruit staff. Some London boroughs are desperately short of social services staff. Surely we must take that into account.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No, I am about to conclude. There is one solution.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Do nothing.

Mr. Hinchliffe: No. I can provide a solution. I am a moderniser and a radical. We should be bold and have common budgets. We should get rid of the boundaries between health and social care. One common budget is the way forward.

4.31 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) was the fifth speaker in the debate. So far, only the Secretary of State's speech has supported the principles of the Bill. The score is therefore 4-1; it will be 5-1 when I sit down.

In nearly 30 years in the House, I have seen many Bills. In a competitive field, the Bill that we are considering is one of the worst. It is divisive and mean-spirited and has no place in social care in the 21st century. It will poison the atmosphere between the two key organisations that should engage in a spirit of partnership to improve the quality of life of elderly people. Instead of joint incentives to co-operate, there will be a unilateral power to fine. At a stroke, the Bill destroys much of the language of seamless government, pooled decision making, joint budgets and integrated teams.

As the hon. Member for Wakefield said, even those who work for the NHS—the supposed beneficiary of the scheme—do not support the Bill. The NHS Confederation described it as a retrograde step. The Royal College of Nursing

"remains unconvinced that charging Social Services for delayed discharges from hospitals will lead to better discharge planning."

[Sir George Young]

Scarce funds that were voted for the care of elderly people will disappear into the maw of the NHS, possibly to be spent on other groups.

There will be yet more bureaucracy in a system that is buckling at the knees under paperwork. There will be perverse consequences as people find ways through and around the new rules. For example, care home providers may exert further pressure and increase prices when they know that the authority faces the threat of a fine, thereby diminishing the amount of care that can be bought.

We heard from one doctor today and another in the debate on the Queen's Speech what GPs will do. Those whose patients need access to a care home will have an incentive to admit them first to a hospital so that they reach the front of the queue. Social services departments will cut some of their preventive work to protect their budget from the fines for which the Bill provides, which will make elderly people more likely to end up in hospital.

The proposals might be tenable in an atmosphere where relationships had broken down, people were not working together and there was a refusal to co-operate. The previous Conservative Government were driven to introduce rate capping when the relationship between parts of local government and central Government had broken down. Nobody who follows health and social care matters could begin to argue that such an atmosphere prevails between health and social services. We simply have not reached that stage.

There is a temptation to consider the Bill from the viewpoint of the NHS or from that of social services departments, but the right place to start is the viewpoint of the client, customer or patient. He or she wants an overall package of reform or investment that supports independence at home when possible, and in residential or nursing care when it is not. Of course it is wrong for elderly people to stay in hospital for longer than necessary. They lose the living skills that they had before admission and they become exposed to hospital-acquired infection. There is therefore no dispute about objectives.

The reimbursement system, however, will place the patient and the carer in an untenable and often stressful position. Patients and the carers, who may already be distressed and disoriented, will become pawns in a professionally combative and hostile environment.

Patients want a continuum of care from a variety of institutions, provided in a spirit of partnership. They want the people on whom they depend to work together and not against each other. The sole focus on delayed discharge, which is one stage in the spectrum of care, will inhibit efforts to build on services that prevent hospital admissions and investment in longer-term solutions. It will not contribute to building up capacity in the care sector. The client will feel the tensions that the regime creates.

The regime that we are debating highlights publicly the contrast between Government rhetoric about the rights of carers and person-centred care and the lack of individual protection that will result from the proposals. Kevin Terry of Age Concern expressed that well on 14 November. He said:

> "The proposals for reimbursement are ill-conceived and, we believe, impractical."

The proposal is one sided; only one partner will be fined. When the NHS fails to admit a patient for a hip replacement or other operation on a pre-determined date, it faces no fine, although the delay may impose financial costs on others. I recently received a letter from my NHS trust. An image intensifier had broken down and a constituent was consequently unable to receive treatment for back pain. The chief executive wrote:

> "The piece of equipment . . . costs £100,000. A bid has been submitted to fund a replacement . . . a decision will not be known until later in the year . . . I will ensure you are kept informed as to when we hope to be able to progress with your treatment."

My constituent and everyone else will not be treated until the local trust gets around to buying another intensifier. There are no penalties for the failure of the NHS to provide the quality of care that it should.

The explanatory notes give a further example of one-sidedness. Paragraph 31 states:

> "If for some reason the patient is not discharged at this point, then the social services authority is not liable to make any further payment, as it is not responsible for any further delay."

That is fair. However, if the social services department has reserved and paid for a bed in a home and the NHS fails to discharge the patient, the former will be out of pocket but receive no reimbursement from the latter.

As several speakers have pointed out, one key assumption underpins the Bill: a delayed discharge is the fault of social services. Many delays are caused by other factors such as self-funders awaiting the home of their choice, lack of community health services or a transfer to a specialist service in the NHS. The fault may lie with the housing department rather than the social services department. In many counties that have a two-tier authority, the housing authority is often at fault but the social services department will take the hit.

As the hon. Member for Wakefield said, the social services department is the under-resourced partner in the equation. It has not received the same increases as the NHS. Let us consider the extra resources that the Secretary of State mentioned. What the Chancellor has given through the comprehensive spending review the Deputy Prime Minister will remove through the redistribution of grant. Many counties have been promised the same grant in cash terms for next year as they received last year. That is no basis for further investment in education and social services.

In the south-east, despite all the investment that the Government mentioned in rehabilitation and community services and the good working relationship between the two departments, the overriding reason for delayed transfers is simply capacity. The problem has been exacerbated by inadequate funding in an environment of increasing demand for services for older people. Simply fining social services will not address the core problem. If the Government want faster progress, as I believe they do, the Department of Health ought to be giving positive assistance to Hampshire county council and other councils that want to expand the capacity of their nursing home sectors.

We need a holistic approach with incentives, not a narrow approach with fines. I am amazed that Labour Members who have sat on local authorities and who are close to these issues are letting their Government get away with this. If the Conservatives had introduced this measure, they would have walked all over us, complaining about internal markets and all the rest, yet they are not stopping their Government. I genuinely believe that this is a mistake, and I urge the Government, even at this late stage, to think again.

4.40 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I agree with the many Members who have said that we can all applaud the aims of the Bill. No one wants to see elderly people unnecessarily delayed in hospital. Elderly people deserve to be cared for in the most appropriate setting, and we need to examine ways of ensuring that that is provided.

One of the other aims of the Bill is to establish better communication between health and social services departments. Of course that should happen; these are the two agencies that have responsibility for looking after the very vulnerable people in our communities. If I have a concern, however, it is about the manner in which the Bill sets about achieving those two aims. I am raising my concerns not from the point of view of the social services departments in my constituency, which could be subjected to substantial fines; in fact, quite the opposite. I cross my fingers when I say this, but my local hospital does not have a problem with delayed discharges.

I am always extremely sceptical about statistics, especially those relating to health and social services. I was shocked and amazed, last year, to see that my hon. Friend the Minister had said, in response to a written answer, that north-west Lancashire had a 10.6 per cent. delayed discharge rate, and that that compared with 4.2 per cent. in south Lancashire and 0.2 per cent. in east Lancashire. I wrote to the then chair of North West Lancashire health authority and received a reply that can be described only as a confusing analysis of how the statistics are arrived at. She wrote:

"The figure of 10.6 % is a plan figure which is provided by the Authority's 2000/2001 Service and Financial Framework."

She went on to describe how the figures were arrived at, but ended by saying:

"I am pleased to be able to reassure you that actual performance during the first two quarters of the 2000/2001 financial year is considerably below the plan figure in the Service and Financial Framework. Quarter One showed delayed discharges running at 8.9 %, whilst in Quarter Two this number fell to 4.6 %."

Anyone looking at the original figure, however, would have thought that Lancashire had a problem. It clearly did not have a problem, and I knew that.

As well as writing to the health authority, I wrote to Lancashire county council's social services department and to Blackpool social services. They both wrote back to say that they did not have a problem, and that they were working well with the health authority and with the hospital. They commented, however, that the picture behind the delays that did occur was not a simple one. The reasons for delayed discharges included non-availability of a specialist service at a particular time—for example, assessments or continuing therapy from health staff such as occupational therapists, who are employed by the health authority in Lancashire, or physiotherapists. In some instances, delayed discharges were also caused by a place not being immediately available in a patient's choice of residential or nursing home.

An analysis of the figures for delayed discharges shows that about 50 per cent. of them were due to a patient's choice of residential or nursing home not having a vacancy. I say that in the context of there not being a problem of availability of nursing home and care home beds in Lancashire; we have an over-provision. Patients are therefore waiting in hospital until a vacancy arises in their preferred home. That raises concerns for me about the choice directive. What will happen to patients in hospital who are saying, "I am ready to move, but I want to go to that home down the road, and no other." How will the choice directive be applied? How will that bed become unblocked? How will the person be moved? I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will address the issue of consultation with patients and carers in this context. For example, if an individual had to make an interim move, they should be fully consulted and offered a reassurance that, should a vacancy arise in the home of their choice, they would be considered for it.

I carried out my inquiries a year ago, so I thought that I should also look at some more up-to-date figures to find out what is happening now. I contacted Blackpool primary care trust to find out the current position. Of the 163 delays recorded between 5 August and 17 November 2002, only 16—9.8 per cent.—were attributable to social services departments. If those delays attributable to patient or carer choice are removed from the statistics, the actual figure falls to 5.5 per cent. So social services cannot be blamed for the number of delayed discharges. The blame—if blame can be ascribed—lies either with the health authority or with the patients and their carers. In Lancashire last week, there were 27 cases of delayed discharge. Of those, 17 people were awaiting practical or other arrangements beyond the control of Lancashire social services. Those 17 people included five who were awaiting arrangements to be made by families, and, for three others, discharge from hospital was imminent at the time that the statistics were being collected. I am concerned, therefore, that social services are being blamed for this situation when, certainly in my own locality, they are not to blame.

Exciting initiatives are being introduced locally. Lancashire social services, for example, has introduced a new scheme involving named social workers. One of the problems is that it can be difficult to manage and link the social work team in the hospital, which does the discharge assessment as part of the multi-disciplinary team, with social workers in the community. So Lancashire has introduced a system in which, if someone known to social services goes into hospital, a named social worker who knows that individual and knows their care needs follows them through the hospital process and arranges their discharge into the community—an excellent initiative that could, and should, be replicated elsewhere.

I recognise, however, that not every part of the country is as fortunate as the Fylde coast. We have not only excellent collaboration between social services and

[Mrs. Joan Humble]

the health service but some very good health service units, including two new NHS rehabilitation units at Rossall in Fleetwood and Kincraig in Blackpool. The Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), opened the Kincraig unit, and he will have seen the excellent work that the health staff do to help to rehabilitate elderly people and to provide the interim care to ensure that they can safely be discharged from hospital and settled in the community.

When I speak to some of my hon. Friends, however, they tell me that the situation is not the same elsewhere. I want to make one supportive comment to my hon. Friend the Minister. I understand the importance of standardising some of the procedures, learning from good practice and ensuring that examples of good practice in discharge procedures are replicated around the country, but I ask her to allow time for that good practice to be developed. I also urge her to defer the introduction of fines, which will be counter-productive in this context and will undermine the good practice that I have seen and that I would like to see developed elsewhere.

4.50 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble). I recall that, only recently, we lost the chief executive of Addenbrooke's NHS trust in my constituency to the Blackpool NHS trust—our loss is her gain. No doubt if she discusses the matter with him, he will describe circumstances in South Cambridgeshire regarding the availability of nursing and care home places very distinct from those that she described on the Fylde coast.

None the less, some of the arguments continue to apply, and they speak of the necessity for the Government not to attempt to construct a theoretical national argument, but to consider practical issues as they affect localities. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) so eloquently spelled out, they must not address issues by attacking one point in the system instead of understanding the whole system.

Essentially, I have four points to make. The first, which my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) referred to from the Front Bench, is about partnerships and it has been echoed across the House. In 1997–98, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and I, as members of the Health Committee, considered the relationships between health and social services. We could see then the necessity of taking down the Berlin wall between the two and of building partnerships. That began to happen, particularly over winter pressures, and it has extended to become more effective. Although it has become much more effective in my constituency, the Bill is designed not only to recreate that Berlin wall, but to give those on one side of the wall the ammunition to fire at those on the other. That is wholly misplaced and the Government should simply consider the response of the social services directors, the Local Government Association, the NHS Confederation and all those who gave evidence to the Health Committee. It will become obvious that those who are managing such partnerships do not regard the proposal as at all helpful in that process.

Secondly, on the question of uniformity, I want to make a distinctive point that I have not heard set out in detail. We might bandy around national figures on the loss of care home places, but, in practice, that loss occurs for different reasons and to a different extent in different parts of the country. The Government are fond of saying—indeed, I have heard the Prime Minister say it—that places such as South Cambridgeshire are losing some nursing and care home places because of the rise in property prices. If there is a rise in property prices that is leading to such a loss, it is happening in South Cambridgeshire as much as anywhere else in the country.

However, we are also losing nursing home places in South Cambridgeshire because they are being converted, for example, to provide mental health places, as more money can be earned from those. We are losing availability in nursing and care home places because of the change in care standards. I shall not rerun that argument from a previous Session, but it has had an impact and it has driven care home providers out of business. It would not have done so if Cambridgeshire's authority had been in a position to provide the fees necessary to meet their costs, but, as things stand, Cambridgeshire cannot meet those costs.

Cambridgeshire cannot even compete with authorities such as Hertfordshire. They receive the area cost adjustment, which is meant to reflect the additional cost of providing services in their area; but, in practice, those costs are exactly the same. If anything, they are, in some respects, less than those around Cambridge. Hertfordshire's response to its problems is to buy care home places in Cambridgeshire, which crowds out that possibility for Cambridgeshire social services.

In parenthesis, I am struck by how the Government are trying to rectify some difficulties associated with social services funding. Going back three or four years, they were, for political reasons, badging money as NHS money, which then had to be given to a health authority or an NHS trust to buy nursing and care home places and bail out a social services department that could not solve the problem. That is still happening in Cambridgeshire.

The Government have given us £2.3 million and the implication, of course, is that it can immediately purchase additional capacity. However, anybody who looks at markets will recognise that, as is true around Cambridgeshire, additional capacity simply cannot be bought if the price is below the cost of providing the service. Who will come into such a market and offer such a service?

So, £2 million of the £2.3 million provided has enabled Cambridgeshire to raise fees and to maintain provision rather than see it decline. The money has not added capacity so much as sustained it, even at current levels. If the Government are serious about building capacity, they must think hard about how much money is required to enable that to happen in parts of the country such as Cambridgeshire. Judging from what I have seen, I am not sure that £100 million is sufficient to make a substantial difference in building capacity in all those places across the country where the fees being paid are below the cost of provision.

If the Government are to go down that path, they must think hard about differentiating between impacts across the country. I shall not stand here and say that no local authorities are failing to meet their responsibilities. Some will be failing. Equally, however, others are performing well within the resources available to them. They are spending more than the social services standard spending assessment—that applies to almost all of them, including Cambridgeshire—and they are performing well in terms of the provision of home care packages.

The problems of delayed discharge involve, pre-eminently, the availability of care home places and, to an extent, the exercise of patient choice. In such circumstances, it is iniquitous to impose on an authority such as Cambridgeshire an additional fine that will drive the service further and further down.

My third point is that there is an alternative. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire said, we need a more integrated system with incentives rather than penalties, which is what Cambridgeshire is setting out to achieve. A discharge planning team is being established, which will integrate health and social services and be managed by the primary care trust.

I like to think that we can be constructive whenever possible, so I point out that an option for the Government is to take out of the hands of the social services departments alone the question whether patients should be discharged to care homes. That should be put in the hands of a discharge planning team that is independent of social services to the extent that it can buy the place and pass the cost to the local authority if one is available. That would take from any given local authority the excuse that it cannot find a place when, in reality, one is available. Of course, that would follow evaluation.

As I said to the Secretary of State, I am worried that a consequence of the proposal will be the undermining of patient choice. In particular, and as the Health Committee heard from Essex, local authorities are required to make urgent placements and interim placements that are far from the choice of the patients and even not necessarily what is clinically best for them.

Patients will be damaged. I have seen that, especially when those with Alzheimer's or dementia are moved from one place to another. The physical process of transferring such patients from one set of circumstances to another and from one environment to another can do immense damage. I recall that, in some cases, patients who were moved from a ward to a nursing or care home died. The home was of perfectly good quality, but it was not in the patient's interest to be transferred.

There is an alternative, and it involves providing some independence so that a local authority that is failing to deliver on its tasks cannot escape any financial responsibility for meeting patients' needs. If a team is working on those matters and if the NHS trust concerned and the PCT are part of that team, they have an incentive to ensure that patients are not taking up beds when they should be out of hospital. Those bodies can push, through the discharge planning team, for the transfer of patients.

On adding to perverse incentives, due to Cambridgeshire's circumstances and the nature of my area, we know that many care home providers, good as they are and as much as they want to work with local authorities, will raise their fees if they think that my social services department will lose money—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

5 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): We heard from the Secretary of State that the Bill's basic aim is to prevent delayed discharges from acute hospital beds. As we know, that affects older people in particular. Other Members produced, in effect, a regurgitation of the professional whinges and excuses for not doing anything to tackle the problem—notably the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), who for some reason managed to make a 25-minute speech although he is only a Back Bencher like me. I cannot remember when we decided that there were two Opposition Front Benches.

We are all worried about people being kept in hospital longer than necessary. No one wants to be trapped in hospital when they do not need to be there, and that applies especially to elderly people. It is well known that the vast majority of older people prefer to be in their own homes. That was demonstrated to me very clearly earlier this year, when my mother needed emergency surgery. After the operation all she wanted to do was go home, even when she was still in the intensive care unit. The care she received in hospital was first-rate, but she wanted to go home nevertheless. I am glad to say that as soon as she was able to leave she was discharged.

My family and I remain very grateful to all the staff involved in my mother's operation and after-care at the Doncaster and Bassetlaw hospital. Had she lived in a different area, things might well have been different, as we know from some of the stories we have heard today. In Doncaster, however, social services, the primary care trusts and the Doncaster and Bassetlaw trusts operate robust arrangements to ensure that they work together to reduce delays. It is an excellent example of collaboration and co-operation between health and social care services, providing support and care for patients who do not need to be in hospital for medical reasons. Patients who require time and care to recover from illness or surgery may need intermediate care, with intensive rehabilitation support, before going home or into sheltered or residential accommodation. Some may need round-the-clock nursing care in a nursing home.

Most people want to be able to stay in their own homes, as I have said. Health and social services have crisis intervention teams to prevent the need for admission to hospital, or to ease patients back into their homes. In many cases involving elective surgery, they start considering what needs to be done after patients come out of hospital before the patients have been admitted. That is where some authorities go wrong.

Joint agency panels allocate residential places for those who can no longer stay at home. The overall approach is to ensure that as many of my constituents as possible are given the right health and social care support, when they need it. The key is joint working and partnership throughout the caring organisations, and commitment to securing the best for local people. There is also a joint equipment store, and occupational

[Mr. Kevin Hughes]

therapists—of whom we have heard much today—employed by the NHS can assess and order equipment without the need for social services to agree to the ordering of each item, which means that delays are minimal. The provision in the Bill on liability for delayed discharge payments will certainly concentrate the minds of those who have not already started working together to reduce delays significantly.

For authorities such as Doncaster that have put considerable effort and resources into reducing delays, targets must not be seen to be unfair, and should take into account work already done. It would be perverse to set targets that are too high for those that have already started to act, while allowing those that have done nothing to benefit.

According to the House of Commons Library, the rate of delayed discharge in England as a whole is about 9.5 per cent. The rate in Northern and Yorkshire region is 6.5 per cent. Doncaster's average is only about 2.4 per cent. The worst rate this year peaked at 4 per cent. in September, probably owing to the actions of local private care homes, and fell to 1.9 per cent. in October.

All this demonstrates that where there is a will there is a way. Reducing delays have meant commitment across all services at the highest level, and proactive joint working has resulted in better outcomes for older people.

I do not agree with the British Medical Association and some Members that the plans for charging will seriously damage relations between the NHS and local authorities. Where we have the type of joint working that I have described, there should be no need for the charges. Of course, if some turn their faces against it, the BMA and Members may well have a point.

There are other ways of helping to reduce delayed discharge. In a recent report on the subject, the Health Committee rightly observed that telecare and telehealth systems had an increasing role to play in a modern health service, enabling people to stay in their own homes for longer. Tunstall, a locally based company seems to be at the cutting edge. For many years it has been providing telecare systems for a number of local authorities, giving a cover for 1.5 million older people throughout the country. Not only do such systems help older people to remain independent, but safe and secure in their own homes; the company is moving ahead, pioneering technology that can help to prevent hospital admission in the first place by monitoring vulnerable people at home. Following discharge the systems can monitor patients while they are at home, where they want to be. Blood pressure, blood oxygen levels, electrocardiograms, temperature and breathing rates can be monitored from centres, or even by a nurse on duty in the hospital ward. The benefits are obvious, and local authorities must start considering them.

The Bill's overriding intention is to get people out of hospital when they do not need to be there. It may well be, as the Select Committee said, a blunt instrument, but it tackles a problem that needs to be sorted out. Perhaps some need a blunt instrument to concentrate their minds—none more than the professional whingers Members have mentioned today.

The victims of this situation are older people, who deserve better than being stuck—trapped—in hospital unnecessarily. The victims are also those in pain who wait for a hospital bed that is blocked because no one thought about after-care before they were admitted or while they were having treatment. The Bill should put an end to local empire protection and professional elitism, and finally kill the syndrome in which everyone thinks someone else is dealing with a problem when in fact no one is doing a thing. I look forward to joining my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Lobby to support the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, I should explain that spokesmen for the second largest Opposition party are exempted from the time limit.

5.9 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): You will doubtless forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, for not being drawn into any further comment on your ruling, which I know to be the case.

It is a pleasure, as always, to follow the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes). I hope that, at the end of my speech, he will let me know whether he considers me one of the "professional whingers" to whom he referred at some length.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: It sounds as if the hon. Gentleman is one already.

Mr. Waterson: Well, there you go.

We all know when there is an intractable problem, because names and definitions keep changing. The phrase "bed blocking" used to be used, but I am told that that is no longer very politically correct. Then "bed blocking" became "delayed discharges," and now it is rather grandly called, "delayed transfers of care." Whatever it is called, it affects about 5,000 patients every day of each week of the year.

In my own constituency, as in many other parts of the country, there used to be great concern about so-called winter pressures and the associated problems. However, one of this Government's achievements—if that is the right word—is the creation of an all-year-round problem, at least in Eastbourne. They have created not only a list to get into my local hospital, but a list to get out, which reached an absolute peak of 149 blocked beds in June this year. So concerned am I about the issue that I have sought regular updates on that figure for a year or more. Although it has tended to fluctuate, until recently it has tended to fluctuate upwards.

What have this Government done? Typically, they have panicked, tabling a measure that will introduce the law of unintended consequences in spades. The proposal does not have a friend in the world, apart from the hon. Member for Doncaster, North, who seems to think that everybody else in the world is wrong and he is right. It would be difficult to point to any group, body or organisation involved in the consultation that considered the proposals a good idea—nor am I sure that the Swedes would accept fatherhood. Apart from the hon. Gentleman, nobody thinks it the right thing to

do, and nobody thinks that it will work. We have heard from Labour Back-Bench Members, and we have heard other excellent contributions from Conservative Members. Basically, the Government are introducing a bed tax to get themselves out of this problem.

I turn to the likely effect in my own area of East Sussex, and in Eastbourne in particular. The irony is that the Government are introducing the proposals in a great rush at precisely the moment when places such as Eastbourne are beginning to see the fruits of a working partnership between the health service and social services authorities. In recent times, since Conservatives took control of the county council, there have been some major steps forward in social services. Conservatives took over a waiting list of 800 people who were assessed for social services care, but who under the previous regime were not getting it. That waiting list has gone—all those people have been dealt with.

The county council, in partnership with East Sussex Hospitals NHS trust, has actually over-achieved its bed-blocking targets. As the trust said to me in a letter of only yesterday:

"The SSD Delayed Transfers PIP target has been overachieved so far to try and provide a buffer zone to assist with winter planning".

The letter continues:

"It is pleasing to see that the total number of Delayed Transfers of Care has reduced from the peak that it reached in June of 149 to the present level of 62."

Mr. Dawson: Say thank you.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman says, "Say thank you," but no thanks are due to this legislation, which will actually set the two organisations at each other's throats instead of enabling them to continue to work in close partnership.

We have already heard how the number of delayed discharges, although still too high, has fallen as a result of partnership working. Mr. David Archibald, the director of social services, wrote to me saying that

"the level of cross-charging could be as high as £2.5m."

He points out that this sum

"would have to come from existing budgets to older people. This sum equates to 240 residential or nursing placements, or 800 home care packages."

As if that were not bad enough, as we all know, social services nationally are grossly underfunded—to the tune of at least £1 billion. That figure, or rather more, is the amount by which local authorities—the great majority of them—overspend their standard spending assessment.

We in East Sussex are told that the 6 per cent. increase over the next three years will be guaranteed, but that leaves aside the massive impact of the Government's proposal—already touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young)—to change the basis of local authority funding. In East Sussex, that could mean £44 million being taken straight out of the county council's budget in a worst-case scenario. Such a cut equates to the scrapping of nearly 2,500 elderly people's care. All this talk of a 6 per cent. increase is complete hokum, because of the massive effect—it is the financial equivalent of falling off a cliff—of such a cut in funding for authorities in the south-east such as mine.

There is also the question of the supply of suitable beds. For eight years, our county council was run—if that is not too ambitious a word—by the Liberal Democrats. Year after year, they paid the lowest rates per week to the private sector. No wonder so many homes have closed. As we have heard, some 66,000 care places nationally have gone since this Government came to power. To make matters worse, they insisted on keeping open wholly inadequate, county council run facilities that cost a great deal more than those in the private sector. My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) will remember responding to such debates when he was a Minister responsible for these issues. We have witnessed a run-down in basic provision. Where are these places to come from?

There is another, fundamental issue—the question of choice—that the Minister needs to deal with in her winding-up speech. Age Concern is extremely worried about this issue. It has drawn attention to standard 2 of the national service framework for older people, which states:

"NHS and social care services [should] treat older people as individuals and enable them to make choices about their own care."

However, as has been pointed out several times by Members on both sides of the House, the reality is that elderly people, who are often confused and very unwell, will become a kind of commodity. They will become counters on a vast Monopoly board, being shoved backwards and forwards between authorities, with the prospect of the imposition of heavy fines if they are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Older people and their families deserve some say in where they are cared for and on what basis. Potentially, this ludicrous legislation carries a vast human cost. We have heard the concerns about emergency readmissions, which have already reached a record high. I suspect that they are bound to increase, as old people are shoved out of the door of their local hospital under the pressure of the Bill.

As Age Concern said in its letter to me, the Bill's penalties and provisions

"take no account (and indeed make no mention) of the rights of older people".

For that reason, and for the others that I have set out, it is clear that in a place such as East Sussex, the Bill's effects can only be destructive—not just of the choices and needs of the older people who we all profess to be looking after, but of the so far quite successful partnership between social services and the health authorities.

In another letter, the director of social services said that, of the current cases, 59 per cent.

"resulted from difficulty in making nursing and residential placements due to capacity issues in the market place."

It is no earthly good the Government trying to make water run uphill—that is one of the Bill's effects—if the places are simply not available for the people whom we are trying to help.

5.19 pm

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I welcome this debate and the Government's determination to tackle what is, after all, a very difficult problem. On any given day, 5,000 people are awaiting discharge that has been delayed for one reason or another—a problem which is

[Dr. Howard Stoate]

having a significant detrimental effect on acute sector NHS care, and which, like road congestion, has finally reached the point at which something must be done.

Why are we in this situation, and what can be done about it? I have been in the health service for a long time. When I started out as a junior houseman, we worked in big Victorian hospitals with huge numbers of beds. Patients would be admitted through casualty, moved to a medical ward and then, if they were old enough, transferred to a geriatric ward or, if they showed any signs of mental instability, to a psychogeriatric ward, where they remained until the grim reaper decided that it was time to come and remove them, long after everyone else had forgotten where they were.

That unsatisfactory situation carried on for a long time. Now we have changed the regime completely, with modern hospitals providing high-tech treatment, and therefore much shorter stays. That works well, but it means a significant increase in throughput, with people who have received their high-tech care being quickly transferred elsewhere. It also means that many patients are discharged from hospital at an earlier stage of recovery, so it is essential that the facilities are there in the community or in their home for care to continue outside the hospital.

There is also now a much greater determination among patients to remain in their own homes as long as possible and to be transferred home after treatment as quickly as possible. Fortunately, there are now better facilities in the community to allow that to happen. When I was a junior doctor, it was difficult to set up care packages in people's homes.

The situation is strained in Dartford. According to a paper that I received just this morning from the Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust, there are currently 47 patients awaiting transfer, which constitutes about 12 per cent. of the hospital capacity, which is only just over 400. The trust says that there are enough care beds in the locality to deal with the local population, but because of the proximity of London a third of the beds are taken by patients from London whose authorities have much higher funding levels available for such care.

Recent changes in the inspection of care homes mean that older people with mental health problems are becoming more difficult to place. The ability of some patients to fund their care independently—they take up about a third of the available stock—also puts pressures on the beds available to social services. Six of the 14 nursing homes in the area are BUPA homes and charge more than the social service contract price, so top-ups are needed.

Patients with mental health care needs constitute a particular problem. Of the 47 patients awaiting transfer of care, 40 per cent. are waiting for EMI—elderly mentally infirm—places, which also puts great strain on the system.

Mr. Gale: As a Kent Member, I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He rightly highlighted the fact that inner-London boroughs are buying beds in Kent and blocking beds that are needed by Kent social services to move people out of Kent hospitals. Will he ask the Minister to tell us how the Bill will even begin to address that problem?

Dr. Stoate: I thank the hon. Gentleman, but that is not quite the problem that I was talking about. I will come to that shortly when I refer to a constituency case.

The paper I received this morning points out that there are alternatives to nursing home care, and I am pleased to see that the acute trust is using much more sheltered accommodation with joint social services and health care team support. A community dementia team has been set up to allow people to receive care in their own homes, and that is certainly easing some of the pressure. The trust is working very hard indeed to make such alternatives available.

I want to talk about a constituent who was seen this morning by two of my constituency workers. He is quite a difficult case and his story highlights some of the problems. He has a rapidly evolving dementia and severe Parkinson's. I have a letter from his GP saying that he needs an EMI bed, but social services has said that it will not pay for EMI care but will pay only for nursing care and has put pressure on the GP to redesignate him accordingly. The GP has written to me in outrage, which is why I undertook to raise the case in the House.

Social services is prepared to pay £450 a week for my constituent's care, but not the £560 required for an EMI home—there is a place available—so he has now been languishing for many months in a bed in a community care NHS unit, quite inappropriately, as he does not want to be there, his family do not want him there and the NHS clearly does not want him there. For want of a top-up of £110 a week, he is occupying a bed in an NHS facility where his condition cannot be properly treated. As his condition deteriorates and his mental health care needs become ever greater, it is increasingly obvious to those caring for him that there is a problem.

The Bill will at least make discussions of such cases more realistic. They will take place more frequently, and we can hope for more appropriate care packages for different types of patients. However, if we introduce the reimbursement scheme by April 2003, it could cause problems and create pressure. What does the Minister think about that? Despite recent funding increases—£300 million earmarked for partnership in care last year—social services departments are still having problems with the effects of historical underfunding, so we need a period of pump priming to ensure that the capacity is in place before they face penalties. That will give them time to identify the services that they need to provide. For the proposals to work properly, we must have sufficient nursing home care beds, community facilities and home care packages in place.

We should not forget that early discharge is also a problem. If we ensure that hospitals are not put under pressure to send patients home or on to other facilities before they are fully ready, we will reduce the risk of the merry-go-round of patients being readmitted. We must ensure that step-down facilities are in place. I am pleased that a facility will be completed in Dartford and Gravesham by 2004 providing 60 step-down intermediate community beds, which will take enormous pressure off the social services and health departments. I would like to see such projects rolled out across the country.

We need a clear incentive for health care and social care services to work together to unblock delayed discharges, which are causing great misery for many of our constituents. At least the Government's proposals will get things moving, but they must recognise that procedures must be in place to allow the situation to improve before draconian penalties are imposed on already overstretched services.

The proposals will contribute greatly to improvements in care, provided that they are implemented in a way that allows social services to build up capacity in a measured way to unblock the problem.

5.28 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I do not believe that there is anyone in the House who does not think that elderly people should get the best possible care and a streamlined service so that they are not kept in inappropriate conditions. The issue is whether the Bill will help to achieve that. I am surprised that it has been introduced at all. On 2 July, the Minister and I served on a Standing Committee distributing grants to social services departments across the country, in order to allow them to implement measures to reduce bed blocking or delayed discharge. On the face of it, three-star local authorities were being given rather more leeway and were allowed to spend the money as they liked. Authorities with one, two or no stars had to provide detailed proposals and to spend the money on reducing delayed discharge caused by bed blocking.

As I said at the time, the problem is that one-star local authorities sometimes have very good delayed discharged figures. In Stockport, where I used to be chair of social services, the health authority and social services did excellent work to prevent bed blocking. A parliamentary answer to question 43988 made it clear that Stockport's delayed discharge figure was already good.

Stockport is a one-star authority with a good record in that area. I noted that the Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster health authority—which covers the three-star boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster—had a 9.8 per cent. delayed discharge rate in the same period. That is five and a half times the Stockport rate. I asked at the time how authorities with other problems could spend on anything that they liked apart from delayed discharge work, whereas the place that had prioritised the issue that the Government claim to want to support was made to go through the hoops.

I suspected that there were other anomalies to be found, but the Minister at the time did not answer the question. Less than five months ago, it was all right to allow social services departments with three stars to spend the money as they wished, even though their delayed discharge figures were comparatively high, but now the Secretary of State has apparently changed his mind. How come? Have not the extra grant payments worked? Does the Minister know? Has there been any monitoring? Why has the Secretary of State changed his mind since July?

The Secretary of State said that the needs of the older person always came first. They did not appear to do so in July. The Bill has aroused almost universal condemnation. It uses coercion just when local authorities and health authorities are beginning to adopt best practice. It is likely to worsen and not improve the situation for patients.

Various hon. Members have mentioned Age Concern's worries. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) quoted that organisation's view that the proposals were "ill conceived and impractical". Age Concern says that the Bill makes no reference to older people's rights, and it is especially worried about matters to do with consent and advocacy. It has stated that the proposals

"do not treat older people as active participants in the provision of caring services, because they take no account (and indeed make no mention) of the rights of older people—for example, the Bill does not mention the need for consent of the patient at all stages of the process of discharge, or of the appeal rights of patients in relation to disputes between the NHS and the local authority."

The Bill is likely to damage existing beneficial arrangements developing between health departments and social care departments. Age Concern was also worried about premature discharge and noted:

"Concentrating on delayed discharge and imposing penalties for this one aspect will not nurture the joint working (between health and social care providers) that is happening at the moment, and could lead to premature discharge and inappropriate placement decisions."

Age Concern was also worried that the proposals would put even greater pressure on families than exists already.

The Royal College of Nursing's observations have been mentioned by various hon. Members. The RCN made it clear that it was keen to support efforts to improve discharge planning, but that

"a system that penalises one part of the care sector could threaten or diminish partnership working."

The RCN said that fines would lead to the further stigmatisation of older people as "problems", and added that even the timing of consultant ward rounds could lead to delayed discharge. It also said—and I believe that this is very important—that nurses, who are very highly trained these days, should be given the authority in appropriate circumstances to arrange and allow discharge.

Mention has also been made of Carers UK, which is concerned that core discharge procedures are likely to get worse. It stated that

"from 1999 to 2001, readmissions of the patient within two months of being discharged nearly doubled from 19 per cent. to 43 per cent."

Therefore, when the emphasis is put on delayed and premature discharge, readmissions go up. It added that

"the proportion of carers who felt early discharge was at fault rose correspondingly from 23 per cent. in 1999 to 45 per cent."

Carers UK also said that

"77 per cent. of carers said that they were not given a choice about taking on caring responsibilities."

Carers are not being consulted. Carers UK said that

"the proportion of carers being consulted fell from 1998 to 2001 so that nearly four out of 10 carers were not consulted."

That is during this Government's time in office. Carers UK also said that

"the proportion of carers who said their views and ideas were not taken into account rose from 36 per cent. in 1998 to 45 per cent. in 2001—nearly half of all carers providing substantial care . . . Only half of the carers were told about the sorts of care that would be needed upon discharge . . . 43 per cent. of carers said they were not given sufficient help on return home."

[Mrs. Patsy Calton]

The truth is that there is insufficient capacity in the community. That problem is felt not just in my constituency but right across the country. We can do all that we can to return people home, but if the care assistants and workers—and especially the trained ones—do not exist to meet their needs, the circumstances of those people will not improve. The Bill, with its half-baked and counter-productive measures, will not solve that problem.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Calton: Wait for it, I have a minute left. The NHS Confederation has also made it clear that positive incentives have an important role to play. It believes that fining could undermine existing local partnerships. It is also worried about administrative costs. Where is the money going to go? How will it be redistributed?

As many hon. Members have said, the start date of April 2003 is too early. The Government are going to wait until 2003 to find out the results achieved by the money that has been spent this year. They should wait at least until then, and then give notice of how they intend to act.

5.38 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): A great deal has been said already and I shall not go over it, save to note that the concern in my constituency about how we deal with community care and ensure that the resources are there when they are needed has not changed in the 15 years for which I have been a Member of this House.

One thing that has changed is that the underfunding that may exist now is nowhere near as great as in the years of the previous Conservative Government. However, we must make sure that the legislative time available to the House—and the additional funding made available by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer—is used to the best effect. We must make sure that the provision is there when constituents need it.

In that respect, I question whether so much time and energy should be devoted to the Bill just now. I accept that sometimes one needs to wield a bit of a stick to make people do what is needed, but the carrot-and-stick approach is also needed.

Is my hon. Friend the Minister satisfied that the extra money that is provided for care in the community is enough? I would be a lot happier debating the Bill if we knew what the local government settlement would be and what extra money would be given to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent social services. I accept that we have had an additional 6 per cent., which we would never have had under the Conservative Government, but we need to ensure that we are getting the extra money that will allow our social services to do what we expect them to do.

Dr. Murrison: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Walley: I am sorry, I do not have time.

On bed blocking, as of this week, there are 48 people on delayed discharge in the North Staffordshire royal infirmary. If those people were not in those beds, that acute hospital would have beds for people who are desperate to get the NHS service that they need. So I have no doubt that the Government are right in making sure that we do not spend money on highly specialised services in our acute hospitals for people who no longer need that expert specialist medical treatment. We must put all our energies into finding a solution to get those people back from hospital into their home and the community, back into intermediate care or even into the long-stay beds provided by the Combined Healthcare NHS Trust, which, itself, has patients who cannot be discharged because of the lack of appropriate community facilities.

A constituent of mine has written to me consistently over 15 years imploring me to make sure that the Government do what is needed regarding dementia services. I have spent a great deal of time making the case to Staffordshire county council that it should give money or land to Claybourne, a specialist place for people with dementia, which is run admirably by Methodist Homes for the Aged. It is of great concern to me that hardly any of my constituents can be placed in Claybourne now that the land has been acquired and this wonderful facility has been built, open and even extended. Not as many as my constituents who should go there can go because the local social services cannot afford the cost of moving them. That means that although people in other parts of the country where social services have additional money can go to Claybourne, my constituents cannot. That is a source of genuine concern.

Let us by all means have a Bill that will penalise local authorities that do not comply with the standard required, but let us make sure that there are minimum standards of service. Wheelchairs should be provided to the community where they are needed. Let us make sure that we have occupational therapists. Let us make sure that people are not being kept in hospital for want of £20 for a handrail. I accept that we have to ensure that social services should be fulfilling those functions but in reality that is still not happening. I would rather look at ways of postponing the Bill until such time as we can do a proper audit and be certain that what should be happening is indeed happening.

We hear a lot about the need for modernisation, and I embrace that. The Edwards report on north Staffordshire has led to the award of extra money to oversee extra resources for care in the community and to deal with the need to transfer that funding from its traditional target of long-stay beds to care in the community. However, the implementation of the Edwards report is still not subject to full accountability. Until we have that, I feel that we cannot simply depend on a piece of legislation that will penalise and fine. If my hon. Friend can give me an assurance that the Bill will not only impose such disciplines, but ensure that the local social services are properly funded, able to respond to changes and accountable, perhaps we can look forward to making sure that our elderly people are not left at the mercy of a system in which they are sent from pillar to post and do not get the services that they need.

5.45 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): The Labour Front Bench is struggling somewhat for support, even from its own Back Benchers. Far be it from me to offer any comfort, but may I point out that in February this year I introduced a ten-minute Bill? I wanted to call it the bed block Bill because I thought it sounded rather catchy. Unfortunately, the private Bills office had other ideas and it was downgraded to the Waiting Time for Discharge from Hospital Bill, which did not convey quite the meaning that I wanted. As is the way with ten-minute Bills, it ran into the sand, but in April, Ministers and Mr. Wanless appeared to be thinking along somewhat similar lines and subsequently produced the Bill before us.

I would not like to be considered a professional whinger, in the words of the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) and although I would like to be fairly positive about some of the ideas that the Government are putting forward, I will explain why I think that the devil is in the detail, why the measure is doomed to fail and why it will not be attracting my support.

I note that the Government have consulted very widely on the Bill, which is good, and have had 270 responses. The Department of Health tells us that there was a wide spectrum of responses but did not say that there was much in the way of support for the measure from those 270 respondees. It would be interesting to hear in the winding-up speech who, among those 270, were positive about the measure. The soundings that I have taken in my constituency have been uniformly hostile.

There has been some recent improvement in the bed-blocking figures, and we need to give due credit to all who have worked hard to achieve that, but problems remain and winter is upon us. A London consultant recently told me that patients in his ward regularly have to spend the night on a mattress on the floor. That is a damning indictment of our health service in the 21st century. Those of us with first-hand experience as patients know full well that being on a hospital ward is an unsettling experience, whether or not we have a bed. For elderly or vulnerable people, that would be a gross understatement, and the experience would not be therapeutic.

We also know that the longer people are in hospital, the greater their chance of succumbing to hospital-acquired illness. Long stays mean unnecessary medicalisation of people's problems and the demotivation of valuable NHS staff. It is a classic lose-lose situation.

Despite the small measures to resolve the imbalance between the social services and the NHS announced today, I believe that there is a deficit between the two sectors. That is historic and I believe that we should be supporting what might be described as the less ritzy part of care. Traditionally we support those medical specialties that produce obliging targets and outputs. They focus strongly on cardiology and surgery in general, when we should perhaps be looking more closely at areas of care that could arguably produce more in terms of health care and outcome for people for every pound spent. To that extent, I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that he is transferring £100 million from the NHS to social services. It will be interesting to see whether that funding is sustained when the Bill comes into effect.

Much of the devil in the detail to which I referred is contained in the explanatory notes accompanying the Bill. I was left rather puzzled as to what qualified as a qualifying hospital under the definitions in the Bill. I am not entirely sure whether Ministers know either. For example, I have previously asked Ministers what they mean by "intermediate care" because they are often less precise than they should be. I am certainly confused about what it means in the Bill. Will an elderly person in a community hospital who is under the care of a consultant be a qualifying patient in a qualifying hospital for the purposes of the legislation?

Although there is little mention of primary care trusts, community hospitals and GPs in the Bill, the explanatory notes on clause 4 come close to that in the reference to care of an "interim nature" pending fuller social services assessment. That worries me as it could mean that a patient is discharged before a fully comprehensive package is in place. A fully comprehensive package involves primary care and I am amazed that a community care Bill can so obviously neglect primary care trusts.

Cross-charging rates are to be set by regulation. The consultation document suggested £100 a day except in London and the south-east, where the rate will be £120. That is a substantial differential and it implies that social care in the south-west is substantially less expensive than it is in the south-east. As I represent a Wiltshire constituency where we constantly make comparisons with the largesse that is heaped across the border on Hampshire, I shall be interested in any evidence that the Minister can provide to back up the assertion that social care in Wiltshire is less expensive than it is in Hampshire.

The measure's most obvious perverse incentive hardly needs restating. As a GP, I should be far more inclined to seek admission to an acute unit if I thought that it was the best, or only, way to obtain the social care that my patient needed. That would both encourage bed blocking and make it difficult for people who were not admitted to hospital—they would be for ever at the bottom of the pile.

A more subtle perversity occurs to me, as it may have done to other hon. Members: the relative disadvantage that would be introduced for emergency surgical and medical patients compared with those whose admission is anticipated in advance. Those potentially disadvantaged patients tend to be older and frailer than those considered well enough for elective surgery. Those who are less well would thus be disadvantaged by the Bill, because those who are well enough for elective surgery would, by definition, be relatively fit. I should be grateful if the Minister could consider that point.

Clause 2 restates Ministers' obsession with cold surgery. In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State said that Opposition Members had an obsession with the acute sector, which seems to be the pot calling the kettle black. There is no doubt that Ministers are obsessed with cold surgery—patients undergoing elective procedures. Such patients can expect their package to be arranged well in advance of those admitted as emergencies, yet it is arguable that prompt

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

reintroduction into the community may be of greater benefit to those who have recovered or are recovering from an acute illness, not least if they are older. I am concerned about the paradox that the least well will be disadvantaged.

Readmission rates are rising, and hasty discharge may be one of the causes. However, it is a fallacy to suppose that that is the province of one sector or another. It is not only the shortcomings of hospitals that cause increases in readmission rates. The problems lie also in primary care and social care, so fining hospitals is plain daft. Furthermore, health care staff will resent the implication that their actions should be dictated by the possibility that their hospital might be fined.

The regulatory impact assessment glosses over the burden that the measure is likely to place on carers—either by design or default. We must recognise that social service providers lean heavily on informal carers. Without them, our system would crumble.

There are several cracks in the RIA. The major costs in our health care system are up front, so if capacity is increased, as the Bill is presumably designed to do, which is welcome, there will be a great increase in costs as more surgical operations are carried out. There is no indication that Ministers have fully grasped that point. I shall be interested in their comments on the greater up-front costs that will undoubtedly result from the Bill.

5.55 pm

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): Before I join my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) in the Labour Back-Bench naughty corner by incurring the wrath of my equally hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), I want to say two things. First, no one doubts the commitment of the Government Front-Bench team to addressing this often difficult and deep-seated problem. Secondly, the Government's record on investment in the NHS and social services knocks that of their predecessor into a cocked hat.

The current situation is not, as Opposition Members try to suggest, the fault of the Labour Government. The roots of the problem go back not a few years but at least a decade. Opposition Members show their customary collective amnesia. Their hand-wringing makes me think that they must belong to the Uriah Heep appreciation society.

I shall remind the House of the background. In the late 1980s and in the 1990s, the Conservative Government's mantra was clear: public provision bad, private provision good. We all remember how funding was skewed so that people going into independent sector accommodation commanded more resources from the then Department of Health and Social Security than those going into local authority homes. We all remember the explosion in the number of private sector residential and nursing homes. We all remember the massive loss of care beds in the NHS and the closure of local authority homes, or their transfer to trusts, voluntary sector organisations or similar creative arrangements.

Of course that could not be sustained, so when the resources originally vested in the DHSS were transferred to cash-strapped local authorities, which were then systematically starved of cash—unless they happened to be Westminster or Wandsworth—the die was cast. The Labour Government inherited a major problem and it has developed into a crisis.

As a solution, however, the Bill is at best premature and at worst could destabilise the care system for older people, as some Members have already pointed out. There are several key points in the case against the Bill and I base them on my observations over many years as a councillor, a chair of social services, an MP and someone whose parents will undoubtedly require care in the near future.

The issue of choice has been referred to over and over again. Older people, or their friends, relatives or advocates, want a place in a particular home and they are reluctant to leave hospital until it is secure.

There are funding problems. Leeds spends over £18 million more than its standard spending assessment on social services, a situation that is unlikely to change as a result of the local government finance review. The authority has not been able to pay nursing homes as much as they say they need to stay in business. About 200 beds have been lost during the past couple of years. However, following an independent report commissioned from PricewaterhouseCoopers, Leeds has increased payments by about 10 per cent. or more, which will, hopefully, check that loss of beds. Only time will tell. The 6 per cent. growth in real terms plus any further funding from the Government will not achieve an immediate improvement in that long-term funding problem. It cannot instantly ensure that a build-up to appropriate levels of community care services is achieved.

Other Members have referred to key issues such as the recruitment of specialist staff and said that blame is shared equally among various agencies. I am not sure that blame is the right word, although we seem to have used it a lot in the debate. The Bill is premature and unhelpful.

Capacity has been affected by the fact that some homes have closed because owners—often with an eye to shareholders—have chosen to realise a capital asset for housing or other uses.

My fear is that, as many hon. Members have rightly said, the Bill will lead older people to be pressured, albeit subtly, to leave hospital prematurely. They may have to undergo unnecessary extra moves between hospital and their eventual place of residence. For some people, those additional moves will require the commissioning of step-down facilities in the independent sector. In Leeds, as in so many other places, there is already little surplus capacity in nursing homes, and further use of spare capacity for step-down or interim placements may exacerbate the situation.

Leeds is trying to resolve the issue by creating the spare capacity in hospital wards that would then be transferred to a primary care trust. That capacity would not be designated as acute and, I hope, not counted against the measurements that would fall foul of the Bill. In the longer run, that resource could be decommissioned as better alternative community-based facilities were created, but that needs time, and the Bill is premature and unhelpful in that respect as well.

The Association of Directors of Social Services has understandably expressed concern that some independent sector providers may seek to take advantage of the pressure on social services departments imposed by the Bill to increase charges.

The penalty payments will, I understand, go to the hospital trust. As far as I am aware, there is no requirement to ring-fence that money for older people's services. The resources available for the care of older people will be absorbed into the general acute sector, thereby reversing a trend that everyone is trying to achieve. At the very least, if the Bill comes into effect, the Minister should consider ensuring that any penalties go to the PCTs, so that they can be recycled into the care of older people.

As other hon. Members have said, hospitals may accelerate discharge procedures to put pressure on social services or reap the benefits of the Bill. Many hospital trusts—Leeds is no exception—run considerable deficits, and there is a danger that they will take advantage of any possible income flows and view them as very welcome news. Any use of interim step-down facilities will require proper medical cover and GPs may be reluctant to take on such work. I am not aware that any guidance or funding has been offered to PCTs to cover that issue.

In Leeds, there is a very good working partnership—other hon. Members have referred to similar circumstances—and a will to ensure that patients are not detained unnecessarily in hospital. Delayed discharges run at about 2 to 4 per cent. per annum, mostly because of considerations involving choice, and I understand that that percentage compares favourably with national figures. That percentage represents 50 to 75 older people.

There is a huge problem, and it needs big answers. The Government are already beginning to provide those answers through the extra funding that they have made available, but I hope that the Minister will not reply by saying that we are at our best when we are at our boldest, because those words were no doubt uttered by George Armstrong Custer immediately before the battle of the Little Bighorn. I cannot help but fear that the Bill—well intentioned though it is—represents perhaps the wrong battle in the wrong place at the wrong time.

6.3 pm

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I start from the same premise as most hon. Members who have spoken this afternoon: the Government are trying to tackle the problem of delayed discharges, which is exactly the right problem to tackle when we consider not only the financial implications but the quality of life of those elderly people towards the end of their days who are losing a few of their precious days in hospital. However, I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) and the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who did not mince their words. It gives me a great deal of pleasure also not to mince my words: this is the wrong Bill doing the wrong thing at the wrong time, and one cannot get away from that.

The regulatory impact assessment, which all hon. Members have probably seen, states that there are really only two options: do nothing, or introduce a reimbursement scheme. The most obvious solution of all—looking at the whole system—has been missed, but the Health Committee has done the work on that. I should like to make four points. I think that they all come from the Health Committee report; I do not think that I have included any of my own.

The first and most important point is to avoid inappropriate admissions. The latest figures show that about one in seven patients do not need to be admitted to hospital, and there are already ways to avoid that. Many places have multi-agency response teams—MARS teams—that GPs can call out to patients' homes to work out alternative methods of coping with them other than sending them to hospital.

One of my daughters is a nurse-consultant in intermediate care. Her job is to go into the casualty department and medical assessment unit of a very large hospital to sort out patients' care at home, if possible.

I must, of course, refer to hospital reconfigurations. I am delighted to hear that a Government paper is coming out, recognising that reconfigurations that take assessment centres away from the local population have to be reconsidered.

The second crucial point from the Health Committee report is that a named person should be responsible for co-ordination of all stages of the patient's journey right from the moment of admission—before then in the case of elective admissions—and up to and beyond discharge. My PCT has a discharge co-ordinator who goes round all the hospitals that the trust uses. In addition to such co-ordinators, named people who are responsible for each patient would make a huge difference.

The third point, which has been made already, is that it is absolutely crucial to consult patients and carers. They must be involved, not just as an afterthought, but right at the beginning. If discharge planning starts early, a logical conclusion can be reached. Is step-down care needed? If so, is it available? Can the patient get home? Are adaptations and other aids needed? Such planning has to start at the beginning.

In their response to the Health Committee report, the Government agreed with most of those points, but then seemed to put them all on the back burner. They said several times that they would introduce the system of reimbursement, but, as I have said, that focuses entirely on the wrong end of the process.

I congratulate the Government on revising the hospital discharge workbook, and I hope that the new one will come very soon and that it will produce a radical overhaul of the whole process of hospital discharge. I welcome the change agent team and the Modernisation Agency. A lot of good things are going on, but this approach is completely wrong.

In his introductory remarks, the Secretary of State said that partnerships were the key, and several speakers have said exactly the same. I cannot see how the Government can argue that the proposal improves partnerships. It sets one side of the equation against the other. One can blame the other, and thus avoid paying. The Secretary of State says that £100 million can go from the NHS back to social services to make up for the fine, which proves to me that he has suddenly realised that the proposal is mad.

[Dr. Richard Taylor]

I will conclude my remarks, as I know that many other Members wish to speak. The Bill is wrong and should be thrown out. Like the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), I have been counting speeches, and I think that the score is about 12-3. I wish that the Bill, which should be in the interest of patients throughout the country but not in the interest of political parties, could have been subjected to a free vote or decided on the number of speeches rather than a whipped vote, which, I fear, will automatically see it through.

6.10 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor). I do not know whether the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) is still keeping score, but I can tell both Members that I am about to pull a goal back. My speech will not be without observations of my own, having worked on the Health Committee report and taken a great interest in it.

The speech of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) was high on conjecture and hypothetical situations but, other than what seems to be the Conservatives' policy of pumping money into care homes, contained no solutions to the issue of delayed discharges or bridging the divide between health and social services. If keeping care home places open is their overriding priority, they are sadly mistaken. That is no policy.

Conservative Front Benchers are not alone in not having answers on this subject. I worked briefly in the NHS, and I lost track of the number of seminars and workshops that I attended on bridging the divide between health and social services. Many good ideas and examples of good practice were discussed, but good practice only produces incremental change. There are huge problems in this area, however, which the system has failed to put right. My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) referred to the need to concentrate minds, which is absolutely right. The system is not currently working for patients and families. I do not have all the answers, but the system needs to be made to work better and more quickly for those people than it does at present.

Opposition Members seem to be defending the current system. They seem to be saying that everything is fine as it is, but it is not good enough. We need to address that. Attacking these proposals should not be used as an excuse for saying that nothing should be done. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire referred to stress and tense situations in hospital, which are hallmarks of the current system. That is doing no good to patients or families.

In all the discussion about structures and processes, it is easy to lose sight of some of the purposes of the Bill. There are probably two clear objectives. One is to give elderly people in particular more appropriate treatment when they need it, to get them through the system and to get them back home, which is the important point. The second is to free up hospital beds so that more patients can be treated across the NHS. That problem has bedevilled the NHS, and we must get better at bearing down on blocked bed days, as they are called. Five thousand beds are currently blocked at any one time.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): Is my hon. Friend aware that, despite all the good practice and all the hard work of many social services and acute trusts, when my acute trust began this work a year ago we had 70 delayed transfers of care and that this week we have 70 delayed transfers of care?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When minds are focused on this problem, and people start to bear down on the bureaucratic process that exists, it is amazing how the system can be made to work better. We should all bear that in mind.

As I said, the report found that there are 5,000 blocked bed days at any one time. It is important for hon. Members to consider the evidence that the Department gave as to why those beds are currently blocked: 22.2 per cent. are awaiting an assessment of care needs; 21.9 per cent. are awaiting a funding package to be agreed; 20.4 per cent. are awaiting a care home placement; 11.5 per cent. are awaiting further NHS care; and 6.7 per cent. are awaiting a domiciliary package of adaptations and equipment. Nobody can tell me, based on those figures, that there are not areas in which we can start to reduce delays in the system. Why are 22.2 per cent. waiting for an assessment of care needs? There must be things that can be done to bear down on that.

The report also mentioned our visit to the United States, to which, I think, my hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) referred. On the United States system, the report clearly states:

"We were left in no doubt that this system"

of financial incentives

"was very effective in reducing hospital stays."

We visited a health maintenance organisation called Tufts Health Plan, which told us something extraordinary. The day its patients go into hospital for a planned admission, the builders move into their homes to adapt them so that they can leave hospital as soon as their care is complete. None of our constituents would recognise that experience. It is an example of good planning. There is no reason why it could not be done here, but our system does not place pressure on people to make them think that they have to do that good planning and deliver better services.

There are two reasons why the United States system works. The first is that the financial incentives are part of the process. They move people through the system and out of hospital quickly. The Bill tries to replicate part of that in our system. The second reason is that there is one budget and therefore only one person deciding how to get someone home as quickly as possible. On that matter, I bow to the experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield. In some ways, I am under his spell on the Committee. The Government should give careful consideration to a single budget as a way of getting people through the system more quickly. That is the ideal. It cuts away the possibility of squabbles about who is responsible or where the fault lies. We are more likely to get people through the system quickly with one budget and one objective than with a system of financial incentives or penalties.

It will be a shame if the Bill halts the move towards single budgets in health and social services departments. I do not want that to happen.

Mr. Dawson: I do not disagree entirely with my hon. Friend, but structural change is not the whole answer. Wherever there is a structure, there is a boundary, and other functions would be left out of a joint health and social care body. Surely it is our systems and values that are important. We must aim for the ultimate principle, which is to wrap services around the people.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend is right. People are the most important consideration. They do not mind whether the health department or the social services department provides their care. They do not care about the divides, which we have to break down. I favour a move to single pooled budgets. Having said that, the proposed system is the fall-back option. If people do not go down the collaborative route, another system has to be in place that will work for patients. It might be one or the other, but I hope that the Government will not rule out the good examples of joint working.

I echo what the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) said about the readiness of the system to cope with the proposed changes. My local authority is a member of the special interest group of municipal authorities. We vehemently argue that we have been underfunded for years, especially in social services. One symptom of that is a severe lack of occupational therapists, which other hon. Members have mentioned. The health service and the local authority in Wigan employs occupational therapists, but the health service often takes them from the local authority, which struggles to keep them. I gather that there is a national shortage of occupational therapists and that there are 5,000 training places every year. The Government have to consider that problem if we are to achieve the ideal of getting people back home as quickly as possible.

The system is not able to adapt homes quickly enough. There is a 10 to 13 month wait in Wigan for an assessment for a stair lift. There are many former miners and people who suffer from industrial disease in my constituency. That is a hell of a wait for a home to be made adequate. That person could easily pitch up at hospital again before the changes are made.

Finally, will the Government consider the range of services and appropriate accommodation available in the community? Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, I believe that the choices available to people are not good enough, and my great hope is that the Bill will diminish the reliance on institutional care, in both residential and nursing settings. For people who are stuck in hospital for too long and who become institutionalised, hospital care becomes a pathway to residential care when, if they had been expedited through the system, that option may not have been the most suitable.

I should like to echo a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North: why cannot we use social services resources to put better equipment in people's homes? When the Select Committee visited West Yorkshire, we saw people doing self-testing at home and sending their results to remote centres to identify any emerging health problems that may require hospital admission. We should consider how we can concentrate resources on the point of entry to the system, rather than always thinking about how to cope with people when they need care. We should concentrate on getting to the point at which people do not need care, or, if they do, on ensuring that it is much later in life. If this system can keep people out of hospital in the first place, it can only be welcomed.

6.21 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I wholeheartedly agree with the speeches made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) and, yes, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe).

Thank goodness I do not have to stand up and make fawning speeches about the Government, so I can wholeheartedly say that this is a lousy Bill from an absolutely rotten Government. They should be ashamed that they are introducing it in the House. Some weeks ago, the Secretary of State gave evidence to the Health Committee, and I challenged him about consultants' contracts. I asked him whether he would take on the consultants and said that, if so, he must be mad. After a lot of waffle, which we also heard in his speech this afternoon, he said that he would not, and I judged him to be sane. I am now reconsidering.

These will be dark days for the Labour party and the Government. The economy is on the slide, and the Government will need all the friends that they can get. Having listened carefully to all the speeches today, I think that they are rapidly running out of friends among Back Benchers. The Bill is the ultimate case of buck passing, and, as we have heard, no one is in favour of it. There is a long list of people who have condemned the Bill.

What Member would say that it is terrific to have people stuck in hospital beds when they should be returned to their own home or admitted to a residential home? Of course Members of Parliament think that it is shocking. Who wants to stay in a hospital and catch MRSA? Every Member wants to do something about bed blocking, but the Government do not seem to understand that this ridiculous Bill, which they are trying to persuade the House to accept, will not solve the problem. In fact, it will make it much worse.

In part 2, the Secretary of State has had the cheek to take powers to allow him to remove, in circumstances set out in regulations, the power of local authorities to charge for certain community care services. That will do huge damage to local authority budgets, and authorities throughout the country are already struggling to meet the demands on them.

The Government should have listened to the Health Committee. We all know that, sadly, the House is not quite the force that it used to be, but Select Committees certainly provide a good means of challenging the Executive. Members of the Health Committee worked hard to prepare the report. We made 37 recommendations, and went to America and Canada. If the Government had listened to our recommendations, they would not be in a mess. For instance, we said:

"There are real risks that perverse incentives will be created that will undermine partnerships that have taken time to develop and foster an unproductive culture of buck-passing and mutual blame

between health and social care. We agree that appropriate incentives have a role to play, but we would also urge the development of positive incentives that reward good practice, rather than any precipitate and over-zealous emphasis on penalties."

We went on:

"We are concerned that the focus on tackling delayed discharges, entirely laudable in itself, could lead to an intensification of pressures to discharge patients too quickly, with inadequate preparation, and in situations that could intensify the demands on their carers. This has the potential to trigger a rise in readmission rates. Premature discharge leading to readmission is clearly stressful and in many cases harmful for the patient, and is also wasteful of resources. High levels of unplanned admission are likely to be a marker for poor practice."

As another member of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor), said, the Government should have looked at our key eighth recommendation that a dedicated person look after the individual before they were admitted to hospital and while they were there. Afterwards, that person would make sure that they were given proper care and support.

In my constituency, there is a huge number of elderly people. If you want to live longer, come to Southend, West. In February, a local resident will celebrate her 109th birthday. She lives in a bungalow on her own, and recently I had the privilege of having a cup of tea with her. She is truly remarkable, but many other people are admitted to hospital with no relatives or loved ones to support them. It is thus not just a question of dereliction of duty by social services.

Will the Government look at the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 that I had the privilege of steering through the House? That measure would deal with bed blocking, as it tackles the important issue of fuel poverty. All hon. Members know that this winter a huge number of elderly people will be readmitted to hospital. Cold, damp homes are associated with premature mortality, physical and mental illness and impaired quality of life. They aggravate a wide range of medical conditions, increase suffering and make it harder to care for vulnerable people at home, thus adding to the burdens on the NHS. Those burdens are seen, as I have said, in growing waiting lists for admissions and bed blocking. No doubt, there will be another crisis this winter. National Energy Action believes that the Government should look carefully at recommendations that winter taskforces in primary care trusts should produce a local plan to deal with that problem, thus increasing awareness of the links between housing and health, identifying households at risk, and making referrals to fuel poverty programmes and good-quality energy advice.

Next week, members of the Health Committee will visit Sweden and the Netherlands. Although we are looking at sexual health, I have decided that I shall make it my business to find out how the Swedish model is working. According to one director of social services, the introduction of a programme of penalties in Sweden resulted in a two-year build-up, after which time all the accommodation was made available. It is crazy and disastrous that residential and nursing homes throughout the country are closing because of the onerous duties placed upon them by the Care Standards Act 2000.

This is a rotten Bill and I plead with the Government at the eleventh hour to drop it.

6.30 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I am not sure whether the Minister needs reminding of the saying that success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan. If one considers the majority of responses to the Bill, it is clear that it is an orphan. The overwhelming view of the Bill has been unfavourable, to say the least. That Labour stalwart, Sir Jeremy Beecham, the chairman of the Local Government Association, has urged Ministers to abandon the Bill. The NHS Confederation and the Association of Directors of Social Services have both condemned the proposals in the Bill. Age Concern has described the Bill as "ill-conceived and impractical".

The British Medical Association has voiced its opposition. Help the Aged is opposed to the imposition of fines, and says that the Government should concentrate their efforts on securing the long-term future of social services. Kent county council, acting as a spokesperson for a group of county councils that will be adversely affected, called the proposals "gravely flawed".

During the debate, speaker after speaker has condemned the proposals, particularly in part 1. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) on an elegant and lucid speech in which he highlighted the fundamental flaws in the Government's approach, as outlined in part 1. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who presented a compelling argument about the impact that the Bill will have on partnerships. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) highlighted the problems in his constituency, the way in which the NHS and local authorities have been working closely together, and the damage that the Bill will do to that relationship. Those sentiments were echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison). My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), in a typically robust speech, left us in no doubt of his opposition to the Bill.

It is not solely Conservative Members who are opposed to the Bill. I know that the House always listens carefully and with respect to the views of the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), the Chairman of the Health Committee, who in the course of his comments made it plain that he was against part 1 and thought that it was wrong. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), who, to be fair, said that she would not vote against the Bill, was critical of certain aspects of it, as was the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), who urged the postponement of the fines. She was chairman of social services in Lancashire before coming to the House.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) was lukewarm in her support. Some of the comments of the hon. Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) may have been unpalatable to me, but the thrust of his powerful message was that the Government had got it wrong in part 1. Looking round the Chamber during the speech of the Secretary of State, it was interesting to see a number of other hon. Members expressing their support through their body language and their sedentary comments. I caution them about being over-enthusiastic in support of the Bill.

I caution in particular the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford). If I were her, I would check what her social services department thinks of the Bill. During the afternoon, my office had an opportunity to speak to the director of social services of Kirklees council who, among other things, made three comments on the Bill: first, that it is not the right way to tackle the problem; secondly, that it is totally wrong and not good for partnership work; and thirdly, that it will rebuild a Berlin wall between health and social services. I understand that hon. Members in the Kirklees local authority area are meeting the social services department tomorrow to discuss the implications of the Bill. The hon. Lady might be interested to hear the department's views in that meeting.

Kali Mountford: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am surprised but not alarmed about his telephone call, despite his office having said merely that it was from the House of Commons; the fact that it was his office had to be wheedled out of it. I called the department at 4.30 today, after his call had been made, and it said that it was perfectly happy with the Bill and that working relationships and partnerships were the way forward, and commended such arrangements to other authorities as the best way of making the Bill work.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful for that contribution, but I would be fascinated to know to whom the hon. Lady spoke in the social services department. If she spoke to the director of social services, Mr. Philip Cotterill, it would seem most extraordinary that his views on the Bill should have so radically changed in the course of a maximum of 90 minutes.

The role of the Health Committee is very interesting. Many hon. Members have mentioned the report that was published in July, and it has been interesting to hear in the debate the hon. Members from the governing party who were members of the Committee. The hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) gave us the benefit of an interesting speech in which he reassured my hon. Friends that he was going to redress the balance by speaking in support of the Government's proposals after an overwhelming number of Labour MPs had spoken in opposition to them. He is perfectly entitled to take that position and I do not criticise him for doing so, but I wonder—I shall leave this in the air merely as a matter of wondering—how he squares the support that he expressed for the fining system set out in part 1 with recommendation 33 in the Committee's report. I remember the discussions that we had in formulating the report, so I wonder how he squares his undying support for what the Secretary of State is doing with two parts of that recommendation, which states:

"There are real risks that perverse incentives"—

that is, fines—

"will be created that will undermine partnerships that have taken time to develop, and foster an unproductive culture of buck passing and mutual blame between health and social care."

The recommendation goes on to state:

"we would also urge the development of positive incentives"—

as opposed to fines—

"that reward good practice, rather than any precipitate and over-zealous emphasis on penalties."

Again, that is very different from what the Government are now recommending.

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: No, because there is not much time.

The greatest flaw in the legislation is that, ironically, it will not achieve the aims that it seeks to promote. Simplistically to believe that the panacea for solving problems of delayed discharge is fining social services departments demonstrates a total lack of understanding of the problem.

Most reasonable people would endorse the policy intention and goal of delivering improvements to the system to ensure better, more timely and safe discharge from hospital, but to hijack the Swedish system, completely misunderstand it and simply produce a negative policy of imposing fines on social services departments is a missed opportunity. I tell the Secretary of State that that approach is ultimately bound to fail. It is beyond argument that for vulnerable people, and older people in particular, to remain in hospital longer than necessary is potentially a danger to health and is grossly unfair and an utter waste of NHS resources, but to pray in aid the Swedish system without understanding the differences and the fact that it is now having to be amended to pick up on the unintended problems that it has created is not the best way to proceed.

The Government have failed to accept the inherent crisis in care for the elderly. Without redressing the problem of the loss of 60,000 beds, the closure of 2,000 homes and the decrease in the number of households that receive domiciliary care by almost 100,000, delayed discharge cannot be tackled satisfactorily.

The burden of prospective fines is hanging over social services departments like the sword of Damocles. It is an ominous and current threat. Regardless of the success of individual departments in reaching their specific targets for reducing delayed discharge, fines are to be distributed with zest. There has been much speculation recently about the financial burden that the fines will place on local authorities. Many authorities have expressed their grave anxiety about the detrimental effect of fines on them from next year.

The Liberal Democrats, the arbiters of financial prudence since the Chancellor finally divorced Prudence, claim that the estimated national cost is £50 million. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) kindly explained in an intervention that he had concocted those figures on the back of an envelope. Although it grieves me to tell him, their sums are wrong. Unlike the Liberal Democrats, who use a piece of paper and the back of a cigarette packet with a clipboard thrown in to calculate a combination or two of figures before announcing a figure that they believe to be newsworthy, I have spent my time more scientifically and productively. In the past week, I have canvassed as many local authorities with social services departments as possible.

The figures that I was given are significantly higher than those that the hon. Gentleman produced at the beginning of the week. London alone estimates a penalty figure of approximately £25 million. That is in line with the figures that the hon. Member for Ealing,

[Mr. Burns]

North (Mr. Pound) provided during the debate on the Queen's Speech when he opposed the proposals and claimed that they would cost Ealing, North about £2.2 million.

Let us consider the shire counties. Their estimates were £2 million for Buckinghamshire; £6 million to £7 million for Surrey; £1.5 million for Cambridgeshire; £3.9 million for my county of Essex; £2.5 million for East Sussex; and £8 million to £10 million for Hampshire.

In order not to leave anyone out, I also spoke to social services departments in the Health Ministers' constituencies. In case they do not already know, I shall enlighten them about the way in which the proposals will affect them. Worcestershire, which covers the constituency of the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), believes that the financial burden will be approximately £1.8 million. The local authority of the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) estimates it at £2.74 million. The local authority of the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) believes that the cost will be around £1 million, and the local authority of the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) estimates the financial burden as between £500,000 and £750,000.

While I enlighten Ministers about the way in which their perverse proposals will affect their areas, it would be unfair if I did not draw attention to the financial burden that the proposals will place on the local authority that covers the Prime Minister's constituency. It has been estimated as approximately £1.4 million.

Just over half the local authorities that I managed to speak to reckoned that the financial burden would be £76 million. Let us project that upwards to the total: the Local Government Association figures estimate a cost of about £180 million, which also highlights the impact statement figures. That is probably about right. What does that mean? The Secretary of State suggests that he will rob Peter to pay Paul and shift £100 million from the Department of Health to the Department for Work and Pensions. That is ludicrous.

The policy should be abandoned before it does more damage. More help should be given to try to remove positively the problem of delayed discharge rather than introducing some crackpot and punitive scheme that almost nobody likes except the most diehard new Labour stalwarts. It is absolutely crazy and it will cause grave problems for the working and further development of partnerships. It will also do nothing to deal with the problems of admissions and readmissions to hospitals. It will distort operational priorities, create pressure for premature discharges, and discourage social service co-operation with care planning procedures in hospital settings.

For those reasons, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to join me in the Division Lobby tonight to vote an emphatic no to a policy and a Bill that are woolly and wrong-headed and that are bound, in the end, to fail, but not before they have done tremendous damage to what has been achieved in the working partnerships between health and social services.

6.45 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): We have had a good debate today. I certainly welcome the constructive suggestions made by some hon. Members about what more we can do to ensure that our older people get the right care at the right time and in the right place. Unfortunately, however, I cannot say the same about the contributions from the Opposition Front Bench. The hon. Members for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) failed noticeably to focus on the needs of older people, had no practical suggestions for improvement, and seemed to see their sole role as the champions of local government. I have to say that that is a bit rich, coming from the people who brought us the poll tax, rate-capping and a stream of central controls on local councils, but who now feign to believe in freedoms for local government.

Let us return to the real issue in the Bill. The existing system means that 5,000 people are currently stuck in hospital when they would be better served outside. This Government's investments in community alternatives and better working between social services and health have made all the difference. The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), in a strident contribution, said that all hon. Members wanted to tackle delayed discharge, but when his party left government, delayed discharges stood at around 6,985. By September 2002, that figure had been reduced by more than one third. That is because social services have been able to build up alternatives to hospital, more care homes have been commissioned, and there are higher fees, more home care provision, and more community equipment.

The way that we have achieved this, through ring-fenced funding and top-down central monitoring, is not sustainable. Extra money has gone to areas in which the problem is worst, rewarding failure with extra resources. As my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) rightly said, we now need a system that rewards success. Throughout the NHS, we will build systems to ensure that money flows through ward activity to ensure faster, better-quality care. The Bill will enable us to do that across the health and social services divide.

I was a little disappointed by the suggestion that no one supported the Bill, and a bit surprised at the approach of the hon. Members for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) and for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor). The hon. Member for Westbury actually introduced a ten-minute Bill earlier this year which he said would facilitate a model based on the Swedish approach to delayed discharge, which he termed a "hugely successful innovation". I do not know whether it is because he has ambitions that he has subsequently changed his mind, but it is very disappointing none the less.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) and for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) and the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) expressed concerns about responsibility in relation to delayed discharge. There are two elements to

this question. First, I want to reassure hon. Members that the Bill states clearly, in clause 4(4)(b), that a charge would be due only if

> "it has not been possible to discharge the patient because, and only because, the local authority has not made available for the patient a community care service which it decided under section 3(3)(b)"—

that is the assessment—

> "to make available for him".

[Interruption.] For those hon. Members who clearly have not read the Bill, let me explain what that means. It means that if someone is a self-funder, or is waiting for an element of NHS care, and that is the reason for the discharge being delayed, the social services department will not be charged. That is fair and reasonable.

The second element, however, is that several people—and, I am afraid, some local authorities—are trying to argue themselves out of responsibilities that rightly lie with social services departments, such as assessing needs and commissioning or providing adequate alternatives. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) rightly challenged the hon. Member for Woodspring on whether his argument is that local authorities should not meet their responsibilities. That is what it appeared to be. The Bill will not impose extra responsibilities on local government, but we expect local government to shoulder those responsibilities for vulnerable older people that it already has.

Unlike the Conservatives, we have recognised our responsibility as a Government to fund the necessary developments. It has been claimed throughout the debate that there is not enough capacity in the care home sector for the Bill to work. There are clearly capacity issues in parts of the country, which is why our spending review made available resources for an increase in care home places. However, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House on 14 November,

> "we will . . . have a problem if we think that the only way of caring for older people is placing them in . . . care homes."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 178.]

That is not how the majority of people want to be cared for. Most want to be able to return to their own homes, which is why we are providing the funding for local authorities to increase capacity across services for older people.

Once again today, we heard calls for more money from Opposition Members, including the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire, and the hon. Members for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), whose authorities received from the building care capacity grant £7.5 million, £3.2 million and £3.8 million respectively. Of course, they refused to vote for all that money when they were given the opportunity.

The Bill will provide the incentive for local authorities to use that funding to produce a range of services—not only care home packages, but interim and intermediate care involving the provision outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate), such as step-down facilities, extra sheltered housing, home adaptation services and different home care packages. Only through the provision of such a range of services will older people get the choices they deserve in relation to the care that they receive.

The important point is that there is a difference between how authorities, including those that face the same pressures, handle their responsibilities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North pointed out, using the approach that I have outlined, a difference is being made to the lives of people in Doncaster, North. For example, Croydon—part of the south-east that also faces pressures—has made a significant difference in respect of delayed discharges. The Bill will ensure that local authorities take responsibility, with the additional resources, for making the differences that will allow older people to get out of hospital when they need to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) outlined the particular constraint around staff and occupational therapists in particular, so I am sure he is pleased that, under this Government, there has been a 36 per cent. increase in occupational therapists in training. He is right: part of the capacity constraint is to ensure that we have the work force in place.

Several Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), concentrated on choice, among other things. Some have argued that the Bill will lead to patients having less choice regarding the services that they receive on discharge and that they will be pressured by local authorities to accept the first available placement. I believe that the opposite is true: the proposals will put the patient firmly at the centre of care and they should increase the choice available to older people. As we know from our experience with the building capacity grant, those councils that have achieved progress on delayed discharge have invested the money innovatively and in a range of services.

The Bill will increase choice in other ways, such as that of staying at home rather than going into hospital in the first place. Preventing people from going into hospital when they could be better cared for with support in their own homes is a key way to reduce delays, and sensible councils will invest in services that enable older people to exercise that choice.

Some Members raised the direction on choice, which exists to enable people to exercise choice when selecting a care home. The direction on choice does not mean that a patient has a right to occupy an acute bed indefinitely when others may be in much greater need. Even if someone is waiting for a place in the home of his or her choice to become available, that person should not be subjected to an inappropriate delay in an acute bed if he or she no longer requires acute hospital care, not least because that is not good for older people themselves. Councils need to invest in services such as step-down and interim care, or to provide intensive home care services so that patients can move to a more homely environment in the meantime.

Some Members expressed concern about consent and advocacy. Let me reassure them that nothing in the Bill removes the current practice or law on consent and advocacy. Many areas have very good advocacy services, and are involved in discharge planning. There is no reason for that to change. In fact, the Government are ensuring that advocacy is available for patients throughout the health service.

[Jacqui Smith]

Concerns have also been expressed about care, but I think my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State dealt with them. Several Members mentioned damage to partnership. Of course good working relationships exist in many areas, but partnership must be judged on the basis of what it produces. There must be more to the outcomes of partnership than simply a good set of minutes. If partnership is delivering, it will be the way in which to avoid reimbursement charges; but partnership depends on clarity about roles and responsibilities.

Whatever the good intentions locally, the current system rewards buck-passing. An older person stuck in hospital is paid for by the hospital, even if that person is the responsibility of social services. We propose that the social services budget should pay for the older person's care when it becomes the responsibility of social services. Essentially, this will be a payment for looking after the patient.

The Bill will clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies. It will assist partnership. Most important, it will prevent older people from being caught in the middle of disputes.

The Bill will ensure that the needs of the patient are put first, not the needs of the NHS or local government. Delayed discharges are bad for older people, worrying for their families and carers, frustrating for patients waiting for treatment and wasteful of taxpayers' money. Each older person trapped in hospital is an argument for change, and each is a demonstration that the current system is not working. As my right hon. Friend made clear, the mark of any civilised society is the way in which it treats its senior citizens. The mark of an effective health and social care system is that it ensures choice, access, independence and quality of care for our older people.

The national service framework for older people is bringing health and social services together, and raising standards of care for older people. In July, my right hon. Friend announced a £1 billion package leading to faster assessment, more places in care homes and sheltered housing, more intermediate care services, and more support for older people wanting to live at home and their carers. Today we have responded to local government concerns about capacity by announcing that, in addition to the increases in social services funding, from next April we will transfer money from the NHS to enable social services departments to fulfil their responsibilities. This is a whole-system commitment to tackling delayed discharges.

Not only has the extra funding been opposed by the Conservative party; today Conservative Members have also opposed the reforms to make it work. We know that the extra money we are providing for our health and social services brings with it a responsibility for us all—a responsibility to ensure that it makes a difference. The Bill ensures that services needed to promote independence will be provided free. It places new duties on the NHS to work with local authorities. It rewards social services departments that live up to their responsibilities. Most important, it puts the needs of vulnerable people, not organisations, at the centre of the system. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 136, Noes 238.

Division No. 11] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and Angela Watkinson

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Malaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Ivor Caplin

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third Reading).

The House divided: Ayes 237, Noes 135.

Division No. 12] **[7:11 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard

Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Ivor Caplin

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*

Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and Angela Watkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

COMMUNITY CARE (DELAYED DISCHARGES ETC.) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Standing Committee

2. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 12th December.

3. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

6. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

The House divided: Ayes 228, Noes 119.

Division No. 13] **[7:23 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leppper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis

McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Marin, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Ivor Caplin

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and
Angela Watkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

COMMUNITY CARE (DELAYED DISCHARGES ETC.) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State by virtue of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided by virtue of any other enactment.—*[Charlotte Atkins].*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Housing Support Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet at Westminster on Tuesday 10th December at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the adjournment of the Committee; and

(2) in respect of that sitting Standing Order No. 99 (Scottish Grand Committee (substantive motions for the adjournment)) shall have effect with the substitution in paragraph (2) (b) of the word 'five' for the word 'ten'.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

SECTION 5 OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (AMENDMENT) ACT 1993

Ordered,

That, for the purposes of their approval under section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, the Government's assessment as set out in the Pre-Budget Report 2002 shall be treated as if it were an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

PETITIONS

Cliffe Airport

7.34 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I am honoured to present a petition signed by thousands of local residents who are horrified at the prospect of an airport at Cliffe which would operate on a 24-hour basis.

The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of concerned residents of South East Essex and surrounding areas sheweth

That the Government's proposed Cliffe Airport option appears, from the scant details so far revealed by the Government, to offer far more disadvantages than advantages to South East Essex; and that the Government has totally failed to consult fully the people of South East Essex on the question.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Government to rescind its Cliffe Airport option and undertake substantial, informed and open consultation in South East Essex.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

New Midlands Airport

7.36 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): This is the first petition that I have presented in my 10 years in the House. It is signed by 15,767 people in my constituency and elsewhere and reflects how distressed we are about the proposal to build an airport between Rugby and Coventry. It states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom and Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament Assembled

The Humble Petition from the electors of Blaby, South Leicestershire and others of like disposition sheweth

That the proposals for a new airport between Coventry and Rugby would involve the destruction of precious unspoilt countryside, rural environment and wildlife; that the airport would be built on the floodplain of the River Avon, thereby increasing the risk of flooding and would be contrary to planning advice contained in PPG25; that the costs of constructing such a new airport and associated infrastructure would be excessive; that such a large development on a greenfield site would be contrary to stated Government policy; that any such airport would be less conveniently situated for passengers than existing airports; that the construction and operation of such an airport would increase congestion on already congested motorways; that the noise and associated pollution would seriously discomfort local residents; and that the need for a new airport has not been convincingly demonstrated.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House shall urge the Department for Transport to oppose any such proposals and to pursue instead the enlargement and improvement of existing airports.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Christchurch Road Post Office

7.37 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I am honoured to present a petition from people living in the community served by the Christchurch road post office in Reading. They are unhappy that it closed on the retirement of the previous postmistress and that the Post Office has not followed the process set out in its urban reinvention programme to review need in the area. The petition has been signed by almost 3,000 people on the initiative of Councillor Riaz Chaudhri.

The petition states:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to ensure that the Royal Mail work with local elected representatives, residents and shopkeepers on Christchurch Road to keep a post office open.

And the Petitioners remain.

To lie upon the Table.

Local Government Funding (Swindon)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

7.38 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I welcome the opportunity to put Swindon's views on the review of local authority funding.

My constituents have made it clear that they want and value improved local government and police services. A key part of that relies on new investment. My constituency has the worst-funded unitary education authority and my constituents have called for a fair funding system. We welcomed the review because we thought that we were bound to gain from it. Unfortunately, it has emerged that virtually every authority thought it would gain.

Imagine, then, our disappointment when we found that although almost every other one of the 40 worst-funded education authorities with which we had campaigned looked to gain from at least some aspects of the new education formula, Swindon did not gain from any of the education options put forward. It is therefore no surprise that the review team and I have received a huge number of letters about the issue from teachers and parents in Swindon. Swindon has already received more education funding under this Labour Government—over £500 per pupil per year. However, teachers make it clear to me that extra funds are needed and would be well used to extend students' opportunities and to raise standards. Similarly, it is clear that we need more funds for social services.

On all funding methods I urge the Government to give more details on how changes will take place. They have said that no authority will get less grant next year, but it is not clear whether that is in real or cash terms. The Government have also promised that, as the new system is implemented, no authority's schools will lose out, so schools simply need clarification about the period of implementation. However, for other services, and authorities overall, including police authorities, the position needs to be clarified.

Given that the Government have allocated substantial resources to public services, they would give much reassurance to local authorities if they made it clear that, for police and local authorities, overall funding would be maintained in real terms for 2003–04, 2004–05 and as many more years as they felt able to make that promise. Authorities could at least plan on a level playing field, even if nominally they may lose out under the new formula. There should be no allowance for existing spending patterns, except as part of the process of implementing the new formulas. This is not a fair basis of funding. It is an allowance for existing spending and it will box in populations who have suffered under low-spending authorities and ensure that they remain in that position.

I turn now to specific issues on particular services. Swindon has the third worst education standards in the south-west; Bristol has the poorest standards and receives the most funding, well above the south-west average, which is logical. Swindon receives £34 per pupil below the average. The lower standards are not because we have worse schools; they reflect deprivation that has not shown up in existing formulas or a lack of baseline funding to meet pupils' needs. I want the formula to be improved, not to take away from others but so that more future growth moneys support the lowest-funded authorities—where they are needed, as they are in Swindon.

Giving extra funds for additional education needs is sensible. One of the questions under consideration is whether the working families tax credit should be included as a measure of deprivation, or whether only income support should be included. There is a powerful case for including the working families tax credit, or its equivalent in the new post-April system. Employment is rising, but in many constituencies that means that families are moving from no pay to low-paid work, and that does not change the education opportunities or attainment of those children overnight. If we want to ensure that the education challenges faced by families with no pay or in low-paid work, the way forward must be to take into account data on the working families tax credit as well as on income support.

I would expect that to produce smoother changes in allocations, as the change in data for income support plus the working families tax credit is likely to be less dramatic than that for just income support. Smoother changes are a good policy goal. Whichever indicator of deprivation is chosen, the current threshold system fails the test of being easily understandable.

In terms of deprivation, Swindon is about 110th in the 150 authorities, so we are about the 40th least deprived authority. The threshold in education tries to create what Swindon wants—a fair base level of funding for many authorities. Under option 2, the threshold was seen as high, with a baseline set at the bottom 50 authorities. However, it is not clear whether the additional funds for education needs are given to the bottom 50 authorities or levelled up to the 50th least deprived authority. If we assume the former, whereas under the current formula Swindon's existing needs are recognised, under the new formula they are ignored and taken to be just the baseline, so Swindon would lose £2 million compared with our current grant. That cannot be justified—Swindon's results do not justify reduction. We are currently in the bottom 40 authorities. The new formula is not levelling up, but is levelling down further, which does not make sense. The additional funds are concentrated on the 100 most deprived authorities, leaving few funds to distribute along the baseline.

If Swindon is supposedly levelled up to get the resources of the 50th least deprived authority—a more deprived area—it is not right that that leaves Swindon with fewer resources than we have now. The threshold has to move up 105 authorities to be neutral for Swindon. Only then will a third of education authorities get extra help for special needs, and more resources will go into basic needs for all schools. That is difficult to justify—why does the extra support have to be concentrated on 50 authorities before the formula for Swindon is back where it started? Swindon is among the most poorly funded authorities, so it does not have a high basic level of funding. That alone shows how hard it is to follow the formula and suggests the need for a rethink.

Option 5 proposed by the F40 group is widely supported. Of the 55,000 responses to the consultation on the review, 53,000 were made as a result of the F40 group's campaign. That represents a magnificent response from parents and staff who are keen to see a higher base level of funding. I hope that the Government in turn can respond positively and adopt an option along the lines of the F40's proposal, which builds up a higher base cost for all schools.

Additional costs are inevitable in areas of high employment and housing shortages such as Swindon and must be acknowledged if there is to be sufficient recruitment and retention of staff. Head teachers have made it clear that they face pressures not experienced by their colleagues in other parts of the country when recruiting staff. Only yesterday a head teacher in one of the most deprived areas in Swindon told me that she had advertised a key post but received only three applications. The only suitable applicant came from abroad—she recruited that person, but unfortunately they did not stay at the school. That is just a small sign of the pressure we are under, and shows that we need extra resources to deal with our serious recruitment and retention problems. If the Government want to achieve equal opportunities for all students, those extra costs must be reflected in a new formula.

Most work on this problem is not in the review of education but in reviews of area cost adjustment. Members on both sides of the House have recognised that the existing system is unfair. Proposals in the review paper are a vast improvement on current arrangements. A change is much needed and can be justified by the detailed work in options 2 and 3. Option 2 suggests using the method recommended by the independent review of the additional costs allowance in 1996 and taking more detailed account of differences in the structure of labour markets in different authorities. Swindon is a good example, as our economy is widely recognised as being different from that of the wider economy in Wiltshire and the south-west. With the exception of London, it is hard to find a town or city with as many national and international headquarters, but the prosperity that that brings hides deprivation, which is hard to tackle in an area of high wage and housing costs. That should be picked up by the formula, as options 2 and 3 propose.

The arguments for options 3 and 5 are appealing, as private sector wages reflect the market, whereas public sector wages are fixed. If an area has a lot of public sector workers, the inclusion of the public sector will dampen the effect of wages, yet the pressure to find staff may be even greater in those areas. That applies as much to education as to other services, particularly social services. Although education rightly receives much of the limelight in the discussion of local government funding, the funding of social services is equally important. Many authorities, including Swindon, spend well over current Government assessments of funding, which indicates their huge needs. Swindon certainly faces huge pressures in social services for children, the elderly and people with mental health problems, all of which are essential in any civilised society.

I should like to get back to the days when a home help service was available. It did good preventive work, but we are a long way from having it. Again, I recognise that the Government have put more investment into social services, but there is still a long way to go. Whichever proposal is chosen, the population basis should be the resident elderly population, plus those in residential care who are supported by the authority but live outside it. It does not seem right to exclude people who cost the authority a great deal of money. It is right that they should be supported, and if they are the responsibility of the local authority, they should be recognised in the formula.

On fire service funding, a radical approach is needed to remove the perverse incentive of the fire calls indicator, which has been discredited. We should be doing all we can to promote preventive work, and I am very proud of the work that Swindon and Wiltshire fire brigade does in that respect. That has often been at the forefront of preventive work across the country. The fourth option for the fire service gives an extra top-slice for fire safety education, and an extra sparsity top-slice, which is surely justified. That is the most attractive option if the Government genuinely want to prevent fires and deal with the difficult pension problem facing the service.

The second option, which makes only minimal changes, does not deal adequately with those issues. As the consultation has proved to be complex and painful, it is unlikely that Ministers and MPs will take part in such discussions every year, so any changes made now should be significant and substantial.

Many concerns have been raised in Wiltshire with regard to police funding, particularly the rural policing fund. I was delighted to hear the Home Secretary announce last week that the rural policing fund would be preserved outside the formula. That is making an important difference in Wiltshire already and we want to see it retained.

Whereas education services funding looks to use working families tax credit and income support data, environmental services funding takes account of income support only. It would seem logical to use both sets of data across Government Departments. I know that the Government have responded by saying that many of these services are subsidised in the day, but I cannot think of many services in Swindon that are subsidised in the day. In the case of cultural services, the same issues of access and inclusiveness would apply to those on low pay as to those on no pay.

On population growth, I urge the Government to recognise that Swindon has been growing rapidly and it is a huge frustration to my constituents that the infrastructure does not keep up with that expansion. Formulae must take account of that. Swindon may be in a unique position, as we have effectively been a new town without being defined as a new town. We have been the fastest-growing town and services have not caught up with the expansion of population. The borough council planned for that as much as possible but, because of rate capping and other problems, it was not able to do as much as necessary. Outside the funding formula, perhaps the Minister will consider allowing more of Swindon's uniform business rate to be returned to the town for a defined period so that we could catch up with the investment needed. With our Government-backed urban regeneration company and new regional development agency structures, this may be a key time to deliver on that.

[Ms Julia Drown]

My constituents rely on local government services and appreciate the value of those services. They want the Government to adopt a new, fairer formula for funding local government services to reflect the differing needs and costs of services in different areas. I have highlighted some of the issues that the new formula should address. I emphasise three points: first, a review of the area cost adjustment is crucial to reflect the pressures that high-cost areas such as Swindon experience; secondly, the need for a higher basic funding level for education authorities; and thirdly, the need for major additional investment in social services.

7.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I genuinely congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on securing this debate. There is much competition between many hon. Members throughout the House for a debate on this issue. It is the mark of a dedicated and conscious Member of Parliament to argue in such detail about technical and funding matters that obviously affect all our constituents so significantly.

My hon. Friend has given me a very long list of issues to cover, so I shall press on and try my best to address some of them. Hon. Members will be aware that the Leader of the House confirmed earlier today that the announcements on these matters will have been made by this time next week, so we do not have long to wait. In the meantime, however, I can certainly reassure her that the points that she has been making have, along with all other responses, been taken into account in making the final decisions. This debate also follows the announcement made earlier this week about setting up a voluntary arrangement with Swindon borough council following a request from the authority for help in improving public services, which are facing difficulties in the area.

My hon. Friend is especially concerned about funding for schools. She registered her support for the proposals made by the F40 group. I assure her that I am well aware of the strength of feeling not only in Swindon, but elsewhere in the country, which the group has made plain. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards has been able to meet a delegation of representatives. I know that there was a helpful exchange of views.

On the options in the education formula, it is worth reiterating that the considerable increases in funding for education that the spending review has provided over the next three years mean that we have been able to give the commitment that no authority's schools will lose out in real terms in moving to the new formula. We want a fairer, clearer system that is justified by the educational needs of children and based on the most up-to-date evidence of relative cost and need. Any formula will need an element for deprivation, known as additional educational needs, and an enhancement for areas where schools need to pay more to recruit and retain staff.

The F40 group has proposed a change to the formula, suggesting that money be taken out of the factor specified in the formula for deprivation and put into the basic allowance per pupil. That would have an impact on authorities with high levels of deprivation. In working out a new funding system, we need to consider how changes will affect all authorities, not only those in the F40 group. However, I can assure my hon. Friend that we have been considering all the responses very carefully, including those from the F40 authorities.

My hon. Friend mentioned some specific points that I shall try to address. In respect of how the education formula will treat issues relating to deprivation, the indicator that we choose is clearly very important. I appreciate that Swindon has some disadvantaged areas with residents in low-paid work. Among the proposals for the new funding formula are two options in which the main indicator for deprivation—the number of children of parents on income support—is supplemented by the number of children of parents in receipt of the working families tax credit. That option picks up children whose parents are in low-paid work and aims to reflect a wider definition of poverty. As I said, we will see the outcome very shortly.

On the complex question that my hon. Friend asked about the threshold for additional educational needs and how it works, the consultation options all use thresholds for assessing top-ups. For example, the threshold of 30 LEAs would give all authorities funding as if 13 per cent. of their pupils were deprived. If 15 per cent. of an authority's pupils are deprived, it would receive additional funding for the 2 per cent. of pupils above the threshold, but if that authority has a level of less than 13 per cent., it would receive funding as if it had a 13 per cent. level.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's concerns about the level of the threshold and how it might affect Swindon. Although the threshold is relatively easy to convey in a general sense, I can sympathise with her about the difficulty in assessing how the different threshold levels will affect individual authorities. In making decisions, we are considering the pros and cons of high and low-level thresholds for additional educational needs.

Let me deal with the way in which the current system reflects the extra costs through area cost adjustment. It takes account of the extra costs of recruiting and retaining staff in some areas, especially London and the south-east. The options in the consultation paper are based on evidence that suggests that authorities with significant deprivation and additional staff costs need to spend more to achieve the same results for their children. I accept that there is scope for judgment about the evidence, but the four options reflect that.

To make a wider point about the area cost adjustment, I note that my hon. Friend supports options ACA2 and ACA3, and that on balance she prefers options that are based only on wages in the private sector. Although we understand the rationale for using only private sector wages, there are arguments against doing that, notably the reality of lower wage flexibility in the public sector. We must weigh up those issues carefully.

My hon. Friend seeks assurance on several other formula issues. She mentioned the elderly personal social services formulae. There are two main choices. One option is to use the total resident population, which includes those in households and residential care. The alternative is to use the population in households plus the number of people in residential care that the authority supports. My hon. Friend was clear that she supports the latter. Both options include people in residential care, but the second approach recognises that authorities place people in care in other authorities. However, the matter is more complicated and it is difficult to go into great detail. We have been carefully considering the balance as we finalise decisions.

My hon. Friend also questioned the reason for including deprivation in police option 5. It has a separate deprivation factor, which was included in the consultation document to seek views on whether that would be an acceptable method of helping to implement the Government's agenda to help people out of deprivation.

My hon. Friend also asked whether the £30 million rural policing fund would continue next year. I appreciate that she spotted that the national policing plan, which the Home Secretary launched, will continue in its current form outside the funding formula.

My hon. Friend believes that working families tax credit data should be used in the block of services that is catchily entitled EPCS, or environmental, protective and cultural services, in addition to assessing deprivation based on benefits data.

Low wages are clearly an aspect of deprivation that is not well covered by benefits data, but is that the right indicator for EPCS? Is that set of services in as much need of deprivation weighting as, for example, education or social services? Decisions will be made, announced and explained next week, but we are all grappling with those questions.

Let us consider fixed costs for authorities. All authorities, whatever their size, must have specific functions, for example, a chief executive, a director of finance and so on. Those basics constitute bigger issues for small authorities. However, it is debatable whether much can be achieved through a fixed-cost element for larger authorities such as police authorities or fire authorities. Nevertheless, we are carefully considering all the arguments.

My hon. Friend mentioned population growth and the extent to which the formula should recognise it. We have received many comments on that. We understand the anxieties of rapid growth areas about their increasing population. The consultation paper contains an option of making a targeted grant that is top-sliced off the total formula grant to avoid the complexity of including it in the formula. The results of the 2001 census highlight some of the difficulties of simply projecting forward past population trends.

My hon. Friend proposed a more radical approach for the fire service formula to get rid of the perverse incentive of the fire calls indicator. I assure her that we have looked closely at all the formulae to ensure that they no longer include the perverse incentives and inadequate indicators that many of them contained.

On non-domestic rates, the Government have said in the pre-Budget report that we will explore how some of the increased business rate revenue derived from growth and regeneration might be retained by councils. We will be consulting on any proposals next year.

The formula grant review is, of course, about the distribution between authorities of a fixed pot of money. However, it is worth reminding the House that we have significantly increased the funding for local authorities overall since we took office, with Government grant increasing by 20 per cent. in real terms, compared with the 7 per cent. cut in real terms over the last four years of the previous Conservative Administration. The spending review ensures that councils will continue to see increased funding. I have repeated the good increases in grant for local authorities generally in previous Adjournment debates that have taken place recently in the House, and I do not wish to take up too much time in this debate repeating all the good news for local authorities.

My hon. Friend has called for even bigger increases in funding over the next three years, in particular for social services. We looked carefully at all the pressures facing local authorities, at the improvements in service we want to see made, at the room for greater efficiencies and at what the country can afford when setting the spending plans for the next three years—plans which provide now for a real-terms growth in funding for personal social services of 6 per cent. a year. We believe that we have been able to ensure that the people will be able to see real improvements over the next few years in the priority areas such as personal social services.

My hon. Friend has also asked for clarification on the Government's commitments on the level of grant increase next year. We have said that we will ensure that no local authority receives less grant than it did last year on a like-for-like basis—that is, if the composition, nature and functions of the local authority do not change significantly. This is a cash grant increase pledge—not in real terms—but we hope to do much better than this in the announcements that we make this time next week.

My hon. Friend has also asked for floors to be set for all three years of the spending review. We want to ensure that local authorities have greater certainty about future funding. We have said that we intend to keep floors and ceilings as part of the new system, and they will therefore feature in the local government finance settlement for at least the next two years. However, we cannot provide information on the levels of floors and ceilings for future years, as there are too many variable factors which can affect decisions on the floor. Given that, we are unable to provide this information much in advance of the provisional settlement for each year.

It is worth looking at how Swindon has benefited since we took office. It has received an annual average increase in standard spending assessments of 5.2 per cent., compared with an increase of 1.5 per cent. in the last four years of the previous Conservative Administration. Swindon's education SSA has increased by nearly £21 million—more than 37 per cent.—over five years. Its standards fund allocation has increased significantly, and it has received more money for capital, including the £58 million private finance

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

initiative scheme. In social services, Swindon's children's grant has increased by 18 per cent. and its carers' grant by 21 per cent.

A wide-ranging review is under way. There is, of course, a difficult balance to be struck, but we are considering carefully all the points that have been made, particularly by hon. Members who have spoken and written in during the consultation period. The Government have a good track record of providing major new funds for councils, and I hope that, in the decisions that are announced next week, many hon. Members will see the commitments that we have been able to maintain.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 2 December 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Young Offenders

1. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What plans he has to extend the use of intensive supervision and surveillance programmes for young offenders. [82302]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): The intensive supervision and surveillance programme is a Home Office-funded Youth Justice Board initiative. It is the strongest community sentence for serious and prolific young offenders, and it is aimed at the 3 per cent. of young people who are responsible for 25 per cent. of juvenile offences. The scheme has just been extended to cover all 10 areas covered by the street crime initiative. It now covers four fifths of England and Wales, including all the big conurbations.

Dr. Cable: In the light of Friday's court ruling pointing to the inappropriateness of prison for children, will the Minister now agree to extend completely, to all youth areas, this valuable programme, which has been shown to be much more effective than prison in deterring reoffending and which costs the taxpayer only one quarter as much as a young offenders institution place?

Hilary Benn: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the intensive supervision and surveillance programme. Early indications are encouraging, but we must wait for the full assessment, which is to be undertaken by Oxford university, with the results available in 2004. One of the reasons that we introduced the programme was to minimise the chances of young people having to go into custody, although we recognise that that may be necessary for a small proportion of offenders.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the best ways to supervise young offenders is to have a vigilant police authority, but that police authorities in many areas are composed of people who do not come from high-crime areas? I do not expect him to answer off the cuff today, but will he undertake to examine the balance of representation on police authorities, especially in areas such as mine, where there are very few people representing the city of Nottingham, but where the majority of the shire's crime takes place?

Hilary Benn: I agree that it is important that police authorities should be representative of the communities they serve, not only in dealing with young offenders, but in dealing with all types of crime. I am happy to write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Does the Minister agree that for that minority who have to be imprisoned, the key to rehabilitation lies in structured programmes both while they are in custody and on their release? In that context, should there not be concern if the early release programme under tagging of 60 days, extendable to 90 days, is leading to young offenders being released part way through programmes undertaken while they are in custody?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman is aware that when applying the early release programme under home detention curfew, prisons will, in anticipation of prisoners coming out, take account of that in their programmes. On his first point, he is absolutely right: structured programmes are important to tackle the problems created by young offenders. That is precisely why in recent years we have invested £50 million in improving those programmes under the auspices of the YJB.

Air Weapons

2. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What plans he has to change the age limit at which air weapons can be used; and if he will make a statement. [82303]

11. **Jeff Ennis** (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): What plans he has to amend legislation on possession and use of airguns. [82313]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): The misuse of air weapons is a serious problem. We are considering a number of options for dealing with the difficulties that people have faced, and I intend to introduce proposals in the new year under the new antisocial behaviour legislation.

Mr. Mullin: I am grateful for that reply, but had hoped that the Home Secretary would be able to go a little further and say precisely what he had in mind. Will he confirm that among the options he is considering are raising the age ban on ownership to 17 and increasing the powers of police to confiscate the weapons; and whether he has any plans to deal with replica weapons?

Mr. Blunkett: I am deeply sympathetic on all three counts. The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry,

North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), has been pulling together a package of measures for me, and I hope to be able to announce some of those very shortly.

Jeff Ennis: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), is the Home Secretary considering the introduction of a licensing system for the use of airguns? That would be popular with many local councils, particularly in Barnsley and Doncaster, but I know that it would be difficult to achieve given that about 4 million unlicensed air weapons are already in circulation in this country.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend has identified a real problem in both the bureaucracy and our ability to enforce the law. He will be aware of the way in which the categorisation works at the moment—the six foot-pounds, as they are known, which are already prohibited under the handgun ban. Obviously, there are a number of ways in which the use of handguns can be dealt with as an offence, including firearms offences. I am sympathetic to the problem, and am seeking a way forward that will not bog everyone down in a bureaucratic nightmare but will result in a solution.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I thank the Home Secretary for his final remark about not seeking to trap everyone in a bureaucratic quagmire, but does he agree that tens of thousands of young people handle airguns extremely responsibly and learn a great deal about the art of target shooting and rifle shooting, particularly the basic rudiments of weapons safety, from shooting with airguns? Does he agree that it is extremely important that they should not be prevented from enjoying the perfectly legitimate and wholly satisfactory use of their weapons?

Mr. Blunkett: I would agree, but that is primarily because they are properly supervised and trained, and understand the nature of the weapon that they are handling. If that can be done in properly supervised surroundings, so much the better.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): May I emphasise to the Home Secretary the fact that the ban on handguns, to which he referred just now, demonstrates clearly that banning does not necessarily reduce the criminal use of handguns? I remind him of the Prime Minister's public pledge not to place further restrictions on shooting sports. In that spirit, and in the spirit of the Home Secretary's own remarks on the record that he wants any changes in airgun legislation to have cross-party support, I urge him to reject proposals on licensing and raising ages because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) said, they will penalise the vast majority who participate in the lawful, sensible and safe use of airguns. Will he consider simply extending section 16 of the Firearms Act 1968, which would make it an arrestable offence to carry an airgun in a public place unless someone could prove that they had good reason for doing so? That would have our party's support.

Mr. Blunkett: I am prepared to consider the hon. Gentleman's proposition, but I want to make it clear that there is an enormous difference between holding, owning and using airguns for sport and using them to maim, terrorise and undermine the order that we expect in our communities.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): On the question of weapons in general, the Home Secretary will be aware of the rising tide of gun crime in London. Is he aware that the Metropolitan police aim to get the minimum sentence for carrying a weapon raised to at least five years? Will he also do something about the production of Brocock replica weapons?

Mr. Blunkett: I am aware of representations. There is good reason for treating the issue seriously and considering whether we should add it to the Criminal Justice and Sentencing Bill.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Like my hon. Friends, I very much welcome the moderate approach that the Home Secretary has outlined this afternoon. However, will he clarify something? Rather puzzlingly, he told the Select Committee on Home Affairs that he would examine why people under 17 could purchase air weapons. Is he not aware that that is already illegal? Between 14 and 17, people can borrow and use air weapons—we all agree that that is sensible—but they have to be over 17 to buy them.

Mr. Blunkett: You can be under 17 to own one—that is an interesting anomaly. We can banter about the niceties across the Dispatch Box till kingdom come, but in the spirit of our earlier discussion, we are all trying to find a genuine solution.

CCTV

3. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What plans he has for funding further CCTV installations by local authorities. [82304]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): Under the crime reduction programme closed circuit television initiative, a potential £170 million will be spent funding 684 CCTV schemes. Although bids for that initiative are now closed, other opportunities for funding CCTV schemes currently exist under the safer communities, communities against drugs, and the small retailers in deprived areas initiatives.

Mr. Kidney: Does my right hon. Friend agree that CCTV cameras are effective in deterring and detecting crime, especially when they are used in conjunction with other measures such as lighting? The people who live in Stafford town and Penkridge village are delighted with their cameras and would like more. How, as a result of my right hon. Friend's reply, will local authorities such as Stafford borough and south Staffordshire district obtain funding for more CCTV cameras?

Mr. Denham: I am delighted to hear of the success of the CCTV scheme in Penkridge village. That experience is shared in many parts of the country. Funds will continue to be available for crime reduction through

crime reduction partnerships. In response to many requests from local councils, we are tending to move away from central ring-fenced budgets for specific purposes to enable decisions on priorities to be made locally. Funds will continue to be available for crime reduction in my hon. Friend's constituency and those of other hon. Members.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): What is the percentage difference in crime detection in town centres that have CCTV by comparison with those that do not?

Mr. Denham: The major evaluation of the 684 schemes that the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister are undertaking will give us the detailed information about impact that the hon. Gentleman seeks. As well as the increase in crime detection, crime in car parks decreases by more than 40 per cent. when CCTV is introduced. We are seeking a reduction in crime and the fear of crime, not simply an increase in detection.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Does my right hon. Friend know that CCTV cameras in metropolitan areas are concentrated in the larger towns and cities? What help does he offer the smaller urban authorities, such as former urban district councils, to obtain the services of CCTV? Is it possible to have mobile CCTV in some of our communities?

Mr. Denham: The money that we made available through the safer communities initiative and the communities against drugs funds can be used to finance CCTV schemes. They have been used in many different areas. I visited an extensive network in Surrey recently that was funded through such initiatives and other sources. Mobile or relocatable schemes can play a useful part when that is the most appropriate method of tackling the problem.

Drug Rehabilitation

4. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): What recent assessment he has made of the benefits drug rehabilitation has for a community. [82306]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): Drug treatment, including rehabilitation, works. Research has shown that for every £1 spent on treatment, £3 is saved in criminal justice and victim costs of crime. The longer problematic drug users remain in treatment, the greater the savings ratio. Rehabilitation is only one aspect of treatment and is not always the most appropriate intervention.

Mr. Hoban: I have talked to those who work with the homeless in my constituency, and they are concerned that the wait of three to six months for treatment is too long, and that the treatment periods are too short to be effective. Given the benefits of rehabilitation that the Under-Secretary outlined in his answer, is it not time to spend more money on treatment and on increasing the number of rehabilitation places and their effectiveness, for the sake of our addicts and the communities where they live?

Mr. Ainsworth: I welcome—I really do—the Conservative party's conversion to providing treatment for drug addicts. It is a shame that it happened only a couple of months ago, before the party conference. We realised the benefits just after we took power in 1997, and we have increased the amount of treatment available by 8 per cent. every year since then. We plan to continue to do that. Although things are not currently adequate, waiting times are decreasing. We need to reduce them further.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Retailers in the shopping centre in Milton Keynes have become aware of the huge cost of shoplifting by a relatively small number of drug addicts, who do it to finance their drug habit. The retailers are considering making a financial contribution towards increasing the number of drug rehabilitation places that are available locally as a better way of dealing with the problem than simply locking people up. What is my hon. Friend's response to that proposal?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend hits on an important point. Retail partnerships are increasing in our towns and cities. They have some knowledge of the problem. We need to plug such partnerships properly into all our crime reduction initiatives, including our ability to get drug addicts into treatment. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety recently held discussions along those lines with the Birmingham partnership. We are actively considering the matter to ascertain what can be done in conjunction with retail partnerships in towns such as Milton Keynes.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): With an estimated 300 heroin addicts in Gosport alone, each needing something like £20,000 a year to feed their habit, is it not obvious that the 1,882 places available for treatment are woefully inadequate, and that platitudes and reassurances must be backed up by action?

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is prepared to listen to any answer that is given to him in that regard. We have 118,000 people in treatment in this country. We need to double that figure, and we plan to do so. By the end of the drugs strategy period, we plan to have more than 200,000 problematic drug users in treatment. There is not enough treatment at the moment, but we need people of the right quality to remedy that, and those people need to be trained. We also need the input of GPs. This is not something that can happen overnight. We have been increasing the amount of treatment available consistently since 1998, and we plan to continue to do so. I might say that that is in marked contrast to what went on before.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): When the Minister answered a recent written question by saying that 118,500 individuals were reported as being "in contact with" treatment agencies, what did he mean? How many

of those individuals are in fact being maintained on methadone? Is it true that almost half of them are in that condition?

Mr. Ainsworth: What I meant was that 118,000 people are receiving a whole range of treatment services—not merely rehabilitation—including specialist drugs advice and information, harm reduction advice, in-patient detoxification services, specialist prescribing services, GP drug prescribing services, and counselling services, as well as residential rehabilitation. The right hon. Gentleman appears to be putting across a very simplistic view of what treatment is or needs to be. Treatment needs to be tailored to particular needs, and I would suggest that what is needed in a particular locality does not need to be dictated at national level. Local people need to decide what is needed in their area.

Mr. Letwin: If such matters do not need to be dictated at national level—I have some sympathy with the Minister on that—is it also the case that there is no need for national targets? In 2000, the Home Secretary set targets to reduce the proportion of people under 25 using class A drugs by 25 per cent., and to reduce by 25 per cent. the level of repeat offending by people misusing drugs. Was it because the Home Secretary and the Minister did not believe that there was a need for a national strategy that they removed those targets in 2002? What is their proposal in relation to their new statement on drugs? Are we going to hear that targets are to disappear altogether?

Mr. Ainsworth: The right hon. Gentleman should be a little more patient. As I have said, he discovered the drug problem two months ago, just before his party conference. If he waits a short while, and if he is prepared to engage in an adult debate on this issue, he will see that there are better focused targets, which are measurable and achievable, in what we announce.

Mr. Speaker: Question 5, please.

National Treatment Agency

5. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw): What criteria are used to determine the performance of the National Treatment Agency. [82307]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): So are we all.

Mr. Ainsworth: The National Treatment Agency is assessed by the Department of Health. The following criteria are used: access to treatment, in terms of progress on meeting the national drugs strategy target of doubling the people in treatment by 2008; capacity, in regard to the extent to which there is work force capacity to meet the target; efficiency, in terms of the reduction of waiting times; and effectiveness, in regard to the increase in the proportion of people successfully completing or appropriately sustaining treatment.

John Mann: I wish to follow up the fourth aspect—the quantification of what determines success. I have investigated that at length in my constituency, but nobody from the drug treatment services has been able to quantify success—for example, whether it means people coming off drugs, stabilising, reducing intake or eliminating criminal activity. Will my hon. Friend consider how that specific fourth target can be tightened to hold the National Treatment Agency accountable?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is right. All treatment has to be aimed at attempting to achieve abstinence, but maintaining people on treatment can in itself lead to significant reductions in crime. The treatments offered have therefore to be tailored to individuals, and keeping people in treatment, picking them up when they fail, and readmitting them to treatment all need to be looked at positively. However, we need adequate ways to measure exactly what is being achieved, locally as well as nationally.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Minister is right to refer to cost-effectiveness, and rehabilitation treatment is important in the criminal sphere, since between 50 and 60 per cent. of property crime is drugs related. A few weeks ago, I put to him the possibility of ring-fencing the proceeds of drug trading, millions of pounds of which are rightly confiscated each week in the Crown courts. Why do we not ring-fence that money to create more rehab places for that very important category of person? May I also remind him that there are only 38 rehabilitation beds in the whole of Wales? That does not deal with the problems in a single valley.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman should not look to recovered assets—not at the moment, in any case—as the panacea for all those problems. We managed to recover about £20 million of criminal assets last year, and over half that was redistributed through the recovered asset fund. That money on its own will not make such a difference, and it will not deal with the treatment that is needed and already planned in the drugs strategy. I accept what he says—it can play an important part—but there needs to be a lot more input than just recovered criminal assets.

Police

6. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): What recent discussions he has had with the chief constable of Thames Valley police about recruitment and retention of police officers; and if he will make a statement. [82308]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I have discussed the chief constable's concern about retention in the Thames Valley area on a number of occasions in the past year, most recently in the past few weeks. Thames Valley police has been recruiting strongly in recent years, but the force has recently experienced retention difficulties, including a net outflow of transfers. We are working

with chief constables, police authorities and staff associations in London and the south-east, including Thames Valley, to consider all the associated issues and to develop practical solutions.

Mr. Cameron: I am grateful for that answer and I am glad that the Minister has spoken to the chief constable of Thames Valley police, to whom I spoke this morning. I have to tell the Minister that the retention situation is still dire. Is he aware that, in parts of the Thames Valley area, over 60 per cent. of front-line officers are probationers? Will he consider increasing the extra allowance for Thames Valley officers in the south-east of England and giving the chief constable more flexibility over his budget, particularly in respect of overtime and the special priority payments? We must try to keep some of those officers in the Thames Valley force rather than see them go all over the country.

Mr. Denham: There are a number of things that we need to consider, including how the additional special priority posts money will be implemented in Thames Valley and other forces in the new year. Thames Valley officers already receive an additional allowance compared with the norm of £2,000 a year, and we are helping in other ways—for example, 171 of the starter homes under the starter homes initiative will be for the benefit of Thames Valley officers. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we take the issues facing a few of the south-east forces very seriously and we are considering what measures we can take to assist.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that 22 officers have left the Chiltern Vale force since April, which is some 10 per cent. of the total? I was told by a senior officer this morning that that will have grave consequences if something is not done quickly; so will he please, this afternoon, commit himself to extra allowances, as my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) requested?

Mr. Denham: As I have said, additional resources are on the way as a result of the pay deal with the Police Federation and the employers earlier this year. We need to discuss how they can be used. We are considering, among other things, giving the forces help with housing. I am due to meet the forces in the south-east before Christmas to look at a range of options.

Active Citizenship

7. **Ross Cranston** (Dudley, North): What plans he has to promote community engagement and active citizenship. [82309]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): As I think my hon. and learned Friend knows, we believe that the active involvement of local people in their communities is essential to achieving safe, cohesive communities and can make a real difference to the quality of life in an area. We want to increase voluntary activity and promote active citizenship, and the active community unit is leading that work across Government.

Ross Cranston: I agree that good public services are not simply a matter of bureaucracy up here providing services for a community down there. That applies particularly to deprived communities. How, though, is my hon. Friend ensuring that Home Office services in my area actively involve local people—and, if I may be blunt, what Home Office resources are available to those people?

Beverley Hughes: My hon. and learned Friend is right. If we are to involve the voluntary and community sector more in the delivery of public services, which is what we want to do, local people must be involved in both defining and shaping the way in which services are delivered. They must become involved in the voluntary and community organisations that we want to engage in public service delivery.

My hon. and learned Friend will know from his experience in Dudley, which is one of the 88 most deprived areas and has received substantial regeneration money, that as well as producing better services such arrangements often have a marked effect on local people who become involved. Like me, he has met many for whom that involvement has constituted a personal turning point, showing them that they have the capacity for more extensive involvement.

Dudley, as I said, has received substantial resources. *[Interruption.]* If I may finish—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] My hon. and learned Friend will know that, in addition—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the hon. Lady finish.

Beverley Hughes: There is also a specific amount, £330,000, for development of voluntary and community networks in Dudley.

Bob Russell (Colchester): The Minister rightly spoke of the important role that the voluntary sector can play in our deprived communities in particular. It now costs some £22,000 a year to keep a young person locked up in a young offenders unit. Would it not be better to invest that money in our young people through the recognised youth organisations, perhaps helping them to hire school halls; and would not our communities be a lot better for it?

Beverley Hughes: As the hon. Gentleman will know from the policy we have published, we consider community-based solutions appropriate for many young people, and the voluntary sector has a key role to play in that.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): When an active citizen who has witnessed a serious crime is scared off from giving evidence at a criminal trial, does that not underline the need to strengthen the law so that some of the thugs on our streets who are getting away with serious assault and worse are brought to justice? If people are to be active citizens and support their communities, they too need support from the law of the land.

Beverley Hughes: I agree that the concept of active citizenship is not only about involvement in voluntary activity. It also means being able to play a proper role as a participant in the criminal justice system. Our White

Paper and the Bill that will follow will make the system work so that victims and witnesses can play their proper role.

Special Constables

8. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): How many special constables were employed in England in (a) 1997 and (b) 2002. [82310]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Wills): On 31 March 1997 there were 19,874 special constables in England and Wales. On 31 March 2002 there were 11,598.

Mr. Osborne: Those figures reveal the total collapse in the number of special constables employed in this country. In my county, the number has fallen by more than 50 per cent. The Government say they are committed to increasing the number of specials, and regularly organise recruitment campaigns. Why have they failed so spectacularly?

Mr. Wills: We of course agree that the special constabulary has a very important part to play—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members want to hear the answer to the question, I suggest that they listen. If they go on making noise, they will not hear the answer—*[Interruption.]* There you go, Mr. Speaker.

We agree with the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) that special constables have an important role to play, and that we need more of them. As a result, we are investing a lot of money—£300,000—in the champion's initiative, which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community announced 10 days ago. We need to improve the engagement of employers, and to see what else we have to do. The reason for the fall in numbers is a long-standing one, which began many years ago. In many ways, it can be traced back to 1945, and there are many complex reasons—*[Laughter.]* Opposition Members find this very amusing, but we have to deal with the problem.

The point that hon. Member for Tatton is, I hope, getting at is that we have to deal with crime and with reassuring the public about crime. That is the role of special constables, but it is only part of the picture. In looking at this issue, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will remember that police numbers as a whole have risen to 188,512, and that we now have the largest ever number—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Jenkins.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): Does my hon. Friend recognise the demise in the number of special police officers—a development that starkly highlights the drop in the number of people in our society who do voluntary work and who make a voluntary commitment? That is happening across the youth sector, and it certainly worries me. Has any work been done on that, and is it happening because too many people now lead hectic lives and do not have sufficient time, or because for 18 years they were told that there is no such thing as society?

Mr. Wills: My hon. Friend is right, and he draws attention to a very valuable point. There are many reasons why the numbers are falling, a key one of which is that we are having difficulty in retaining special constables. Recruitment is not a problem: last year, we recruited 1,700 new special constables, which is a significant achievement. The problem is that we are losing more of them, and a key reason why is exactly as my hon. Friend describes. More than 50 per cent. of special constables leave because of family commitments, and work and study commitments. Significantly, one in five leave to join the regular police force, which shows our success in transforming the state of policing in this country. Anecdotal evidence shows that, in many areas, as many as 40 per cent. leave the specials to join the regular police force, which we should all welcome.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Who bears the greatest responsibility for the hon. Gentleman's failure, Attlee or Thatcher? *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Wills: I assume that that was a debating point, rather than a serious question. The responsibility falls not to any Prime Minister, but to long-standing changes in society. It is a measure of the failure of the Conservatives that they do not realise that some things have to be tackled systematically, coherently and with proper funding, and that is what we are doing.

Alcohol-related Crime

9. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will ensure that all crime and disorder partnerships include measures to combat alcohol-related crime as part of their strategies. [82311]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Initial analysis of the crime and disorder partnerships shows that some 53 per cent. of them have included prioritisation of alcohol abuse in their policies for reducing crime.

Mr. Grogan: Given that the aims of the Government's Licensing Bill include allowing more flexible hours for pubs and creating a more civilised atmosphere late at night in our town and city centres—making them attractive not just to the young, but to those who are young at heart, such as my right hon. Friend and me—does he agree that it is more important than ever that crime and disorder partnerships prioritise by trying to make the night-time economy as safe as possible?

Mr. Blunkett: I would encourage all crime and disorder partnerships to take a further look at their strategies in view of the real problems of binge drinking. More than half of those who commit crime are seen to have been involved in drink or drugs, and we know that that causes devastation.

On a slightly facetious note, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on his dedicated work for the all-party beer group, which includes getting people to drink sensibly?

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Given that the Government have had it trailed in the press this week that we are about to have the relaunch of the drugs strategy and that it is widely known that the most recent British crime survey showed that 40 per cent. of violent crimes are fuelled by alcohol, can the Home Secretary tell us when we will get the Government's alcohol strategy, which is hugely important and was trailed nearly five years ago? When will they give crimes fuelled by alcohol equal priority with crimes fuelled by other dangerous drugs?

Mr. Blunkett: The Department of Health and the Home Office are working with the forward strategy unit on developing a proper programme that is integrated with and related to the updated drugs strategy that we will publish this week. I do not disagree with the need to tackle this problem, and I do not think that anyone would, given that a high percentage of stranger violence is committed by people who are under the influence of drink.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): Is my right hon. Friend aware how effective exclusion orders are in banning perpetrators of violent crime from licensed premises, particularly where partnerships exist between the police, the local authority, magistrates and landlords? Unfortunately, their application is patchy. Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to point out again to local crime and disorder partnerships how effective exclusion orders can be and ask them to reconsider using them in their armoury to combat violent alcohol-related crime?

Mr. Blunkett: I should very much like to do that, in conjunction with the proposals in the Licensing Bill. Not least, I commend those alcohol outlets, particularly in city and town centres, which have made an agreement with the police, often using radiocommunications, and are prepared to contribute a little towards making those outlets more attractive. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I are looking at how to strengthen that.

Accommodation Centres

10. **Tony Baldry** (Banbury): When he expects to appoint the independent monitor of accommodation centres. [82312]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): We intend to ensure that the monitor is appointed in good time for him or her to be able to monitor the operation of accommodation centres from the date at which the first centre is open.

Tony Baldry: Would it not be sensible for the monitor to be able to advise on whether a location is suitable to meet the needs of asylum seekers before hundreds of pounds are spent on a public inquiry and millions are spent on building an accommodation centre rather than after?

Beverley Hughes: The role of the monitor was discussed here and in the House of Lords during the passage of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, including the implications of the late amendment on location. The hon. Gentleman has put that point before. Lord Filkin wrote to him on 15 November, making it clear that the monitor is not an adjudicator or an arbiter of whether a location would be suitable for an accommodation centre and that decisions about where to locate the centres will be made by the Secretary of State subject to the planning process. The monitor will not be involved in selecting sites.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Does the Minister accept that there is sufficient ambiguity in the drafting of the last-minute concession in the Bill to allow plenty of argument about the right time to appoint the monitor for him or her to be able to advise on whether all the services can be provided to residents in a particular locality? If she remains so confident that she is right and all the interest groups are wrong when she says that all the services can be provided in remote rural areas, why will she not take the generous interpretation, appoint the monitor soon and allow him or her to comment on the policy of putting all these people in very remote rural places?

Beverley Hughes: I have already said that that is not the role of the monitor—he or she will be monitoring the operation of the centre. I think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman believes that some areas of the country, including his own, are not suitable for asylum seekers and accommodation centres, but we do not take that view. In the annual report to the Secretary of State, the monitor will be able to comment on whether a need of residents is not being adequately met in a particular location. We can then take action to ensure that that need is met properly.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): We support the concepts of accommodation centres and of an independent monitor, but will the Minister tell us what impact they will have, first on the current record number of applications for asylum—29,000 plus in the last quarter; secondly, on her collapsed policy of removing failed asylum seekers; and, finally, on the backlog of claims, 16,000 of which have been outstanding for more than a year?

Beverley Hughes: The accommodation centres themselves are part of an end-to-end strategy for keeping in much closer contact with asylum seekers so that we are able to remove people if their claim is refused. The hon. Gentleman will also know that the Act was implemented only three weeks ago. We had to fight tooth and nail with the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in the House of Lords for many of the most important provisions in that Act, and when we are able to implement them, as we shall be doing during the next few months, they will have the impact on the intake of asylum claims that we anticipate.

Child Abduction

12. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What support he has given to Sussex police to operate the amber alert pilot scheme to help counter child abduction. [82314]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): We are very interested in the lead being taken by Sussex police and the Association of Chief Police Officers' homicide working group in piloting the child rescue project. We wish it success and will closely monitor its progress over the coming months.

Tim Loughton: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. May I draw his attention to early-day motion 70, which has been signed by me and 84 hon. Members and praises the amber alert scheme as it operates in the United States and wishes the Sussex police well in their pilot? However, as Sussex has only a limited amount of motorway, and as the scheme relies on breaking into media broadcasts and on broadcasting on motorway and other traffic signs, will he monitor it closely and give us an undertaking that, if it goes well, it will be piloted more extensively in other constabularies throughout the country, so that at least something positive might come from the horrific murders and abductions that have occurred during this and previous years to deter other such tragedies in the future?

Hilary Benn: I agree wholeheartedly. The scheme is imaginative and is aimed at using all the resources of the community to try to intervene quickly when a child abduction appears to have taken place. We know that those early hours are crucial if we are to find a child who has been abducted. I gladly undertake to monitor carefully the success of the scheme. I am sure that other forces will be looking with great interest at the work that Sussex is doing and I should be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and officers from the Sussex force when the pilot period is over so that we can consider how to spread that good idea elsewhere.

Police

13. **Mr. John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): What plans he has to improve the rate of recruitment and retention of police officers. [82315]

15. **Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What plans he has to improve the rate of recruitment and retention of police officers. [82317]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): The police service in England and Wales is recruiting very successfully; 10,215 officers joined it in the year to March 2002—38 per cent. more than the previous year and the highest number of recruits since 1975. The number of police officers leaving the service annually remains low at about 5 per cent. of strength. However there are variations between forces, and we are working with chief constables and others to identify measures that can be taken where there are local retention problems.

John Robertson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. He will be well aware that, early next year, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 becomes law and will allow the police to seize the assets of the drug barons and Mr. Bigs of the criminal world. What talks has my right hon. Friend held with the Scottish Executive on police staffing on both sides of the border, especially in relation to cross-border co-operation?

Mr. Denham: The Scottish Executive have been closely involved in all stages of the development of the policy and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) has taken a close personal interest in the implementation of the Act, as has the Minister for Justice in Scotland, Jim Wallace. The operation of the Act is a devolved matter, but the Scottish Executive have recently appointed the heads of the new criminal confiscation and civil recovery units. The Scottish police college is delivering comprehensive financial investigation training to police officers in Scotland and that is being developed in consultation with the police service in London.

Brian White: I welcome the measures that the Minister has announced for retaining police officers, particularly in the south-east, but is he aware that the same pressures apply to civilians working in the police force, and those who work alongside the police, such as the new neighbourhood wardens being piloted in my constituency? Will he ensure that the measures do not create unintended or artificial barriers for those who support the police in their duties?

Mr. Denham: Of course I am keen to ensure that nothing we do to support police officer retention has an adverse effect on those who fulfil an important role as police staff. I am pleased to say that there has been good and strong recruitment of civilian staff in my hon. Friend's local police service and all the police services in the south-east.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Special constables are by definition police officers, and we have already heard that there has been a serious collapse in their numbers. Would the Minister consider paying them, invoking the precedent of paying retained firemen and the Territorial Army?

Mr. Denham: We recently invited the current deputy chief constable of Surrey, soon to be the chief constable of Cheshire, Peter Fahy, to act as the leader of a new project to investigate the recruitment, retention, training and deployment of specials in an endeavour to increase their numbers. The question of payment is controversial among specials. I recently approved a pilot project in Workington in Cumbria that, subject to changes in parliamentary regulations, would enable modest local payment to specials in the area. I anticipate, as part of the specials project, that that may happen in a few other areas, too, but we need to be careful not to upset the essentially voluntary nature of

the special constabulary, which I know from experience is highly valued by many specials. I accept in principle the question that the right hon. and learned Gentleman raises, but we must proceed with due caution with some pilot projects, to see how it works out.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Is there not a distinction between paying specials and introducing a new status of retained officer, an omnicompetent officer working part-time, which would help to retain experienced officers? Ministers have said repeatedly over the years that they are considering the case for such retained officers. When will they reach a conclusion?

Mr. Denham: We have been considering not a salary but a bonus payment or modest enhancement in allowances. We have no active plans to introduce other types of working for specials, save that, as part of the pay negotiating body agreement last year, we are making the use of part-time paid police officers more flexible than in the past, by allowing engagement for less than 16 hours a week.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Does the Minister share my concern about the effect of congestion charging on the retention of police officers in inner London? Is he aware that many of the officers in my constituency have to travel by car because of their shift hours? Is anyone likely to provide the extra £1,000 that they will have to pay?

Mr. Denham: That is the responsibility of the Mayor of London and the Metropolitan police service, as the officers' employers. [HON. MEMBERS: "Aha."] I know how much the Conservative party would resist any suggestion that the Home Secretary or I should interfere in these matters. The issues are under active consideration by the Metropolitan police service, and were touched on in recent discussions that I had with the deputy assistant commissioner.

Rural Crime

14. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What the incidence of rural crime was in (a) April 1997 and (b) April 2002. [82316]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): A comparison of the British crime survey figures for 1997–98 with those that I announced in July shows that, for rural areas, burglary was down 44 per cent., violent crime down 35 per cent. and vehicle theft down 34 per cent.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Home Secretary take the time to come and visit Thirsk, one of the market towns in the Vale of York, where burglaries of both homes and properties appear to be on the increase? Will he consider closely the question of improving closed circuit television cameras, to ensure that the clarity of the picture is sufficient to be able to apprehend criminals, rather than merely showing the crime that they have committed?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I would. I am very pleased that the community safety partnerships have been using resources allocated by the Home Office to extend CCTV, and I should like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Hambleton crime reduction partnership in a neighbouring area on being one of only two groups in the country to be awarded beacon status for their efforts in crime reduction in rural areas.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statistics and the downturn in crime in rural areas, but there are also hot spots in rural areas. In my constituency, there is a lot of car crime and vehicles being dumped, and we would like to see more high-visibility policing in the rural area. What resources can he make available to allow to that to happen?

Mr. Blunkett: I hope that, later this week, we can indicate the necessary resources and encouragement to help forces to recruit and to use those recruits effectively in terms of imaginative single manning where appropriate and, of course, show the importance of restoring the rural element to police funding, which will help across the country.

Travellers

16. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): What steps he is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour by travellers. [82318]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): The Government are committed to tackling all forms of antisocial behaviour. That is why we will introduce an antisocial behaviour Bill in the current Session. In addition, we have announced new proposals to deal with unauthorised encampments and the problems of antisocial behaviour that can sometimes arise from them.

Ms Drown: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. We have been promised some more detailed guidance—I understand that my hon. Friend's Department is working on it with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—and we had expected to receive it during the summer. When will we receive that guidance? Although many travellers pass through Swindon and cause us no difficulties at all, some serious antisocial behaviour has been associated with travellers, and we would like to have the guidance to be able to improve the way in which that is managed.

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend and, indeed, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills) have made me aware that they have a particular problem in their area. She knows that, in relation to unauthorised encampments, we have promised new legislation to evict from unauthorised sites where local authorities have authorised sites. The strategic and operational guidance to police and local authorities will be forthcoming very shortly and, in addition, there will be funding to build more authorised sites.

Young Offenders

17. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): What measures he is taking to tackle persistent youth offenders. [82319]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Wills): We are tackling the causes of persistent youth offending through our work to overcome social and economic exclusion, and we are coupling that with tougher action to bring home to persistent offenders the severe consequences that will follow continued offending, including antisocial behaviour orders, acceptable behaviour contracts, parenting orders and local child curfews.

Mr. Love: May I commend the excellent work being done by the Enfield youth offending team, which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary visited earlier this year? Its restorative justice programme is nipping in the bud the sort of behaviour that leads to antisocial offending. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to expand that type of programme so that we can address the sort of antisocial behaviour that leads to youth offending?

Mr. Wills: My hon. Friend is right. We have to take a range of measures to deal with this problem. The sort of measures that he mentions are very welcome, and we know that they are beginning to work. The proof of the success of the measures that we are taking is that we have reduced the reconviction rate by 14.6 per cent. during the past five years, which is important, and that we have delivered on our pledge to halve the time between arrest and sentence. My hon. Friend will agree that those measures are working. We want to see more of them, and we will continue to fund them.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Does my hon. Friend agree that the social inquiry reports that are sometimes produced in court when young offenders appear before magistrates and in other courts are inadequate? Does he also agree that, because the wider family context is often relevant, it would be helpful in the raft of legislation that is to follow to make family reports available to criminal courts as well as family courts?

Mr. Wills: My hon. Friend makes a very important point, and we will certainly consider it very carefully in framing the legislation.

Police

18. **Gareth Thomas** (Clwyd, West): What plans he has to increase and enhance the role of support staff in the police. [82320]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): We are keen to enhance the role of police support staff. Community support officers are already being deployed in London, and we expect up to 1,200 to be working by the end of March. Today sees the implementation of section 38 of the Police Reform Act 2002, which enables chief officers of police to designate suitably skilled and trained support staff to exercise certain police powers.

Gareth Thomas: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. On the issue of community support officers, does he share my puzzlement that although many police forces are actively recruiting community support officers, as they believe that that will improve the effectiveness of their force, North Wales police have decided not to do so, ostensibly because of lack of funding? Would he agree to discuss this issue with me in the near future?

Hilary Benn: I would be pleased to discuss the matter with my hon. Friend. Under the scheme, as he will be aware, forces were invited to bid. From memory, 27 forces were successful, all of which bid first time round. A new round of bidding will occur in the new year. Speaking for myself and my constituency, I cannot wait to see the arrival of the community support officers who will be deployed in West Yorkshire, because of the benefit that I know that my constituents will derive from their presence.

Northern France

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on illegal immigration from northern France.

As the House knows, since the beginning of June I have been in negotiations with the French Government to tackle illegal immigration from France, focusing on making substantial improvements in border controls, improving security at freight depots and the removal of the magnet of the Sangatte centre. This morning, I held further talks with the French Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy.

I am very pleased to tell the House that we have today agreed that the Sangatte centre will close by the end of December, and will be handed back to the owners, Eurotunnel. That is four months earlier than originally anticipated. As the House knows, the centre has been a magnet for illegal trafficking of immigrants since October 1999. More than 67,000 people have passed through the centre since that date. Its closure is, therefore, an extremely welcome achievement and a major contribution to stemming the tide of clandestine entry into the United Kingdom.

I wish to place on record my appreciation of the positive way in which Mr. Sarkozy has approached these negotiations over the past six months and for the good faith that he has shown throughout our talks. I am grateful, as I know those concerned will be, for the decisive action that he has taken against illegal immigration in the Calais area, including the deployment of 1,000 gendarmes and substantial enhancement of security measures.

The French Government have taken away and re-housed some 500 people so far. Just as importantly, however, I have agreed with the French Government a range of measures to establish immigration controls and border security operations in northern France, effectively moving border security to France. The extension of those measures to other ports along the French coast and, in future, to Belgium ensures that instead of dealing with the symptoms, we address the causes of our present difficulties. I can also tell the House that we have opened discussions with the Netherlands.

As the House will recognise, this is a transformation in our border security. It is far better to stop people entering the country illegally than to have to send them back, with all the time wasting and expense that that entails. These measures build on the progress already made. The security measures at Coquelles and Frethun have now been strengthened. The number of clandestines arriving from Frethun has fallen from almost 400 in April to a handful in October. By Christmas, 100 per cent. of the freight traffic travelling through Calais port each and every day will be searched.

Co-operation between our security and law enforcement services has led to the arrest and disruption of six major trafficking gangs operating in northern France over the past few weeks. Almost 250 people have been arrested for people smuggling this year. Immigration officers have been operating in Calais since 20 August. This operation will develop rapidly following today's agreement into a full, joint immigration control as early as possible next year. These actions have been significant in sending a signal, and today's announcement will complete the message to those seeking to traffic human beings across Europe to the UK.

To ensure that we play our part in getting Sangatte closed immediately and, of course, for good, I have agreed that up to 1,000 Iraqis can come to the United Kingdom, not as asylum seekers but on work visas. This is a one-off exercise. They will be temporarily housed for up to three months while we undertake job matching. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for his co-operation. In this way, we will ensure that those who might have reached Britain clandestinely will now pay taxes and national insurance and will not be subject to continuing support from the British taxpayer. We will also take a limited number of Afghans under family reunification, determined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The remainder of the Sangatte population, together with those with whom the French have already dealt, as well as anyone subsequently arriving in the area, will be handled by the French authorities.

I can also tell the House that I intend to ensure that the UK's economic migration channels are available to those from countries that currently generate significant unfounded asylum claims. Legal economic migration strengthens our economy and underpins our coherent policy of managed migration. I believe that we should all unite against those who are currently arguing for a complete block on all immigration to this country, and I challenge the shadow Home Secretary to join me in this regard.

This agreement with the French Government is a further piece in the jigsaw of radical reform to our asylum, immigration and nationality programme. Taken together with the new Act—which was passed against considerable opposition, especially in the House of Lords—it will give us the capacity to manage properly entry into this country. I do not today pretend that we have reached the end of the road. We have only just passed the new legislation and we have only just reached agreement with the French. We cannot, therefore, be expected yet to have achieved the results that will come to fruition only from the implementation of these policies. This is a substantial step forward, however, which no one predicted just six months ago.

I want to finish with this warning. We can put legislation in place, we can reach agreement with our French counterparts, and we can debate these issues in the House, but they will come to nothing without a substantial change in the administration of the system. I am making it clear today to the immigration and nationality directorate that we expect a step change in the operation, efficiency and competence within the system and in how it is handled. I shall hold to account senior managers in my Department for an entirely different approach and a step change in the results that we now expect to be achieved.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for a marginally early copy of his statement.

[Mr. Oliver Letwin]

We welcome the closure of Sangatte. The camp was a symbol, as Mr. Sarkozy said today. But why is the symbol considered so important by the Home Secretary? Was not the camp a symptom rather than a cause? Was it not set up because the asylum seekers were in northern France rather than vice versa? How will its closure reduce the number of asylum seekers coming to northern France?

Turning to the price paid by the Home Secretary, on what legal basis is he intending to issue work permits to 1,200 erstwhile Iraqi asylum seekers? If those people were eligible for work permits, why were they not awarded such permits before the camp's closure? Why are the French authorities so keen not to admit those applicants to France?

More generally, the House will want to learn what impact the Home Secretary believes the measures in his statement will have on net inward migration to the United Kingdom. I cannot wholly rid myself of a suspicion that he is highlighting Sangatte, and that he has wished to highlight Sangatte for some time, to distract attention from the number of people entering and remaining in this country and from the administrative shambles that that number reveals.

In a piece of slightly jaded parliamentary rhetoric, the Home Secretary asks me to join him in resisting calls to block all immigration, but that is not the question we face today. He presides over a system that has allowed, and is allowing, record unlawful net immigration. There were a record 29,000 asylum applicants in the last quarter and only 3,500 removals, which resulted in 25,500 new net additions from asylum in that period. With roughly 70 per cent. of asylum applicants finally refused asylum, we face the prospect of 700,000 additional people, who are failed asylum seekers, coming to this country and remaining in it for the next 10 years.

When we face that situation, why is the Home Secretary talking about a total block? He is nowhere near a total block. Despite his heartfelt pleas from the Dispatch Box to his Department to perform better, and despite drawing down £1.8 billion in supplementary spending increases for his Department, he is nowhere near achieving even a respectable approximation to an effective partial block. I fear that no amount of fanfare about a single camp in northern France will distract us from drawing attention to that fact or will distract the country from noticing it.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not sure whether that was a welcome for the closure of Sangatte and the measures that we are taking.

The right hon. Gentleman asks whether the closure is a symptom or a cause of the problem. I draw his attention to a wise phrase:

> "If asylum seekers knew they could no longer use France as a gateway to the United Kingdom, fewer of them would make their way there in the first place."

If Conservative Members agree with that they agree with their leader because those were the words of Iain Duncan Smith in his article at the end of May in the *Daily Mail*. Sangatte is clearly a magnet. That is why the French and this Government want it closed. It is also why we have linked it to massive improvements in border controls along the French coast and why we are now working with Belgium and the Netherlands. That was never achieved by the previous regime.

What is more, the French Government, who have a nominal connection with the Conservative party, agree entirely with my stance. They believe that what we have agreed will make a significant difference. They think that it is necessary and have widely welcomed our co-operation in making it possible.

The right hon. Gentleman asks why we chose to grant permits to Iraqis. In some regions and parts of the world, it is possible to determine that a significant number of people want to take up the opportunity to work. We also know that it is not possible to send people back to some regions, even when their asylum claims are unfounded, and that if we do not allow entry in an ordered and managed way, they will come into our country clandestinely, claim asylum, be a burden on the support system and clog up the works of the immigration programme.

So what are we doing? We are lifting the burden on taxpayers, organising the system properly and providing for our economic needs by giving people the opportunity to work. I should have thought that hon. Members from all parties would welcome that, and that is why I asked the right hon. Gentleman to join me in condemning those, whose voices are louder and louder, who are against all legal, never mind illegal, immigration into this country. I heard such comment, by one who is very close to the Conservative party, on the "Today" programme this morning. I have read it in the newspapers. I read it almost every other day now in *The Times*, and I have to say that, in the case of Anthony Browne, it borders on fascism.

It is time that we challenged the Conservative party on where it stands because only in September the shadow Home Secretary, when challenged on the radio about whether he would take steps to get here if there was a blockage, talked about hanging on to trains and said:

> "Sure. Absolutely. I think we need to recognise that people who seek to better themselves by engaging in desperate efforts to get to places where they can work hard are not morally in the same category as a scrounger who seeks to be a parasite."

The people whom we are inviting here are not parasites; they seek to work. They seek the right to be here legally, which the right hon. Gentleman has raised in the House on a number of occasions, and I am giving them that right.

Today we are unblocking a major problem for the French and British Governments. Of course, I could have wimped and let Sangatte dribble out while people came across the Channel prior to us being able to make substantive change. The change that has made a difference today is the shifting of the border controls from England to the French coast. We have shifted the immigration and security checks and ensured that people will not get here. Stopping people entering clandestinely has to make more sense than trying to process them and send them back whence they came.

We have not spent £1.8 billion more from the reserve. If the right hon. Gentleman wants a sensible debate, I will give him one, but let us have no silliness about 700,000 unreturned entrants to this country. Otherwise,

we will have the kind of rabble that we have seen this afternoon, who cannot welcome agreement, who do not want a sensible, rational way forward and who will back the far right when it suits them to scare people into believing that managed migration is the same as clandestine asylum seeking. The two are separate; we are dealing with them as separate things and putting in place a managed programme to resolve a long-standing problem.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Home Secretary will know that Liberal Democrats believe that the United Kingdom, like all European countries, should honour its obligations to allow people to put their case for asylum and to accept them when they have a good case. The evidence shows that this country, like many other European countries, needs a net increase of immigrant workers to meet the needs of our economy.

If the Home Secretary is saying that he will make a renewed effort to sort out the problems in his Department, that is welcome, but we will believe it when we see it because we have heard it said for many years.

Does the statement and the deal with the French mean that those who want to put an asylum case will be able to do so? Will the United Kingdom take any of the people currently in northern France who want to put an asylum case, or will they be allowed to stay in France or go elsewhere in Europe? Please will the Home Secretary give positive consideration to the ideas I discussed with the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration a day or so ago, namely, that instead of the nonsense of trying to lock one door, which results in people going somewhere else—locking another port, which results in people trying another route of entry—we try an intelligent Europe-wide system whereby people are processed in the same way wherever they come to the attention of the authorities, and the responsibility for all asylum seekers who enter the European Union is shared fairly across all EU countries?

Lastly, will the right hon. Gentleman consider a way of dealing with the press, which whips up the belief that an increasing number of people will come to this country or stay here legally, by saying that that those asylum seekers who are of working age could be considered as the first group of those who will meet our economic working needs, and then we will consider as a country how many other people we require to meet our work force needs? If he were to give the House a figure for how many people a year we need, that would be very helpful.

Mr. Blunkett: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I shall take his first and last points first. I do not intend to take people from France as asylum seekers. I intend to take the Iraqis as I described, for work purposes, and I intend to take people for family reunification from among those Afghans who have been identified by the UNHCR.

I do not intend to confuse asylum claims with economic migration routes. I do not intend to say to those who have been asylum seekers, "We will take you as the first batch of economic migrants", because that would only encourage people to believe that if they managed to get here and claim asylum, they would be able to work. That is why we took the measures that were announced last Friday.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for Europe-wide action. I hope that by the end of December we will have agreed Dublin 2. I do not believe that that goes far enough or that it will resolve our problems, but it is a further step towards recognition by the EU as a whole that the problem affects us all, that it reflects worldwide movements of people, and that it reflects differences between the ways in which people have been dealt with across Europe. That is precisely why I passed substantial measures in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. I hope that we can make rapid and much better progress. Nicolas Sarkozy and I debated that again this morning, because we both believe that a Europe-wide agreement is needed.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his team on achieving a sensible, practical and fair settlement for the closure of Sangatte, and on delivering a raft of other important security and border control measures. However, when the management and accommodation of the British consignment of migrants is dealt with, will he take account of the fact that places such as my constituency, Dover, which already houses an induction centre, a removal centre and accommodation for almost 200 young asylum-seeker children, are already experiencing great pressure? As the Prime Minister said last year, we have already borne more than our fair share.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend's area has borne more than its fair share, which is why I am sure that he will welcome the transfer to the French coast of immigration and security controls. I am absolutely certain that that will alleviate a substantial part of the problem, when taken together with the massive security now in place around the passenger and freight depots in France. A year ago, people said that that was impossible—they said that we would not be able to do it, that the French would never agree, that we would never get those measures in place, and that people would continue to come from those areas.

We still face a major challenge. Distributing those who are organised and managed into this country under the agreement will be important, and I give an assurance that they will not be managed and organised into the Kent coast.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I thank the Home Secretary for that final assurance. Does he accept that a failure by the House to have a proper and realistic discussion of the matter is the surest way to fuel the very worst forces out on the streets? Does he acknowledge that more than half the people who claimed asylum last year did so in-country and so have nothing to do with the process in France, and that the real solution to the sheer volume of work that is causing the bulk of our problems must be to have a rapid method of ejecting those who enter legally, overstay and, when they are finally picked up, try to claim asylum?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, and that is precisely why, in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, I introduced measures to deny people the financial support and housing that they would otherwise claim if they had not made a claim at or close to the point or port of entry. Many of the people we are talking about as in-country

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applicants have been trafficked in, spent time in the country, and then make a claim, which is entirely wrong—we all agree about that. My earlier reply was given entirely in response to the hooting that started when I announced that we were going to take people as legal economic migrants. We must be absolutely clear—if we are all united against clandestines, we are not all united on legal immigration on economic grounds to this country. That issue is now dividing us. It may not divide the shadow Home Secretary and myself, but it clearly divides him from members of his party.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is this a one-off acceptance of legal migrants, exclusively for people from Iraq and Afghanistan—dangerous but by no means the only dangerous parts of the world? While I welcome the Home Secretary's call for a step change in the immigration and nationality directorate, will it be accompanied by additional resources, both financial and trained staff? Will he make the same call for a step change and improvement in the National Asylum Support Service?

Mr. Blunkett: On the last point, I consider those support services to be an integral part of the immigration and nationality directorate, and want to seek substantiai changes in them. Yes, this is a one-off—I have made that absolutely clear—designed to close Sangatte. We should remember that there were going to be several Sangattes only 12 months ago. Headline after headline said that we were not going to close Sangatte but instead would open several such centres along the French coast—wrong. Sangatte will be closed by the end of December, and we should rejoice in that.

Let me make one thing clear. Yes, the immigration and nationality directorate will get the money that it needs, and has had several thousand additional posts over the past three years. Using the money wisely, however, managing properly and taking decisive management action on failure and lack of productivity is something that everyone in the House now wants.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): The Home Secretary's hopes that he expressed this afternoon will be shared, I trust he accepts, on both sides of the House. Nobody wants him to be anything other than successful. That is particularly true in my constituency of Old Bexley and Sidcup, where we have many asylum-seeker families who are perfectly decent people just trying to achieve a better role in life. However, many of my constituents will think that the Government are selling out. If the Home Secretary challenges the figures produced by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on unreturned entrants, will he now give the House his own figures?

Mr. Blunkett: As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, I am conducting a major attack on illegal working, and I am running a consultation on entitlement cards. Given the obvious support for major action on that, I assume that the Conservative party, including the Front Bench, will now come out unequivocally in favour of entitlement cards and assist with that discussion. Let me make it clear that we do not accept the 700,000 figure, because it has been plucked out of thin air. However, we accept the need for a proper analysis of clandestine entry and the level of illegal working. We are working with the TUC to tackle that and introduce proper measures to secure the system for the future. I will do my best to ensure that we get that right.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that at a time when a report on human rights abuses in Iraq has just been published, it is rather strange that members of the Opposition appear to be unhappy that this country is giving young men who have fled the tyranny of Saddam Hussein an opportunity to work and to make a contribution to our society? Is it not extremely worrying, when millions of people throughout the world are suffering and are refugees and asylum seekers in many countries, that some people are so narrow minded that they believe that we should do nothing to help individuals fleeing such tyranny?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes it is.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Those of us who campaigned for a long time for the closure of Sangatte will welcome the Home Secretary's achievement because we believe that it may facilitate the traffic of freight and passengers through the channel tunnel. However, the right hon. Gentleman's other comments are breathtaking in their arrogance. Why should 1,200 people be suddenly transformed, at the wave of a Home Office wand, from asylum seekers into work seekers, and granted work permits ahead of scores of others? Given the Home Secretary's answer to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser), why is the Department trying to establish a reception centre for even more asylum seekers in Folkestone? Has the right hon. Gentleman got the Chancellor's agreement to pay the county of Kent all the money that the arrangement will cost the taxpayers and council tax payers of the United Kingdom, especially those of Kent?

Mr. Blunkett: My budget will fund whatever temporary costs arise from the need to receive people and move them to job match through the agreement that was reached this morning. The costs will be much less than what we would have paid—on average £18,000, including legal aid—for putting those who would have come here to claim asylum through the process. We all accept that the 67,000 people who went through Sangatte in the past three years undoubtedly made their way to the United Kingdom. That was their purpose in struggling across Europe—to paraphrase the words of the shadow Home Secretary on a Radio 4 programme in September. We have therefore saved rather than spent resources.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The effective moving of the border for checks against human smuggling is welcome. So is the closure of Sangatte, which, as everybody knows, has for many years been a magnet for people who enter the country illegally. What are the implications for Iraqis and people from Afghanistan who are currently here?

Mr. Blunkett: I am pleased that my right hon. Friend welcomes the change. Changing the border controls to

France is significant. The system of assessing individual asylum claims will continue in the usual way. Those who have not been assigned asylum claims will be considered in future for special humanitarian protection. However, as I made clear in the statement, we are keen to establish legitimate immigration routes for economic purposes so that people who want to create a better life do not present themselves as asylum seekers facing death and torture. If we can do that—we are doing it for 175,000 people this year—and meet the needs of our economy, we will square the circle.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I am glad that the Home Secretary has moderated his tone from that which he deployed earlier, which many Members found offensive.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that many hon. Members perceive a good case for selective and controlled economic migration, and are passionately keen for Britain to maintain its noble tradition of giving asylum to those who are genuinely fleeing persecution in other countries? For those reasons, we are anxious for real control to be exercised over those who are not genuine refugees. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that regardless of whether Sangatte is open or closed, a system that deems that people who have passed through a safe country in the European Union are prima facie not refugees because they have forgone their opportunity to seek refuge in France or Belgium, should return them immediately to their country of origin?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree with the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's comments. It is a pity that he did not notice the shadow Chancellor screaming at me when I spoke about extending economic migration. There is a contradiction within the Conservative party, and I know that he will want to deal with it decisively in the Reform Group. I do not, however, entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman's last point. It is very difficult to say that we will return someone to a country that is under siege—a country such as Iraq, for example—and it is therefore very difficult to say that the first country of entry should be the one that carries the whole load. That is why, building on Dublin 2, a sensible Europe-wide agreement will have to be reached on what is generally called burden sharing. In that way, we can make sense of what is currently a nonsensical situation.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that although my constituents are certainly not opposed to people coming here to build a better life for themselves, and to fill many of our skills shortages, they are opposed to illegal immigration and abuse of the asylum system? They will, therefore, support the fact that he has been working with Mr. Sarkozy and his other European counterparts on dealing with the problems of asylum and illegal immigration that affect all parts of Europe, rather than simply exploiting the issues as some Conservative Members have done this afternoon.

Mr. Blunkett: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does it cause the Home Secretary any concern that so many economic migrants come to this country from areas and countries in which organised crime is a way of life?

Mr. Blunkett: It certainly concerns me if those who come here perpetrate, organise or are involved in acts of crime. I have made it clear both to the police and to the immigration service that if people who are here without citizenship—people here on work permits, or for whatever other reason—commit crimes or are involved in mafia-type activities, we should seek to remove them from the country as fast as possible.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I totally agree with my right hon. Friend that a controlled immigration policy that seeks to match skills with labour shortages is the sensible way forward, but I want to ask him a question that I suspect some of my constituents will be asking me before the end of this week. It is about the 1,000 or so Iraqis. These are people who almost certainly travelled across Europe in the company of criminals and gangsters, and originally claimed to be asylum seekers but now claim to be economic migrants. Given that this country could be at war with Iraq in the relatively near future, how successful has the screening of these people been? How do we know who we are admitting to the country?

Mr. Blunkett: The great advantage of doing this in an ordered and managed fashion is that we can actually screen those people. We are undertaking security screening of those coming into the country, which would not be possible with those who reach our shores clandestinely. I take my hon. Friend's point that people will be concerned and will want to know that we have done that effectively. I want to make it clear that we are not taking any Iraqis who have claimed asylum. None of the people I am taking has claimed asylum in France. If they had I would have insisted, under article 12 of the original Dublin convention, that their claims be processed in France. That would be the case for anyone who had attempted to claim asylum there.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The right hon. Gentleman is demanding a step-change in the operation, efficiency and competence of senior officials in his Department. Is that not an astounding admission of failure in the Department of which he is the political head? Is it not an extraordinary transfer of responsibility? Are not he and his Ministers responsible for policy and its implementation? If he cannot achieve that, should it not be he, rather than senior managers in his Department, who is held to account?

Mr. Blunkett: Something would be sadly wrong if a Home Secretary came to the Dispatch Box and pretended that black was white, and that everything was fine in the Department, when he knew that it was not. I would have thought that it was a refreshing change for a Minister to come here and say that everything is not right, and that we are doing something about it. We have just appointed a new director-general for the immigration and nationality directorate. We have also changed the whole operational system and, at last, managed to get a grip on the failed computer system that

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was put in by the Conservative Government in 1996. Let me make it clear, however, that we are accountable for policy and its implementation, and we expect managers to be accountable for the administration and efficiency of the system. Ministers do not direct; they do not appoint or sack. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will know from his extraordinary time in the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—which he will remember vividly, because he refused to resign over the most disgraceful carry-on and incompetence imaginable—that Secretaries of State sometimes have to say publicly that they will no longer put up with incompetence and lack of productivity that everyone else knows exist.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): My right hon. Friend knows that I have criticised his policies on occasion, but I am pleased to offer my support for his robust defence of his policy today. Anyone who has read the Foreign Office report on human rights abuses in Iraq can only be moved by the terrible abuses that have occurred to some Iraqis, and anybody who has been to Afghanistan recently, as I have, will not be surprised to know that some Afghans wish to leave that country as well. I therefore fully support my right hon. Friend; I also support the points that he made at the beginning of his statement. It ill behoves the sons and grandsons of immigrants on the Opposition Benches to scream hysterically every time the word "immigration" is mentioned in the House.

Mr. Blunkett: I could not agree more.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Home Secretary has admonished my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), but at least my right hon. and learned Friend was subject to a public inquiry, which no one on the Labour side dared to undergo when they got the country into the most appalling mess—and he was vindicated by it.

In the Home Secretary's talks with the French Government on securing the northern coast of France and the channel coast in this country, has he discussed foot passengers who might enter this country via the Channel Islands? When Sangatte is closed, what changes can we expect for passengers travelling from France to the Channel Islands and then from the Channel Islands to the UK? He will know that there is no passport requirement when people enter this country via that route.

Mr. Blunkett: I have not discussed that, although I certainly will, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for drawing it to my attention. As for her defence of her right hon. and learned Friend, the only point I was making is that those who live in glasshouses should not throw stones.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Before the Home Secretary leaves the Chamber, will he beef up his comments on Belgium? Zeebrugge is just 30 minutes down the road from Calais and every night illegal immigrants come to this country from Zeebrugge and other ports in Belgium and the Netherlands, unchecked by the IND, which is not present at the smaller ports around the UK. That is a big problem. I know that people seep in all the time along the river frontage in my constituency, so I hope that my right hon. Friend will invite Lord Carlile's committee of inquiry on our borders to revisit the idea of setting up a ports police to supplement and buttress the IND, Customs and Excise and the county police forces. Such a force is desperately needed and would be a great help, not instead of the measures that my right hon. Friend has announced today, but as an addition to them.

Mr. Blunkett: When we debated the order on proscribed organisations I promised my hon. Friend that I would examine that point. I am doing so, as it is important and, as he rightly says, Lord Carlile has referred to it in the review. Nicolas Sarkozy and I met the Belgian Minister, Mr. Duquesne, at the end of September for a trilateral discussion. We agreed at the meeting, and I have since signed with the Belgians, an undertaking to set in place joint controls, including controls at Zeebrugge and at the Eurostar entry point in Brussels. I hope that we can get those in place as quickly as possible.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The Home Secretary's announcement regarding Sangatte is welcome, but will the UK become less attractive for illegal immigrants? After all, those desperate people have crossed safe European countries, presumably because they regarded the UK as a better destination than France, Germany or Italy.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes they did, which is why some common reception policy and a common distribution pattern across Europe are sensible. That is also why we, through our balanced policy that separates clandestine asylum seekers from legitimate legal entrants, have sought to distinguish and develop one while clamping down on the other. I hope that that policy, through the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, has sent the right message.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): How long will the work permits last—two years, three years, 10 years? What criteria will my right hon. Friend use?

Mr. Blunkett: Much depends on the job that someone takes in a job match. We can offer a longer time to those who take what is clearly permanent work. We will want to renew work visas as we renew a range of other visas. Many people from around the world who have been here for a very long time before gaining nationality have simply asked for a renewal. I am happy to allow that, as part of a process of integration, welcoming and ensuring social cohesion. The more people feel that they are part of our community and can take on language and citizenship skills, the better.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): In view of the expense of our contribution to the liberation and reconstruction of Afghanistan, surely the best place for reunited families is there. Otherwise, do we not risk sending a further powerful signal to that country that we are a soft touch?

Mr. Blunkett: I think that aiding people to return and reconstruct their country is good common sense.

The French are now doing it, and so are we. I have asked the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to find out how many of the 200 or so who are there would fall into the category of family unification. That is not clear at this stage, but I do not think there would be many. We should take such people, on what are perfectly open, legitimate and well tried grounds.

Claire Ward (Watford): What specific skills or qualifications will my right hon. Friend look for before issuing work permits? In the light of his responses to Members representing Kent constituencies, what assurances will he give local authorities in the broader south-east, including Hertfordshire, that potential extra pressure or costs resulting from his decision will be met by his Department?

Mr. Blunkett: Under the reception provision that we are establishing, we will pay. When people have been job matched and move around the country—we expect that movement to encompass the whole of the United Kingdom—they will sustain themselves. The great advantage of offering people a chance to fill vacancies of all sorts is that we will not need to sustain them any longer, and neither will local authorities.

As I said earlier, we have withdrawn the right to switch suddenly from one form of entry—one type of visa—to an asylum claim. I think that will reassure not only communities but local authorities that they will not face such costs.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Irrespective of the merits or demerits of the proposed admission of the Iraqis—on which it is indeed wiser at this stage to remain open-minded than to fulminate in a bucolic fashion—will the Home Secretary now answer a question posed by my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary and tell us what the legal basis of his decision is?

Mr. Blunkett: We are assured by officials—and believe me, I would not have allowed an agreement to be reached between two Governments had I not been assured of this—that we have a legal power to grant work visas to those people, and the right to do so. Work permits have been granted separately in the immediate past in relation to specific jobs. There is nothing to stop us bringing people in and finding them jobs. So that there is no misunderstanding, let me point out that we have a good precedent. After all, the mass advertising in the Commonwealth in the 1950s that led to the Windrush coming to this country took place under a Conservative, not a Labour Government.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I am dealing with an ever-rising number of young Iraqi men who are Kurds. They have been through the IND system, and their official status is "awaiting deportation". They are destitute, without money or housing. I deal with at least 20 such men, and I know of at least 50 in Greater Manchester. They want to work, and it is important that my right hon. Friend make it clear to them today whether he will welcome their applying for work permits.

Mr. Blunkett: No, I will not. I have made it clear that I want to establish centres in such [illegible] regions of origin, to which, if they are economic migrants, they can apply sensibly. We will open discussions with countries in those regions, including the border of northern Iraq, to ensure that we can do that. If we simply transformed failed asylum seekers into economic migrants, we would immediately damage the signal that we are sending. People would believe that once they reached our shores clandestinely and had their application refused, it would be okay because eventually they would still be able to work.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I know that the Home Secretary believes that false asylum applications are attempts to jump the immigration queue, because I heard him say so. With that in mind, does not the proposal that he has agreed to today represent officially sanctioned, state-sponsored queue jumping on a giant scale? What message does that send to all those who have legally applied for residence here, and are waiting patiently?

Mr. Blunkett: I should make it clear that the people I am taking have not arrived in this country as clandestines, and that they have not made an asylum claim in France. It is on that basis that I am able to make this offer, and there is a logic to it; otherwise I would not have made it. If I were to offer clandestines the immediate opportunity to work, I would be criticised; if I were to offer failed asylum seekers the right to work, I would be opening the floodgates. I am taking a logical decision to deal with a problem rationally. I should say once and for all to those who commentate but never decide, and who can criticise but who take no responsibility, that if they have a better, clearer and more sensible way of dealing with this problem in reality—rather than fulminating at the French, wishing that the problem would go away, or pretending that such people would not come as clandestines and then claim asylum—they should come forward with it.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Home Secretary has made a welcome, constructive and civilised statement, but may I press him as to who is going to screen the Iraqis, and exactly for what purpose?

Mr. Blunkett: Our immigration services will undertake screening of status, together with officials from the Department of Work and Pensions, once those individuals have been received. In conjunction with security and law enforcement officials, we will check such individuals' status, so far as is possible. That is what people would expect us to do.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): We are living through the greatest revolution in the history of the world in telecommunications, transport and technology. As a result, our world is much smaller, and for that reason immigration from deprived countries is far greater. Does the Home Secretary think that, in addition to the positive work that he is doing to deal with the problem, there should be substantial international co-operation in planning how to assist people in deprived countries?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes I do, and so does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. In the past six months the UNHCR has

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assured us that it will transform its operation from what I described as in effect a non-governmental organisation, into a transnational governmental organisation that provides support in working out ways to deal with existing humanitarian and economic pressures in what—as the hon. Gentleman rightly points out—is a world of mass communication. In such a world, people know about how others live and where they live, and about lifestyles, in a way unheard of even a few years before. That has increased the responsibility, through the UN and other transnational organisations, to tackle the problem in a unified fashion.

Points of Order

4.24 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I draw the House's attention to the statement published today by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Saddam Hussein and crimes and human rights abuses. Indict, an organisation that I chair, is quoted as a source on several pages of the document. I wonder whether we are to have a statement on the document. It raises many important questions that we should have the opportunity to debate with the Foreign Secretary on the Floor of the House, particularly as Indict has given the my right hon. Friend and the Government information that can bring some of these accusations against the regime in front of a British court. Why have the Government not acted on the conclusion that they have come to in their own document?

Mr. Speaker: There is a written ministerial statement today: No. 5. As for an oral statement, I have had no indication of one.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. On page 7 of the document is the statement that the Iraqi national football team had the soles of their feet beaten. This has been repeated time and time again. When I was in Baghdad I asked for information, and I have asked for other people's information about it, but information comes there none. Such statements may or may not be true, but should the House of Commons not have an opportunity at least to ask for further background information?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is no written statement from the Home Office about a statement made by the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration on several national news broadcasts on Friday evening about a radical shift in Government policy with regard to exceptional leave to remain. Regrettably, no mention was made of this in today's statement, and my concern—apart from the fact that I am mindful, of course, of your rulings on this issue, Mr. Speaker, and of what I regard as a discourtesy to the House—is the great concern now felt by many of my constituents who have been given exceptional leave to remain in this country. As there is no written statement, Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether you have had any information about whether there may be a statement forthcoming on this "radical shift" in Government policy.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no approach on that matter.

Opposition Day

[UNALLOTTED HALF-DAY]

Policing (Northern Ireland)

4.27 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I beg to move,

That this House notes the continuing terrorist activities of the IRA; does not consider its representatives fit to participate in the government of part of the United Kingdom; deplores attempts to undermine further the integrity of policing in Northern Ireland by granting more concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA; and opposes offering non-elected convicted terrorists places on district policing partnerships.

What I say about IRA terrorism can be applied equally to terrorism committed by so-called loyalists. I have been on the receiving end of the acts of such terrorists for a long time in their publications, and their attacks on property have included my property. My church manse was bombed, bullets were shot through my bedroom window and other attempts have been made on my life, not by the IRA —although it has made attempts on my life—but by loyalists. I want to make it clear, therefore, that although the motion condemns the IRA and does not deal with loyalist terrorism, I apply the same condemnation to those terrorists.

The motion before the House is different. It deals not with terrorists, per se, but with terrorists who are given a place in the government of part of the United Kingdom.

It is indeed vital that the House discuss this matter because IRA-Sinn Fein continue to engage in a cycle of violence. Everyone in the House knows that. Everyone in the House should be seriously concerned about the targeting, training and recruiting business and the complete disregard of all calls for the disbandment of—

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I should like to make a little progress. The Democratic Unionist party initiated the debate, but other Members will be able to speak. If the hon. Lady has put her name down, I am sure that the Chair will call her. I ask her please to give me a little more time so that I can get into my speech.

The notion is that Sinn Fein-IRA are on ceasefire and that the House should congratulate them on that. Nothing could be further from the truth, however, and I utterly deplore the reference in the Government amendment to the

"enormous strides towards a more peaceful society in Northern Ireland",

because we could visit some people who certainly would not think that there had been any peaceful strides.

I attended a meeting with the Prime Minister and the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), at which the Prime Minister tried to sell me the colossal falsehood that we were at peace in Northern Ireland. Fortunately, I had with me a copy of a certain document. I did not show it to the Prime Minister but I read him some facts from it. I told him that bombings in Northern Ireland over the previous 12 months had increased by 80 per cent. I told him that shootings had trebled since the agreement and that unsolved crimes had reached a new high. In Londonderry, the IRA shot a bus driver while he was driving a group of pensioners.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I realise that the hon. Gentleman did not show his document to the Prime Minister, but, as he is now quoting extensively from it, will he make it available in the Library?

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Library already has a copy and—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The point of order was addressed to the Chair. I advise the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) that the matter is entirely up to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley).

Rev. Ian Paisley: If the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) can hold on for a while he may find the end of my story quite amusing.

I told the Prime Minister that the IRA beat up a young man in south Armagh, leaving him with injuries that doctors told us were the worst they had seen throughout all the troubles. Violence has increased since the agreement.

Between 1995 and 1998, there were 450 shootings, but between 1999 and 2002 there were 820. Between 1995 and 1998, there were 123 bombings, but between 1999 and 2002 there were 561. The number of bombing devices used between 1995 and 1998 was 156, but between 1999 and 2002 it was 699. The increase in violence has taken a quantum leap.

The former Secretary of State looked at the Prime Minister and told me that he did not think that my figures were correct. I was glad that I had not shown them the document from which I was quoting although I had it with me. I have it with me today. What is the document? The Secretary of State commended it himself: it is the annual report of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I handed the Secretary of State a copy and told him: "You are trying to undermine your own figures because they do not suit you."

That was scandalous, yet the motion asks us to say that everything is wonderful. In fact, everything is far from wonderful. I was in the Minster of State's office last Monday, and she handed me three documents. The first was a draft clauses document containing amendments to a future police Bill. She said, "This is a Government document, this is our thinking." The second document was entitled "Text for consideration", and she said, "This is not a Government document; these are the matters that IRA-Sinn Fein want dealt with, and we are issuing them so that people can have a look at them."

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that I said that it was a Government document, containing suggestions for Government amendments that we might table to a police Bill, subject to conditions that he knows and that we discussed at the time.

Rev. Ian Paisley: There is not much difference between that and what I said. In fact, I said it to the

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Secretary of State and asked a civil servant to confirm that it was what I said. I do not want to misrepresent the Minister one iota. I want to get to the truth of the matter and help the people who have been terrorised in Northern Ireland.

The third document was a police review announcement. It said:

"We are not persuaded that the time is right to introduce changes in these areas. In particular, the removal of the disqualification of ex-prisoners could, in our view, happen only in the context of acts of completion such as those envisaged by the Prime Minister in his speech in Belfast".

I asked the Minister what that meant, but we could not determine what it meant—she could not tell us. I cannot blame her, because the next day we met her boss, the new Secretary of State, and asked him the same thing: we said, "Will you explain to us ignorant folk from Belfast what this means?", but he could not explain it.

On Wednesday, I went to a still higher authority and said:

"The Prime Minister is aware that in the past two days my party has met the Minister with responsibility for security in Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We put one question to both: what is an act of completion? Does it consist of IRA-Sinn Fein repudiating and ceasing violence and being disbanded, or does it simply mean that they can make a statement that they will give up violence? Can the Prime Minister tell us what he believes it means?"

The Prime Minister said:

"I can. It is not merely a statement, a declaration of words. It means giving up violence completely in a way that satisfies everyone"—

I take it that I am one of the everyones in the House and elsewhere, and that all the law-abiding citizens of Northern Ireland are included—

"and gives them confidence that the IRA has ceased its campaign, and enables us to move the democratic process forward, with every party that wants to be in government abiding by the same democratic rules."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2002; Vol. 395, c. 309.]

One would think that that statement was plain enough, but I am afraid that we must again ask the Minister to tell us exactly what she means.

We have had very strong statements from the Prime Minister before—some of them written on a wall during the referendum campaign and some in *Hansard*—but when it came to it the strong words were forgotten. The Prime said in the House that

"we want the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations . . . Meanwhile, it would obviously be a travesty of democracy if parties associated with paramilitary organisations held Executive office in the assembly while they continued to be engaged in or threaten terrorism."—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 811.]

We all know that the IRA has threatened violence. We see the IRA committing acts of violence every day. It was put into the Executive, although the Prime Minister gave us the assurance that it would not be and that it would be "a travesty of democracy"—so it is—to allow those who lead a terrorist organisation to be in government in any part of this country.

Again, in the House, the Prime Minister said:

"I have also always made it clear that we regard Sinn Fein and the IRA as inextricably linked.—[*Official Report*, 3 June 1998; Vol. 313, c. 366.]

If they are inextricably linked, how can they be divided? Those are not my statements; the Prime Minister made them. He told us then that no IRA-Sinn Feiner would be in the Executive. He also went further, for when they got into the Executive he made it clear that they would be put out if they did not keep to their ceasefire, yet when the ceasefires were violated they were not put out.

In fact, what we have is a long document issued by the Government. I accept that it is still a Government document, but that makes it even worse in my opinion because it is to do with concessions and buying off the IRA. The Prime Minister needs to tell us in Northern Ireland what he really means to do. Of course we can hear and see many things, and the way the wind is blowing is interesting.

No one has voiced his views more strongly than the leader of the official Unionist party. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) told us recently that those people could not get back into government until the IRA was disbanded, but he evidently changed his mind last night and our morning papers say today that

"he indicated that practical measures like decommissioning weapons and ending paramilitary activity would be sufficient"

to get those people back into government. We have another fudge, after many fudges, falsehoods and pledges from the leader of the official Unionist party, so what is going to happen?

If anyone in the House thinks that the IRA will go away, they should disabuse themselves of that notion immediately. It is updating its weapons. Today is a good day to debate the matter, as three of its members are on trial in Colombia. When they were captured, however, we were told that they were not IRA men but tourists, even though they had forged passports. What tourist goes abroad on a forged passport? We were told that one of them did not represent the IRA in Cuba; subsequently, it was discovered that he did. Leading IRA men, including prominent ones, flew out to see them. What were they going to do? Were they going to have their first meeting? No, they were going to greet their brothers in terror and give them their support. A worldwide campaign has now been launched by IRA-Sinn Fein to say that the courts in Colombia cannot give them justice, that the whole thing is rigged and that they will not attend the courts. How like their approach to Northern Ireland—and that is a part of the United Kingdom!

IRA-Sinn Fein sent their top representatives to the FARC-controlled jungles in south America. Everybody knows that. It also rearmed from Russia and Florida. Only the other day, guns of the most modern making, which had never been seen previously, were discovered, and arrests were made of those who had them in their possession. Leading people were telling us, however, that nothing had happened with regard to Florida. Leading political, judicial, security, forensic and loyalist figures are now being targeted using intelligence data files. The House should be aware of the terror of mothers and children when their husbands and fathers leave home in the morning to go to their place of business, because their security files, containing all their details, are in the possession of the IRA. That is a most serious matter. I have every sympathy with the men who have run the prisons of Northern Ireland over a vast

number of years—some of whose colleagues have been shot, brutally treated and murdered—who do not seem to be getting the support from the Northern Ireland Office that they should be getting at present.

A major line of inquiry has been identified in relation to the break-in at special branch headquarters in Castlereagh. Weapons have been smuggled from Florida for the purpose of upgrading the stockpile. About a dozen individuals have been murdered in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Belfast agreement in April 1998. A role as judge and jury in the community has been adopted consistently in the form of beatings, shootings and other forms of intimidation. Orchestrated, organised violence in east and north Belfast has culminated in the shooting of five Protestants in the east of the city. Most recently, information has been stolen from the Northern Ireland Office and from Stormont; the chief administrator has been charged, he has not been allowed bail, and he is awaiting his trial. That is the track record of IRA-Sinn Fein. Is not that the action of people who are not fit for Government? Is it not also a condemnation of the fact that, at this very moment, the Government are discussing with IRA-Sinn Fein the possibility of putting on to the police boards people who are not elected members but have criminal records and have served prison sentences because of their IRA activities? Think about that: it is happening as I speak.

Another change represents a major concession. An almost semi-parallel police board will meet in north Belfast. It will have different powers from the boards that meet elsewhere in Northern Ireland. Part of Belfast will be under the control of a board that, if it is constituted in the way that is proposed, will be controlled by IRA-Sinn Fein. It will control the policing of west Belfast and part of north Belfast.

We are in a very serious situation. In the days of conflict, we had the police to rely on and could also rely on those who kept their word with regard to what they said the police would do. I know that charges have been made against members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the same way as charges have been made and proved against members of the British Army, but one does not condemn a whole force because of rotten apples in the barrel.

The constitution of the policing board is another important matter. I was greatly struck by remarks that the Secretary of State made last week. He published an article in *The Irish News* about the new police proposals. He said that policing would not finally be complete until the day that they—the IRA republicans—include themselves. We are now shut into a policy that means that we will not have full policing until the IRA is included. That notion is obnoxious to the people who have suffered and to the very principles of democracy.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the recent unanimous resolution of the Ulster Unionist Council on the proposals for the police boards? If unelected terrorists are put on to the district policing partnerships, the Ulster Unionist party's representation on the policing board will be placed under serious question. Will he unite with the Ulster Unionist party in withdrawing from that board?

Rev. Ian Paisley: In a speech, I made public what we would do. We would be out and, this time, I hope that the hon. Gentleman's party would follow us and take immediate action. I was about to develop that point in my speech.

When we were called in by the former Secretary of State and asked whether we would put our representatives on the policing board, I said, "We could consider that provided you aren't going to make a deal afterwards with IRA-Sinn Fein and bring them in by the back door." He said to us, "If you don't join the policing board now"—it was the last day on which we could join—"you will not be on it until there is an election." I said, "Thank you, but answer this question. If the IRA don't join it, will it have to wait for an election before it gets on the board?" He said, "That is right." However, that is not what is being negotiated now. We were brought in under false pretences. We were given a promise on which the IRA has not delivered and is not going to deliver. I say unequivocally that it will drive real Unionists out of the policing board. Perhaps that is what it wants to do.

Helen Jackson: I respect the hon. Gentleman's party and his leadership of it. In what circumstances can the membership of the district policing boards include people who may have been in paramilitary organisations and are genuinely moving into politics for the future? Are there circumstances in which that is possible, or is it a case of "No. Never"?

Rev. Ian Paisley: It is "No. Never." Those people are not elected. They do not even have the support of others who are elected. The hon. Lady's Government promised us that the arrangements would work in a specific way, but they have gone back on their promise. In the Secretary of State's words, policing will not be complete until republicans are included on the board—but at what price? That is what the people of Northern Ireland want to know. They do not want the Government to issue the document. Instead, they want them to tell us frankly what concessions they made under the first document and what concessions they are likely to make under the second document.

I am sorry that I have taken longer than I expected, but the matter goes to the root of our problem in Northern Ireland. We need proper policing. Unless people in all communities can go to bed at night knowing that they will not be attacked and, if they are attacked, that they will be protected, we will not have peace in Northern Ireland. Let us not have more whitewash of the IRA. Let us no longer tell people that quantum leaps have been taken on security, because it is not so. The Minister knows that. The facts surrounding the policing board also show that to be the case.

Hon. Members need to pay attention to the problem. What would be their attitude if they had the same problem in their cities and constituencies? They should not be so quick to condemn Northern Ireland Members of Parliament, every one of whom lives under a threat. We have all been threatened. Many of us have been shot at and many of us are visited continually by people who say, "Mind your step." What can an individual do to mind his step in this situation? Hon. Members should ask themselves, "Would I like that to happen to my constituents?"

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I salute the Roman Catholic people, especially those in my constituency, who have joined the new police service. We know what happened to one of the first who joined: the IRA attempted to blow him to smithereens outside his house. The IRA circulates the district with its literature that says, "Treat the new police service as you treated the RUC." What place has a party that does that in properly policing any civilised democratic community?

4.59 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the enormous strides towards a more peaceful society in Northern Ireland and the significant developments in policing that have been achieved in recent years; further welcomes the changes to policing proposed in the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill; in particular endorses the Government's view that the time is not yet right to allow unelected ex-prisoners to serve on district policing partnerships; and further welcomes the Government's openness in sharing with this House and the people of Northern Ireland its thinking on how this might be achieved in the future, in the context of acts of completion on the part of paramilitaries.".

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regrets that he is unable to be here to take part in the debate. He is engaged on business in America; otherwise he would certainly have been here to respond to the points made forcefully by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley). The hon. Gentleman's position, and that of his party, on these issues is well known and has been understood for many years. He articulates a point of view that has resonance in Northern Ireland, and I acknowledge that from the outset.

I shall begin by reflecting on the changes in Northern Ireland in recent years. We have come a long way. Before the Belfast agreement, which I know the hon. Gentleman does not hold with, the people of Northern Ireland had endured 30 years of what were euphemistically called "the troubles". There were thousands of deaths, and thousands more lives were torn apart by the violence, sectarianism and community divisions that the hon. Gentleman articulately described. Yet after all that it was possible to reach an agreement about how to shape a better future—one in which former enemies could work together in partnership, in communities and in government. People from all sections of the community could put aside the intransigence and hatred of the past, and co-operate.

Such a transformation required great leaps of faith from the people of Northern Ireland, and particularly, perhaps, from its political leaders. No one said that it would be easy, and the hon. Gentleman has described just how difficult it has been. I say to him, his party and the House that, as security Minister, I know better than almost anyone else in Government what the security difficulties have been. However, he says that things are as bad as they have ever been, and I suggest that that is not true.

This year, 10 people have lost their lives as a result of the security situation in Northern Ireland. That is 10 deaths too many and those lives were lost unnecessarily. If I were a relative of any of those individuals, I would feel precisely the bitterness and grief described by the hon. Gentleman. However, if we go back 30 years, we find that 470 people lost their lives in one year alone. The number of people who die as a result of the security situation in Northern Ireland has dramatically decreased, and that ought to be taken into account when we consider the difficult issues that face us in our attempt to maintain momentum in developing a more peaceful society.

Although no one said that it would be easy, we believed that it would not be impossible. As the Prime Minister said on 17 October:

"it was a brave undertaking and a vast one."

It has taken courage and vision. Some of the steps have indeed been difficult, but there have been difficulties for all sides. The important point is that, despite those difficulties, there has been progress, and Northern Ireland today is a better, more peaceful place than it was before the agreement. It is not nirvana, and there is a long way to go, but it is a vast improvement on the situation that existed decades ago. Transformations can be slow but they do happen.

The same is true of policing. I shall develop the arguments put forward by the hon. Gentleman and answer some of his points. As the Belfast agreement made clear, it is essential that the policing structures and arrangements are such that the Police Service is professional, effective and efficient, fair and impartial, free from partisan political control, accountable both under the law for its actions and to the community that it serves and representative of the society that it polices. The hon. Gentleman will argue that the service has been professional, effective and efficient, fair and impartial, and I agree with much of what he says, but the Police Service's structures and arrangements—its accountability arrangements and representative nature—must be capable of gaining support throughout the whole community of Northern Ireland if it is to maintain law and order, including responding effectively to crime and to any terrorist threat or public order problem. A police service that cannot do so will fail to win public confidence and acceptance.

Patten was clear about the scale of the challenge and the need to provide a new beginning for policing in Northern Ireland. That will take time and it will not be easy, but huge progress has already been made. I suspect that if we had said five years ago that we would one day have a policing board operating on a cross-community basis, or that 50 per cent. of recruits to the police would be Catholic, most people would not have believed us, yet that has been achieved. Even when the policing board was set up, there were those who expected it to fail. There were those who did not expect the board to be able to resolve the question of the badge or the uniforms—but it did. There were those who said that the board would never be able to agree on a new Chief Constable—but, again, it did. There were those who said that the board would not be able to agree a recommendation on the future of the full-time reserve—but it did.

The hon. Member for North Antrim might argue that all those measures are unnecessary concessions to Sinn Fein and republicans, but I believe that they are a necessary part of the reforms to policing in Northern Ireland that will enable cross-community support to

develop, grow and strengthen. Since its first meeting just over a year ago, the policing board has quickly established itself as a powerful and credible organisation with a clear interest in holding the police to account and ensuring effective policing of the whole of Northern Ireland. Despite the enormity of the challenge facing them, board members have collectively shown themselves to be committed to creating the new beginning for policing envisaged by the agreement. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the board members, including the representatives of the Democratic Unionist party, for their commitment and the dedication that they have shown to their duties.

The changes have not only affected the accountability structures for policing; the Police Service itself has undergone a series of significant changes. The determination of the service, from its leadership through the rank and file to the new recruits, to deliver the changes envisaged by Patten has been impressive. Collectively, the police have shown that it is possible to move forward, to create the new beginning and to forge new relationships with all sections of the community. That is the future for policing in Northern Ireland. It is a future grounded in effective policing, with a police service carrying out its professional remit without fear or favour.

The results of current policing arrangements are tangible. In recent months, much of the sectarian violence at interfaces in north and east Belfast—I see the hon. Members who represent those constituencies in their seats—has been nullified through good police tactics, which have also yielded 124 persons charged. I acknowledge that that has come at a cost—437 police officers have been injured as a result of the violence at interfaces—but we should acknowledge the good, professional and capable work that the police have been doing to reduce the effects of that violence.

Such successes in policing are not limited to the violence on our streets. The House might like to know that, since September, 24 loyalists and 11 republicans have been charged under the Terrorism Act 2000. Hon. Members who attack the arrangements for policing in Northern Ireland should consider that that has a knock-on effect, whether intended or not, on each and every police officer. Again and again, it brings policing into the political domain, which is not helpful for effective policing. The hon. Member for North Antrim would be quick to acknowledge that, over the past 30 years, many of those officers have faced some hideous challenges. They have lost their colleagues to terrorist attacks. They have themselves been wounded and scarred and seen their families threatened.

Of course, their work today could never be described as easy. Policing in any community is a difficult challenge, but policing in Northern Ireland is a particularly difficult challenge. The individuals who provide that public service deserve our support and gratitude. I know that they have the support and gratitude of the hon. Gentleman, his party and the Ulster Unionist party, but they deserve the support and gratitude of all parties in Northern Ireland. They have gained the support of the Social Democratic and Labour party in Northern Ireland and deserve Sinn Fein's support.

I agree with the Democratic Unionist motion in one respect—the implicit importance that it attaches to district policing partnerships. I should like to make that importance explicit. The Patten report was clear about the role of district policing partnership boards, and said:

> "The function of the DPPBs should be advisory, explanatory and consultative. The Boards should represent the consumer, voice the concerns of citizens and monitor the performance of the police in their districts. Like the Policing Board, the DPPBs should be encouraged to see policing in its widest sense, involving and consulting non-governmental organisations and community groups concerned with safety issues as well as statutory agencies."

The district policing partnerships will play a vital role as a bridge between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the local community. I pay tribute to the role of the Northern Ireland Policing Board for working towards the establishment of district policing partnerships. I know that that process is well advanced—all the district councils have selected political members, and the first interviews for independent members have been held. Indeed, they were held in the constituency of the hon. Member for North Antrim. I understand that the district policing partnerships should be in a position to have their first meetings in February. I do not underestimate the impact that that will have on local communities. Councillors will be associated with a major new role, and I know they will play their part very conscientiously.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Has the hon. Lady forgotten that elected representatives on councils in Northern Ireland served on police boards and advisory boards in all council areas, and made a contribution that way?

Jane Kennedy: Not at all, I have not forgotten. I am grateful for the contribution of councillors, but the new district policing partnerships will take on new responsibilities and will play an important role in developing an immediate focus and feedback between local communities and district commanders as they develop community policing in a style in which, we all hope, it can grow and flourish in Northern Ireland. I have not forgotten the contribution that has been made in the past.

I am glad to note that the Police Service of Northern Ireland is continuing to develop the role of district command units and, in that regard, I have just referred to the role of the district commander and district policing partnerships. The service published a policy document on policing with the community last year, and an implementation plan is now being finalised for wider distribution in the very near future. It is timely, therefore, that one of the amendments to the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 in the forthcoming legislation will reinforce the importance of policing with the community as a core policing principle.

Let me consider the forthcoming policing measure. The motion is somewhat puzzling. More than a year has passed since the Government published the revised Patten implementation plan in August 2001. In it, we made a series of commitments to legislative change. The Government's aim is to develop a modern police service that is effective and widely accepted throughout the society that it serves. The changes for which the draft clauses provide will achieve that.

Some hon. Members' reactions to last week's statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State disappointed me, but it would not be the first time that

[Jane Kennedy]

I had been disappointed in my life in politics. The draft clauses that we published last week contained little that was new. They focused on the commitments in the revised implementation plan and some specific points that were included at the request of the board, on which the Democratic Unionist party has three seats, in the context of the recent review of policing arrangements. All the issues were discussed in the context of the policing review. Again, I pay tribute to all those who contributed to the review, including the DUP.

The substance of the announcement was therefore yesterday's news. It simply set out the way in which the Government intended to deal with the commitments in legislative terms. Some hon. Members have tried to focus attention on the additional text for consideration that was published with the draft clauses. The hon. Member for North Antrim drew specific attention to it. Although I am the first to recognise that some of the issues are sensitive for many people in Northern Ireland, especially the question of whether former prisoners should be allowed to apply for appointments on district policing partnerships—there are different views throughout the House on the subject—its consideration is yesterday's news or even older.

Lady Hermon (North Down): I appreciate that the Government are wedded to implementing the Patten report in full. Can the Minister pinpoint the recommendation in Patten for convicted terrorists to sit on district policing partnerships?

Jane Kennedy: We undertook to review the question as a subject that emerged from the discussions at Weston Park. We published our intentions in August 2001.

In publishing two separate texts, we tried to be clear and open to the House and to the people of Northern Ireland on the way in which we would take the matter forward. My right hon. Friend and I have made it clear that we would do that only in the context of the acts of completion that we discussed last week and that the hon. Member for North Antrim debated with the Prime Minister.

David Burnside: I thank the Minister for confirming through her lack of response to my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) that the recommendation was not in the Patten report. Will she also confirm that there was no agreement with the Ulster Unionist party on those proposals at Weston Park?

Jane Kennedy: We made commitments at Weston Park and we believe that it is essential that we honour them if we are to fulfil our aim of developing a police service in Northern Ireland that is effective, efficient and widely accepted by all the communities.

David Burnside: All except the Ulster Unionists.

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to make his point later. I appreciate—

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke) *rose—*

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon) *rose—*

Jane Kennedy: Let me make the point that I appreciate the sensitivity of the issues for many in Northern Ireland. That applies especially to the question of the former prisoners. I am sure that we will debate it at length because it is such a matter of principle. However, the proposal is not new. In publishing two separate texts, we sought to draw the sting from the argument and avoid the accusation that we were doing a secret deal and planning to act secretly and in private. The proposal is published and hon. Members can read the way in which we would deal with the matter in the right circumstances.

Mr. Hunter: With respect, this is not just a matter for the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) to mention in his speech. Do the Government accept that the Ulster Unionist party agreed to the proposition that they are putting forward? What is the Government's understanding of the UUP's position?

Jane Kennedy: I think that the UUP will make its position clear.

Mr. Swire: Will the hon. Lady assure the House that there were no discussions at Weston Park that could lead to the possibility of an amnesty for prisoners on the run, or of that category of people being allowed to serve on policing boards in future?

Jane Kennedy: No, there were not, and if the hon. Gentleman reads the implementation plan, he will see that we also undertook to examine how we might resolve this issue. Everything that we have published in the recent draft clauses and in the text for consideration has grown out of that implementation plan. He will have noted that there is nothing in those texts that deals with those deemed to be on the run; that is a separate issue, which we are discussing and considering separately.

During the passage of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 my noble Friend Lord Falconer made it clear in defending the current bar on ex-prisoners joining the district policing partnerships that it was the Government's hope that the sensitivities surrounding this issue would eventually subside. Clearly, that is not the case at the moment, but we will discuss the issue at length as we debate the legislation.

Lady Hermon: As regards timing, it ill behoves the Government to table this amendment at this time, given that we have just had a series of very serious breaches of security, relating to the jurisdiction not only of Colombia but of the Republic of Ireland, and to Castlereagh, as well as the discovery of a serious spy ring at the heart of government in the Northern Ireland Office. Given that series of events, this is not the right time to introduce these proposals.

Jane Kennedy: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point. When we discussed these issues at Weston Park, we committed to considering this matter. Our consideration has covered both how the issues might be dealt with and whether the time is right to do so, which is the point that she has just made. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not yet persuaded that the time is right to introduce changes in these areas, and it is precisely for that reason that we have published

the text separately. We have draft clauses that we hope will form the basis of a Bill, and separate texts that we may consider taking forward. We are not, however, going to take them forward at this time.

Mr. McCabe: Will my hon. Friend explain how it can be tolerable for an ex-prisoner who renounces violence to stand for, and be elected to, the Assembly—and, perhaps, at some point, be responsible for policing in Northern Ireland—when it can never be tolerable for such a person to sit on a district policing partnership?

Jane Kennedy: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, no less, made it clear that the concept of Sinn Fein or of former republican prisoners participating in policing while maintaining a private army was absurd. We could not be clearer than that. It is within that context that we are having this debate, notwithstanding all the sensitivities that it causes to arise.

Helen Jackson: This is the crux of the matter. Will the Minister accept that the tabling of this motion puts the onus back on to members of Sinn Fein to include themselves—in the words of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) in reply to my earlier intervention—and to take the crucial final steps towards moving into politics?

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I correct what the hon. Lady has said? At that stage, I was quoting the Secretary of State and those were not my words, but his. I made that absolutely clear. I do not want her to put the Secretary of State's words in my mouth. I shall talk to her outside the Door and tell her why, if she wants to know.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has answered the point.

Jane Kennedy: Moving swiftly on, an editorial in the *Belfast Telegraph* last week said

"when the guns have been silenced for good, anything is possible."

The political scene in Northern Ireland has already changed almost beyond recognition, and our predecessors in the House may not have believed that much of what has happened would be possible. Having seen so much change, I believe that the House needs to retain an open mind about what may be possible in future. Just because something seems unlikely to any of us as individuals does not mean that it is impossible. We narrow our horizons and limit society's scope for development and progress if we close our minds to such possibilities.

With that in mind, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I concluded that it would be right to show the republican movement in particular, but also the rest of society in Northern Ireland, how we might seek to achieve legislative change in future, in the context of the acts of completion envisaged by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the Custom house in Belfast in October.

By publishing the texts in such a way, we can be completely open and transparent with the House and with the people of Northern Ireland. We can open up the debate to focus on what checks and balances would be needed to ensure that those changes could take effect without undue risk to policing. These are not easy issues, and without substantive debate with the elected representatives sitting in the House and more generally, we cannot be sure of having explored every avenue and having put in place all the necessary checks.

Only those who fear the change to a truly peaceful and democratic future for Northern Ireland have anything to lose from that debate taking place openly, for, in the current climate, those clauses remain hypothetical proposals. The basis on which they could become reality relates to the context of acts of completion in a situation where the men of violence have turned their back on the past in such a way as to give everyone satisfaction and confidence, as the hon. Member for North Antrim said in respect of his reply from the Prime Minister.

It may be, of course, that such a day never comes, but the people of Northern Ireland have achieved so much in the past few years that pessimism is misplaced and optimism about the future essential. That does not mean that we should either be foolhardy or ignore the risks, but it does mean that we should not shut the door to the possibilities. Therefore, I believe strongly that it is important for the debate on the text to take place.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues today; I know that we shall have many more opportunities in the weeks and months ahead. I hope that the hon. Member for North Antrim accepts that we discount neither the views that he expresses nor, indeed, the views of any of those in his party. We acknowledge the position that they take, and they are perfectly entitled to hold such a view.

I hope that hon. Members take the opportunity to focus on the substance of the proposals rather than use them simply for political point scoring. The hon. Member for North Antrim should not assume that only Northern Ireland Members have an interest in those matters. He well knows that Members representing seats in England and Wales have constituents who were directly affected by the violence of the past. It matters to us all that these big issues are resolved. The future of Northern Ireland's policing is worth our serious consideration, and I know that it will receive serious consideration here today.

5.29 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Before I say anything else, let me deal with the issue of Weston Park. The Minister ought to know—but if she does not, let me tell her very straight—that Weston Park, and the so-called agreements that the Government claim to have reached at that meeting, have absolutely no parliamentary or legislative authority or endorsement whatever. The Government did not allow the House to debate those matters or to vote on them; they did not even have the courage or the forthrightness to make a statement about the meeting. There is therefore not the slightest even moral commitment to those agreements on the part of any Member, apart from Ministers if they so will it.

The Minister has revealed that she does not even know whether one of the parties that took part in the Weston Park meeting is a party to one of the so-called agreements. That makes clear beyond peradventure that the word "agreement" is thoroughly inappropriate in this context, and that the Government are deluding themselves in a way that I find rather troubling.

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

Having said that, I want to pay tribute to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) for initiating a debate on a crucial subject in Government time. The subject is crucial for at least two reasons. Northern Ireland is the part of the United Kingdom in which public order is most at risk, most frequently at risk and most consistently at risk; and, as we all know, the whole issue of policing is a major part of the peace process and of the necessary talks that we all hope will lead to a definitive settlement in Northern Ireland.

I felt that much of what was said by the hon. Member for North Antrim was excessively pessimistic and negative. I agree with the Minister that he suggested that nothing had improved since 1998, which is not warranted by the facts. I also felt, however, that—in the best traditions of the Government over the past few years and months, and certainly over the past few months during which I have played my current role—the Minister was excessively sanguine. I know that she does not want to be complacent. From time to time she says—with, I am sure, complete sincerity—that she has no intention of allowing herself to be complacent. However, by reciting the particularly sanguine mantra that she has recited on many occasions, she puts herself in great danger of inducing unjustified euphoria in herself or in her ministerial colleagues.

The picture is mixed. Some things have gone surprisingly well in Northern Ireland. I entirely agree with what the Minister said about the policing board, which is a shining example of that. I touch wood, as I do of necessity when at the Dispatch Box, but none of us could have expected the board to work as well as it has so far. It is encouraging that it got to work so rapidly and in such a businesslike fashion. It is also encouraging that it was able to resolve issues that, although largely symbolic, were nevertheless difficult—the uniform and cap badge, and the appointment of a new Chief Constable.

Lady Hermon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is essential for the proposed policing legislation not to undermine the central importance of the board, which is working so well? In particular, does he agree that it should not be undermined by an extension of the police ombudsman's powers?

Mr. Davies: I agree with the general principle. I will not go into the details of the legislation today because this is a consultation period and we are still waiting for the Constantine report, which as far as I know has not yet been completed. It was supposed to be delivered at the beginning of December, but I have not seen it.

I had intended to meet members of a number of relevant organisations in Northern Ireland today, but was unable to do so because of the debate. They include the chief constable, the policing board and the Police Federation. Although I have some ideas about what the hon. Lady has said and what the Government have proposed, I think it would be discourteous to make any pronouncement on behalf of the official Opposition without listening—in confidence and informally, of course—to what those important stakeholders in the whole process might have to say.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the Police Ombudsman—who is a woman—will be allowed to go backwards, or is she going to move forward? Our worry is that, under the proposals, it seems that she will have powers that can take her back into the past, whereas she should be dealing only with the present and the future.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman again invites me down a long road, but I will not go down it now. However, I should say, since he has given me the opportunity to do so, that I admire the way in which the Ombudsman has tackled her task. She has already developed a reputation for independence in Northern Ireland. That is a great asset—in fact, it is an indispensable characteristic for the proper discharge of that function.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): I want to repeat what has been said. The time has come to leave the past behind us, because if we keep on dragging it up, we keep on dragging up the problem. We should therefore look to building a new future together, but in leaving behind the past as it relates to the behaviour of the Unionist parties, and so forth, we should do the same in relation to all behaviour, and build a new future together.

Mr. Davies: I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman—whatever we do, we must do it even-handedly and fairly. He has heard me use those two terms time and again in the past year, and we must always be reminded of them, but unfortunately they have sometimes been forgotten in many contexts. I should say that I am struck whenever there is agreement between himself and the hon. Member for North Antrim. It would be a brave man in Northern Ireland politics who wanted to take on both of the hon. Gentlemen on a particular matter.

There are other matters that have gone favourably. In particular, I want to congratulate all concerned in the Police Service of Northern Ireland on the way in which the new recruitment programme has proceeded. That we should over-ride normal human rights criteria by establishing a quota for the two religious categories in recruiting to the Police Service of Northern Ireland is of course an anomaly. However, the Opposition strongly endorse the need—temporarily, at least—for that anomaly, so that we can try to get away from the distortions that we inherit from the past.

Lady Hermon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I shall, but if the hon. Lady will forgive me I shall not do so too frequently as I do not want to take up too much time.

Lady Hermon: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me again. I understand that the Conservative party is in fact a pro-agreement party. The agreement twice makes provision for guaranteeing equality of opportunity, irrespective of religion. Why is policing legislation allowed to override the agreement by permitting religious discrimination in the recruitment of police officers?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Lady is absolutely right—the Conservative party very much supports the Belfast agreement. She is a distinguished lawyer, and I thought that she would try to catch me out on this particular

inconsistency. However, I thought that I answered the point before she intervened, by acknowledging that the position is anomalous. If she wants to tell me that I am being illogical, she will win the argument. Unfortunately, to solve practical problems in life one sometimes has to accept anomalies and contradictions. Where a choice exists between two courses of action, neither of which is entirely logical or desirable in itself on first principles, one has to make a pragmatic judgment such as the one that I have set out. I should emphasise that, in doing so, it is very important to be aware that such an anomaly exists, and that a distortion is being introduced to counterbalance a worse one; one must not try to pretend that it is something other than a distortion or an anomaly. In any event, the provision is justified only over a temporary period; that is the basis on which it has been introduced, and on which we support it.

Some aspects of Northern Ireland policing have not been going so well, however. The Minister, with a tendency towards a certain euphoria in these matters, skated over these issues. I am sorry that she did because she has fundamental responsibility for them, and I know that she conducts her responsibilities with enormous conscientiousness. She is very much aware of the facts; she probably genuinely worries about them every night and morning, but she does not want to come before the House of Commons—it would be contrary to the whole culture of new Labour to do so—and set out the facts, which are uncomfortable and disturbing.

The fact is that police numbers are badly down. The Patten report provided for a police force of 7,500 men and women on the assumption of the establishment of peace and normality in Northern Ireland. The hon. Lady will have the exact figures—I do not—but the regular force in Northern Ireland is less than 7,000. That is a matter of considerable concern, and for the hon. Lady not to mention it was slightly artificial. Of course, we have a full-time police reserve, and I congratulate the Government on doing what we pressed them to do for months in renewing the contracts of the full-time police reserve when they came up in September. However, that only gives us a three-year time scale and it is very important to look forward to ensuring that the policing numbers in Northern Ireland are sufficient to meet the tasks that are, sadly, much greater and more formidable than Patten assumed they would be four and a half years after the agreement.

Morale still appears to be low in the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I hope that I am wrong here and that the Minister can give me the right figure, but, according to newspaper reports, on average one man or women in ten in the PSNI reports sick at any one time. If so, it is very worrying, and I hope that something can be done about it.

The Minister is also keenly aware of the constant threat of disorder and intermittent violence in inner-city areas in Northern Ireland, particularly Belfast. I am thinking particularly of Short Strand and west and north Belfast. Sometimes one thinks that the various measures taken to de-escalate the violence are working, but suddenly there is the disappointment of another outbreak. That is very worrying. I do not want to go into this in too much detail, but I should like to say something in public that I have already said to the Minister in private and to others in Northern Ireland—the House will appreciate who I might be speaking to on these matters. It is important that we make it a matter of urgency greatly to increase the number of CCTV cameras in inner-city areas in Northern Ireland.

Against this variegated background, which has both light and shade, the question is what the Government are doing about policing. They have been behaving very erratically. Following the initial consultation on the Patten report two years ago, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who is not in his place this afternoon, went out of his way to reassure Unionists. In his statement to the House of 19 January 2000, the right hon. Gentleman specifically downgraded the role of the district policing partnerships and deferred any decision on giving them powers to raise money to buy in additional policing services, which was in the original Patten report. In the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, the right hon. Gentleman then introduced a number of safeguards in the relationship between the policing board and the chief constable to ensure that operational independence would be preserved. In an effort to reassure Unionists, he also introduced the disqualification on those with criminal convictions from serving as independent members of DPPs.

Those are two areas in which the Government now propose to make changes in the reverse direction. They plan to reduce the grounds on which the chief constable can appeal to the Secretary of State to block reports and inquiries and to make it easier for the policing board to initiate such inquiries. The motion before the House makes it clear that the Government intend, subject to certain provisos, to relax the disqualification against convicted terrorists serving as independent members of DPPs.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene. I know that he has given way on a number of occasions, so I will keep this brief. Are there are circumstances in which he would allow convicted former terrorists to take part in local police partnerships, given that the Government have already made a commitment that the peace process must be utterly completed before that goes ahead? In those circumstances, would he accept that such a change should be made at some point in the future?

Mr. Davies: I think that I have had slightly more experience of conducting negotiations than the people who are currently responsible for Government policy. If we are going into wider negotiations with a view to reaching a comprehensive and timetabled settlement, as I have been urging on the Government for a long time, it is not sensible to put all one's cards on the table in advance. It is much more sensible to ensure that one puts one's cards on the table only when others are doing the same. There is something fundamentally wrong with the tactics pursued by Members on the Treasury Bench. The hon. Gentleman has been assiduous in his attendance at and participation in debates on Northern Ireland, which I welcome, so he knows that I have been developing my critique for a year. Indeed, the Government may even have accepted certain aspects of it—although they are not likely to give me any credit. However, there seems to have been some partial acceptance and I shall say a little more about tactics later in my speech.

[Mr. Davies]

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart should get a good mark from the Whips because he cleverly intervened just as I was drawing attention to the most embarrassing aspect of the Government's behaviour—the blatant contradiction between the policing policies adopted by the right hon. Member for Hartlepool only two years ago and those that the Government are currently proposing. There has been a complete U-turn.

The Minister will recall that when the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 was going through the House, the Government were constantly accused by nationalists of resiling from Patten in order to propitiate the Unionists. However, with this U-turn, the Government are being accused by Unionists of the contrary—of resiling from the Act to appease nationalists. If that is not contradictory, I do not know what is.

I warn the Government against proceeding in that fashion because they are underestimating the intelligence of the people with whom they are dealing. The Government should not continue to underestimate the intelligence of the public as regards any aspect of policy and governance anywhere in the United Kingdom, even though they do so constantly, but they make a great mistake in doing so in Northern Ireland—as I am sure that the Minister, privately, realises already. The political intelligence of people on both sides of the divide in Northern Ireland is especially acute, because politics is an existential matter and people follow it extremely carefully.

I hesitate to make my next point, although it needs to be said: people on both sides in Northern Ireland have an especially clear vision of history going back over many centuries. They are extremely conscious of their history as they see it. When one is presented with two different accounts of the history of the same place, it is often difficult to relate them. It is like looking at a mountain from opposite sides; one has to remind oneself that it is the same mountain.

A feature of those readings of history is that in both cases there is a story of endless trickery or betrayals—or attempted trickery or betrayals—by the British. It is thus not very clever of the Government to do something that further undermines confidence in their straightforwardness or consistency.

The Government should carefully think through their policies. They will not get away with easy card-shuffling tricks when they are dealing with people in Northern Ireland, as they should know by now.

I do not believe for a moment that the Government have any intention of being duplicitous. They do not want to be two-faced, but they are in a frightful muddle because they have been going about the peace process in entirely the wrong way.

The current muddle is only part and parcel of the general muddle that the Government have got themselves into over the peace process. The trouble is that they have used a tactic of making unilateral concessions and trying to do partial deals with one party, and then finding that they have upset another party, then trying to appease the others and then—my goodness—finding that someone else has been left out and needs another favour, and so on. That is a hopeless way of conducting the peace process, but it is exactly what has happened over the past four and a half years, and it is a major reason why we have failed to make the progress that could have been expected following the Belfast agreement.

Yet again, I beg the Government to rethink and to consider once again the need for interlinkage. The Minister of State has heard this from me many times before. No one in Northern Ireland will make a step forward without knowing what portion of the total price to be paid that move represents, what others will do in return, and by when, and what will happen if the commitments are not fulfilled. Everyone has to see the end-game and be part of a comprehensive deal, or we will have no definitive settlement.

That is why partial proposals on individual aspects are a mistake. It would be far better for the Government to keep their cards close to their chest and hold discussions with all parties to find an agreement, which of course will never be completely satisfactory to everyone, but which they could all live with on a contingency basis. If I were Secretary of State, that is the point at which I would define my proposals, and not before.

Jane Kennedy: When we undertook to examine how we could deal with the question of the disqualification from joining DPPs applying to former prisoners, it was in the context that Sinn Fein would support the new beginning to policing, but it failed to do that. We are now discussing a new set of circumstances in which it would not only support that new beginning but take the other enormous steps that we have debated. We believe that, in that context, it would be entirely appropriate to discuss the changes to legislation that we have proposed.

Mr. Davies: Northern Ireland Office Ministers have demonstrated in recent weeks that they understand some interlinkage and contingency that are essential in this process, and there is no doubt that the way in which they have proposed changing the legislation is far better than the way in which they would have done it just a few months ago. To that extent, they have learned the lessons of the disappointments of the past four and a half years, and of course I welcome that.

The Secretary of State was clearly in a difficult position, because the Government's legislative programme was in place before he assumed his new responsibilities. It would have been difficult for him to go back to first base, although that might have been desirable. He has presented a Bill with some proposals on policing, while the Government are publicising other proposals so that people can discuss them and understand that they might be enacted if certain conditions are fulfilled—they are contingent on certain "acts of completion" by Sinn Fein.

I welcome that element of conditionality and contingency, which is exactly what I have been calling for for a year. Congratulations. I am very happy. However, it is unfortunate that this is only a partial learning of the lesson. If the Minister of State thinks through the logic of what she and her colleagues have done, she will see that everything should have been contingent, because there are so many issues involved,

quite apart from policing, including decommissioning, the military presence in Northern Ireland and the restoration of the institutions in Stormont. Those issues are all linked and it would be a frightful mistake to take any one element and say that we can deal with it separately or legislate on it in advance, before a comprehensive settlement is put together. That would be to limit the Government's flexibility and give away some of their limited currency for nothing in return, which is a foolish tactic in any context. Reducing flexibility would also make it harder for other parties to come up with imaginative solutions.

In my view, the Government are about a quarter of the way in the right direction on tactics after four and a half years. I do not know whether that is an encouraging situation, although it is certainly more encouraging than if there had been no progress at all. It is still a long way from the concerted, strategic thinking that we need to handle a peace process as complicated and as important as the one that we have in Northern Ireland.

5.56 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): I entirely agree with the Government's assertion in the amendment that we have made substantial progress in creating peace on our streets. There is no doubt that the atmosphere is totally transformed from what it was a few years ago, but a 300-year quarrel—the past 30 years have been about the worst—is not healed in a week or a fortnight. There is no instant solution; there is a healing process, and what is required is a framework for that process. We have that in the Good Friday agreement. The healing process is under way, and there is no doubt about that. For the first time in our history—the importance of this has been underestimated—the people of Ireland as a whole, north and south—

Rev. Ian Paisley: Aha.

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): Not again.

Mr. Hume: Yes, this is important. This is only the second time I have said this, and the hon. Members did not even bother to listen to me the first time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hume: Yes, there should be order over there.

For the first time ever, the people of the north and the south voted overwhelmingly on how they wished to live together. It is the duty of all true democrats throughout Ireland to implement the will of the people. That vote sent a clear message to the IRA. Historically, it has always said that it is acting in the name of the Irish people. If it now wants to do that, there must be a complete and absolute end to its violence, which it is clearly working towards, and more importantly, it must end its existence as a paramilitary organisation and devote its energies to building a new and peaceful society. *[Interruption.]*

That vote also sent out a challenge to Unionists who oppose the agreement because, also for the first time in history, the whole of nationalist Ireland accepts the principle of consent, which is a fundamental principle of Unionism: that there can be no change in Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority of the people. *[Interruption.]* It is no good saying that the principle of consent works only when one agrees with it. If the Good Friday agreement, which the people voted for, is brought down, it will be necessary for the two Governments to work together alone to solve the problem—and where might that leave the Unionists? It is the duty of all of us to implement the will of the people, and that means implementing the Good Friday agreement in all its aspects.

The first principle of the agreement is respect for difference, and who can disagree with that? There is no victory for either side in the agreement; there is total respect for both identities. The second principle involves institutions that respect those differences—a proportionally elected Assembly, and all sections are there, and a proportionally elected Government in Northern Ireland, and all sections are there.

The third principle—the healing process—is that the representatives of all sections should work together in our common interests, which does not involve waving flags at one another, but the real politics: social and economic development and, as I always say, spilling our sweat together, not our blood. As we work together, we will break down the barriers of the past and a new society will evolve based on agreement and respect for difference. That is the challenge that faces all people who truly want to solve this problem, but those who want to play Rangers versus Celtic matches all the time and are looking for victory will never solve anything by continuing down the road that they are taking.

6.1 pm

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and I wish to draw attention to the loss of morale that has occurred in the Police Service of Northern Ireland in very recent years, but before I do so I want to respond to some of the issues raised regarding the statistics on violence.

The Minister referred to the level of violence that existed in the early 1970s. I often hear Government spokespersons, from the Prime Minister downwards, referring to the vast improvement that there has been in Northern Ireland, and they compare it to the early 1970s. With that comparison, they will get no disagreement from us. More than 400 people were killed in the early 1970s and significantly fewer people are being killed now, but the point is that the number of people being killed in the middle 1990s was declining year on year, until we had the Belfast agreement.

Mr. Tom Harris: Would the hon. Gentleman contradict the figures that show that, in the three years leading up to the signing of the Good Friday agreement, 343 people lost their lives as a result of terrorist activities and that, in the three years following that agreement, the figure was 53?

Mr. Campbell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. The figures from the chief constable's report show that, in each of the three years before the agreement and the three years since, the statistics in

[Mr. Campbell]

relation to bombings, shootings, kidnappings and explosives all show not just marginal increases of 5, 10 or 20 per cent., but increases of 100 per cent. and, in some cases, 300 per cent., so violence is increasing when compared with the period immediately before the agreement.

I want to make it clear that this is a comparison not of Northern Ireland in 2002 with Northern Ireland in 1972, but of Northern Ireland today with Northern Ireland immediately before the Belfast agreement. With that comparison, there should be no dispute and no argument. The statistics show that more people are being injured and shot, that more bombs are being planted and that more violence is occurring now than before the agreement. There ought to be no dispute or argument about that.

I now want to move on to police morale. The Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred to police recruitment, and I have to raise that issue again. Whenever we in Northern Ireland have a merit principle for police recruitment, every member of each law-abiding community is quite content and is prepared to support that recruitment principle because it is based on merit. So the best-qualified people, irrespective of their religion or politics, are recruited to become police officers to combat crime. Unfortunately, because of the Government's insistence on the 50:50 rule, we are not getting that. Instead, hundreds of people from the Unionist community who are suitably qualified, law abiding and want a career in policing are being told that they cannot have that career because of their religion. That is abominable, and it ought to be detested and opposed by every Member.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when I asked that very question during Northern Ireland questions last week, the Minister did not give the answer that I was looking for: specifically how she and the Government would address the very injustice that the hon. Gentleman describes?

Mr. Campbell: I fully accept the hon. Gentleman's point, and it is not before time that the Government should address that specific point. The rule cannot be defended or justified. Every aspect of common law and any approach to the merit principle would suggest that the 50:50 rule must be abandoned.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is it not a fact that the chief constable is having difficulty in getting recruits from the United Kingdom because of the 50:50 rule? He told me that personally when I met him with my party.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, the lack of recruits is precisely part of the problem in Northern Ireland. Part of the reason that criminal activity has increased is that fewer police officers are available on the ground, because hundreds of suitable applicants are being told that they are not acceptable purely on the ground of their religion. That is utterly reprehensible.

Mr. McCabe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: I will give way once more.

Mr. McCabe: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I shall be very brief. I follow his objections to the recruitment policy, but what would be his answer to the third report from the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, which pointed out the problems of religious imbalance and said:

"without some radical change in the force"—

it was 1997–98, so the reference was to the RUC—

"it will take a generation to redress the religious imbalance."?

How would the hon. Gentleman tackle the issue if not by this approach?

Mr. Campbell: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is simple: by the full implementation of the merit principle, so that every member of the Roman Catholic community in Northern Ireland and every member of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland who wants a career in policing can understand, when they complete their application forms, that their religious persuasion will play no part in their rejection or acceptance as police recruits, but that that will depend only on their ability to do the job.

Lady Hermon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: No, I am afraid that I will not give way any more.

My answer would be the full implementation of the merit principle and that principle only. That might involve taking longer to redress the balance, but at least the entire community could be confident that people were being selected entirely on the grounds of their ability and merit.

I now want to move on to some other matters that the Government appear to be prepared to contemplate today. We have included the integrity of policing in our motion. Her Majesty's Government's ongoing discussions with those who represent fully armed terror give no grounds for confidence in the Unionist community that the integrity of policing will be re-established having been undermined as a result of low morale, low numbers, 50:50 recruitment and increasing violence. We are hearing continuous rumours about the on-the-runs and the propositions being hinted at there. The lives of hundreds of prison officers are in jeopardy. They have been visited by the police and told that their names were found on computer files located in the spy ring at Stormont affair. Those people are in fear of their lives as a result of this entire scenario.

In concluding my remarks, I have to refer to the issue of Weston Park, which has been raised several times. The Minister was approached and was asked several times to give her view regarding agreements entered into as a result of the negotiations at Weston Park. It would appear that, at the second time of asking, she was unable to confirm or deny which parties were party to the agreements that have flown from it. I remind the House that it was as a result of agreements at Weston Park that the institutions were re-established after they had been suspended on a previous occasion. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was not only party to but benefited from that reinstatement. At the time of Weston Park, when the discussions about policing and on-the-runs were ongoing, not only were we told by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann that issues in relation to other substantive points would not

be brought to a conclusion, but that one issue, and one issue only, was on the table at Weston Park—decommissioning.

Unfortunately, we now see the reality of what has happened as a result of Weston Park and the current scenario in which Unionist communities across Northern Ireland are completely opposed to the implementation of the Belfast agreement because of what they see happening to the police. The police are supposed to represent all of the community, and they can do so if and when the Government restore the integrity that the Royal Ulster Constabulary once had, which has been lost as a result of the many decisions that have been taken by the Government, both inside and outside the House.

6.11 pm

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): When I heard the opening remarks of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), I wondered whether he was rehearsing a broadcast as we move towards election time. It reminded me of the many times that I saw him on television when I was a youngster growing up in Port Glasgow. He always displayed the same characteristics—leaping from rally to rally with his bowler hat and his flowing sash, always threatening to bring down an institution and always claiming no surrender.

Listening to him today, although I do not intend my comments to be rude, I was saddened that, after all this time, and after all the loss that has occurred, his position has not changed at all. I find it distressing that he recognises no difference between the hideous killings that occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s and the current position. I recognise that there is a problem with crime in Northern Ireland, and it strikes me that some of the problems that we witness currently have surfaced since the agreement, as the level of real, organised crime, which has posed as something else in the past, is now being exposed. We should have common cause in wanting to tackle that. The hon. Gentleman has done us no favours, however, in his lack of movement today.

I wonder, when I listen to the hon. Gentleman, whether he would recognise an "act of completion" if it fell before him. I was brought up in the Presbyterian tradition, too, but I was brought up to believe that forgiveness is part of the system and that human beings can change. I wonder whether he recognises that.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): The hon. Gentleman talks about recognising an "act of completion". Will he define "act of completion"? The Prime Minister will not define it, and the Minister refused to define it at Question Time last week.

Mr. McCabe: I am referring to "acts of completion", and my assumption is that they take more than a single step. I realise that the hon. Gentleman and I may not share that viewpoint, but if we want to move forward, we may have to be prepared to accept that. That seems a basic point.

In terms of the changes about which we heard in policing partnerships and the board, I thought that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) perhaps did the Social Democratic and Labour party a disservice, as it strikes me that the Government may have changed their position. I would be the first to concede that there has been a change in the position enunciated previously by the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). The SDLP now seems to be playing an active role in the policing board. If, through its active and genuine participation, it has been able to suggest changes that will improve the situation, we should welcome that. I would not regard that not as an outrageous 180° U-turn, but as the kind of process for which we should aim, in which people involve and include themselves. If they can suggest changes on the basis of that behaviour, I would welcome it.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I do not think that that is outrageous, and I did not use that term or imply that. I merely think two things. First, it is a U-turn, and I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has recognised that. Secondly, for the reason that I mentioned, it is tactically inept and pragmatically undesirable.

Mr. McCabe: We will have to disagree on both counts. I do not think that a change automatically signals a U-turn, and I do not agree that it is inept to accommodate change when people are playing a useful participative role. The kind of politics in which I believe suggests that when people are prepared to participate and play a useful and constructive role, we should listen to them and take them on board. I do not see anything inept about that. Indeed, were more people in the hon. Gentleman's party prepared to behave in that way, there might not be so few of them present in the Chamber, and so few of them in Parliament generally.

The lesson that Sinn Fein should take from the behaviour of the SDLP is that a road exists, if it is prepared to recognise it. It should follow a similar route. It should be prepared to make it clear that it is totally committed to the democratic process and wants to make the policing arrangements work—I am speaking of Sinn Fein as a party. At that point, if Sinn Fein was prepared to participate in the policing arrangements in Northern Ireland, I would welcome that, as I would see it as a significant step forward.

In terms of the wider question of the arrangements with regard to other groups and paramilitary groups, the position is straightforward. It has been made clear that those groups will not be able to participate in any shape or form until we have had the essential "acts of completion". I would certainly include in those a complete declaration that the war is over—

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Which has been made.

Mr. McCabe: I would like the handing-in of weapons and an end to the violence, too.

David Burnside: If there are convictions of members of Sinn Fein in relation to Colombia, Castlereagh or the present investigation into the spy ring, does that exclude it from the Executive or district policing partnerships?

Mr. McCabe: Given that none of those matters has yet been determined, it would not advance the situation were I to speculate on it.

To return to what I was saying, there is hope if we adopt an open approach. I am a little bemused by the Democratic Unionist party position—I confess that I always have been, so that is not new for me. As I understand it, however, the DUP is committed to devolution, although it has a tendency to destroy any institution that offers that way forward. In a funny way, it is the mirror image of Sinn Fein, because it is the party that wants to be half-in, half-out. It does not want to take part in any of the broad round-table talks in which movement might occur across the board—it wants back-door meetings with the Prime Minister and others to see if it can advance its case. I do not understand exactly what its problem is. It seems to me that it could make a commitment. It may wish to spend its time in this debate looking for a narrow definition of "acts of completion", but it could follow the Prime Minister's other statement. It could give the commitment that it is in favour of making the institutions secure and stable. For a party that believes in devolution, that would be an advance on its current position.

On the policing arrangements, I am surprised that the police do not get more credit for what they have achieved. The new chief constable attended the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee recently, and my impression is that he has made a first-rate start. He has shown his capacity to deal with both sides. Whether he is dealing with loyalists posing as gangsters or the other way round or whether he is dealing with republican spies, the chap has shown us that he is prepared to do what he was put there to do. We should congratulate him on that.

We should also be pleased by the significant rise in Catholic recruitment to the Police Service. The Select Committee was right to say that that was a major impediment to the performance of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Unless measures are taken to tackle that problem, it will take a generation for change to take place. As in keeping with other things that the DUP party would like, I recognise that the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) would rather wait a generation for change to take place, but we do not have that time.

Lady Hermon: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee found that the main cause of low Catholic recruitment to what was the RUC was the intimidation of Catholic families and Catholic members of the police force? If that intimidation were to be eradicated and reduced, that, rather than discriminatory recruitment policies, would encourage young Catholics to come forward.

Mr. McCabe: It is true that intimidation was a significant factor, but I do not recall it being the only one. It is also true that the Committee concluded that it probably was not advisable to wait a generation for change. That point must be taken on board.

I want to return to the problem of ex-prisoners. It is pretty clear that such people could not join the district policing partnerships at the present time. However, my understanding is that that is not what is on offer. What is on offer is the possibility that, at some point in the future, ex-prisoners may be allowed to join the policing arrangements. As I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Minister, if we can tolerate ex-prisoners standing for the Assembly and perhaps being part of the Executive if they clearly dissociate themselves from violence and paramilitary means, I can certainly envisage a situation in which ex-prisoners could also play a part in the policing arrangements.

I was bemused by what the hon. Member for North Antrim said about the current legislation, but my understanding is that it requires political and independent members of the district policing partnership to hold office until the next local elections, which are scheduled for May 2005. I therefore do not understand how the change that he fears could occur. There is some provision for additional appointments to be made to the Belfast board, but that is primarily because of issues that relate to the volume of work. The central anxiety may have been exaggerated.

Mr. Hunter: We have sex registers for paedophiles. Their offences are so hideous that they should be remembered. Therefore, will the hon. Gentleman explain why there should not be a comparable system for former terrorists who have committed equally horrific crimes?

Mr. McCabe: I understand that the hon. Gentleman has good reason to have strong feelings on this subject. However, if we were to keep registers of all the former terrorists who go on to play a constructive role in active politics across the globe, some people whom we now welcome here as statesmen would not get to play any role in politics whatever. We must be prepared to move on. When people are willing to renounce violence and to use exclusively democratic means, I am prepared to recognise that, and I hope that most people would, too. I would like to see the day when the Assembly and the Executive have the power to control policing in Northern Ireland. That is the day when the people of Northern Ireland will embrace their police force and have faith in it.

6.25 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): It is always interesting to hear the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley). Only yesterday I was walking in his constituency, and on the ancient stones of the Giant's Causeway. I was with my friend Ian Morrice, and he asked me what the hon. Gentleman was like. I said that he was indeed honourable and sincere, and held very strong positions that he described extremely clearly. I fear that I was so full of praise for the hon. Gentleman that Ian Morrice, who is planning to marry his fiancée Wendy in December, might invite the hon. Gentleman to conduct the ceremony. In that case, it would most definitely be a marriage made in Antrim.

I have also learned that the hon. Gentleman's opinions are totally internally consistent. What he concludes follows logically from where he starts. I have come to the view that where I differ from him—I do not differ from him on all matters—it is because of his inbuilt assumptions. As others have already acknowledged, the hon. Gentleman and the Democratic Unionist party represent a considerable proportion of

the Northern Ireland community, who agree with the positions that he takes. For that reason if no other, it is important that we hold our debates with a spirit of respect for the proposals outlined in the motions.

Over the weekend a degree of uncertainty has been thrown over the Northern Ireland peace process. Several newspapers reported that the IRA was poised to announce a series of major moves, including comprehensive decommissioning, but those stories were subsequently denied by the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Mr. McGuinness). The confusion is not surprising, or uncharacteristic of Northern Ireland politics, but it certainly makes today's debate poignant, not least because it forces us to ask questions about the degree to which the Good Friday agreement is central to the process and needs to be fulfilled. The paramilitaries have a significant role in rebuilding the fragile trust that the peace process has needed, which now exists in a slightly eroded form.

Policing in Northern Ireland takes us to the heart of some of the measures in the agreement that the various parties say have not been implemented as was required. However, even here there is a complicating factor. We do not have the luxury of considering completion with regard to policing alone, but must consider the other factors that have been mentioned in the debate. The IRA's alleged spy ring in Stormont, the embarrassing arrests in Colombia, and some of the other issues that have been mentioned, make it clear that we must define an act of completion before it can realistically be achieved.

With all that going on, it is hardly surprising that those sceptics who do not believe that the IRA will lay down its arms for good have to some extent been successful in forcing the suspension that we are faced with at the moment. Suspension was the least worst option, given that collapse was the alternative, but at all times in our discussions we return to questions of policing and to consideration of what the Government and the parties in Northern Ireland have done to make it possible for policing to be reformed so as to create consensus across the communities in Northern Ireland.

We must consider to what extent the DUP's motion should attract support. When the hon. Member for North Antrim defended the words in the motion that say that the DUP does not consider Sinn Fein's representatives

"fit to participate in the government of part of the United Kingdom",

he is making a strong statement. He goes beyond my position, but my assumptions are different at the outset.

I subscribe to the view taken by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), reiterated to a large extent by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe). Just because someone has a past does not mean that he cannot have a future. What qualifies Sinn Fein representatives to take their place in a Government in Northern Ireland is partly their ability to lead those who resist participating in the police force, and persist in participating in terrorism, towards a peaceful outcome.

The hon.—and, indeed, reverend—Member for North Antrim knows more than I do about the difference between saints and sinners, but surely no one would suggest that members of Sinn Fein present themselves as saints. However, there are leaders who are capable of bringing people towards accepting the Police Service of Northern Ireland as a more appropriate form of policing than the punishment beatings and other forms of intimidation that, sadly, have been used by some to justify the continued armament and organisation of paramilitary forces in both halves of the community.

Lady Hermon: Would not it be helpful if the Sinn Fein leadership immediately condemned outright any attacks on PSNI recruits, whether Catholic or Protestant, instead of hesitating and constantly sitting on the fence?

Lembit Öpik: Our discussion of Northern Ireland is becoming more nebulous, but the relevance of the hon. Lady's question is to underline how difficult Sinn Fein has found it to bring the hard-liners towards the moderates. It would be helpful if Sinn Fein gave not only a commitment to renounce the punishment-beating ethos that has dogged such a large proportion of Northern Ireland life, but an explicit statement that there should be no intimidation of any Catholic or nationalist who wanted to join the police force. Sadly, underlying intimidation makes it difficult for nationalists who want to join the police force to have the courage to do so, and their fear is understandable.

Rev. Ian Paisley: IRA-Sinn Fein have officially issued and circulated a leaflet—the information has also been put on posters in their areas—telling their people to treat the new police service in the same way as they treated the RUC. That is an official document, issued and paid for by that party and the policy is advocated by all their spokesmen, including their leader and deputy leader.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman makes an honest point. My interpretation of that action is slightly different. I think it tells us that just as we see open divisions among hard-liners and moderates on the Unionist side, we also see the symptoms of a mirror-image tussle going on between moderates and hard-liners on the republican side. One could conclude that everyone in Sinn Fein is a hard-liner, but I take a different view. Some moderation, which has had a stabilising effect, has been achieved by the people in Sinn Fein who have chosen to participate actively and publicly in the political process.

I want to make an interesting analogy, which comes from watching the news in my younger days. I remember the hon. Member for North Antrim commenting on something called the third force, which was widely publicised as an armed militia on the Unionist or loyalist side. That was many years ago. He gave the impression of having an association with that armed militia, although I am not suggesting that he explicitly promoted violence in any way. One reason why the third force did not become a cohesive paramilitary force in its own right under that name was because the hon. Gentleman was willing and able to maintain stability among Unionists and loyalists. In effect, he did what I should like members of Sinn Fein to do. I want them to encourage an adherence to the Police Service of Northern Ireland in preference to an adherence to a militia that organises itself outside the law.

[Lembit Öpik]

In addition, we have the opportunity to draw comparisons with the struggles among Protestants. The Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association still enjoy a considerable degree of organisation and are behind some of the trouble that persists. If we are balanced about the discussion—we have talked about symmetry in Northern Ireland politics—we have to recognise that Sinn Fein is not alone in trying to bring its paramilitaries to order.

David Burnside: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the hard-liners within Unionism, of whom I am proud to be one, whether in the Ulster Unionist party or the Democratic Unionist party, do not sit on the army council of any armed terrorist organisation, whereas Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness sit on the army council of the Provisional IRA, which is carrying out crime and terrorism?

Lembit Öpik: I do not know enough about what goes on outside the Chamber of Stormont to know who is in what position, although I fully understand why the hon. Gentleman raises suspicions about the presence of those individuals on the army council of the IRA. However, that is not the key issue. If the supposition is correct, individuals such as Gerry Adams have a direct line of influence on hard-liners, who need to be convinced to come into the police service. I believe that a proportion of Sinn Fein members acknowledge that a peaceful political approach will deliver their outcomes more effectively than the paramilitary approach advanced by the IRA.

I am sure that my assumption differs from those of Members of the Democratic Unionist party and I suspect we will not get alignment on this, because it is at the heart of the debate. Our responses to it will define how we choose to vote on the motion. If one believes that a large proportion of people in Sinn Fein and the IRA still think that violence will get the result they want, one should vote with the DUP. I think that the organisation has moved on, and for that reason I am sceptical of the DUP's position.

The issue of concessions is interesting. The motion refers to concessions that have allegedly been made to buy off the IRA. I do not have a problem with making concessions to the IRA if they are defined as political progress towards equality in communities rather than a financial bribe. This is a matter more of semantics than of bribery. Any Government would negotiate towards peace by providing greater incentives for peace than for the continuation of violence. I suppose that is why we differ on that aspect of the motion.

I also take issue with the motion's stance on allowing terrorists on to district policing partnerships. The case against that approach has been well made and I do not need to repeat it. What is interesting, however, is that the Government have made progress in defining more explicitly what needs to happen before ex-prisoners are allowed on to the policing partnerships. I am not sure that that was done on purpose, but the debate has moved on from whether there are cast-iron requirements to defining what those are. It is all about acts of completion now. As has been said, we have yet to see what the Government mean by acts of completion. To his great credit, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green made an effort to define those acts. I have no doubt that Ministers will invite him to discussions, either to embrace his ideas or to shut him up. I am not sure whether the Minister of State is shaking her head at the former or the latter, but it cannot be both. The words "acts of completion" are vital, and we must have a clearer definition of them before those who are sceptical about Sinn Fein activity—and, perhaps, those who are sceptical about the amount of back-room dealing by the Government—are satisfied that there is transparency in these matters.

It is clear that in their amendment the Government are congratulating themselves on the openness of their dealings. I suspect that many of us feel that there was more going on at Weston Park than there should have been. *[Interruption.]* I speak euphemistically, but I hear nodding from behind me, which suggests that I have more than a modicum of support, because it takes some effort to nod so loudly that one can be heard. There is an unanswered question, which, let us face it, concerns on-the-runs. I am concerned that a link could arise between our achievements in policing and the resolution of that issue. The Government need to learn that there must be symmetry in private as well as in public, because everything discussed in Northern Ireland will eventually come into the public eye.

I turn now to the question of where we go next, and quotas. The Minister of State will know that I asked her a question about quotas at Northern Ireland questions, and the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) made a similar point a few moments ago. It is widely recognised that the police in Northern Ireland have not been effective in recruiting from the population at large, and there has been a lack of trust between the police and certain sections of the community. The two problems are clearly linked, and Patten rightly recommended changes to tackle both of them.

I was pleased to hear from the Minister last week that 35 per cent. of those applying to join the PSNI over the past year came from the Catholic community, and I share her hope that that will continue. However, she did not answer my question about what will happen when the 50:50 rule goes wrong. The example that I gave concerned what would happen if a proportion of recruits, from one side or the other, dropped out? Would it be necessary to sack or make redundant individuals from the other side of the religious divide to maintain symmetry? What is the Minister's answer to the question—asked, I think, by the hon. Member for East Londonderry—about what will happen to the many people, allegedly on the Unionist side, who feel rejected on the basis of the 50:50 rule? I am not suggesting that we need to review legislation, but it would be appropriate for the Minister to give us some answers when summing up the debate.

I was rather surprised that, in response to an intervention by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said something like, "If she wants to tell me that I am being illogical, she will win the argument." Logic is important in framing legislation, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not saying that if he were Secretary of State he would on occasion support illogical legislation.

The greatest illogicality—or perhaps simply a great surprise to me—is the fact that although the Liberal Democrats worked with the Conservatives, the Ulster Unionists and the DUP to oppose the 50:50 quotas when they were proposed during the proceedings on the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, the hon. Gentleman now seems to be saying that the Conservatives have changed their view and accepted the quotas. That sounds, to use his phrase, like a 180-degree U-turn. People are entitled to change their view, but I am not sure what has changed to encourage the Conservatives to embrace that principle. We have already heard the strong opposition to it from the hon. Members who sit behind me. If the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford or one of his colleagues responds to the debate, perhaps we could have clarification on that point.

We all agree that policing in Northern Ireland is a tough, dangerous job. It is about bringing law and order to a place where disputes are sometimes settled with fatalities. I support the work of the police in Northern Ireland and pay tribute to their courage. I know that the overwhelming majority in the police are not sectarian and have always been committed to peace.

I hope that the acts of completion will be clearly defined by the Government, and that they will be delivered and matched by acts of good faith on the other side. Ultimately, politicians must make judgment calls, and although we have heard cynicism and scepticism about what the IRA intends to do, the ball is in its court; it can deliver something that will deliver peace. If it is to do that, however, and if the Government are to live up to the words in their amendment, acts of completion must be clearly defined.

6.45 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I follow the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) by stating that the debate should have offered a more positive statement on the progress that has been made in Northern Ireland, but it gives hon. Members an opportunity to pay tribute to the immense bravery and commitment of the members previously of the RUC and now of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I cannot imagine that there is a more difficult policing job anywhere in the United Kingdom than on the streets of Belfast and Londonderry. Every Member of the House should be extremely grateful for the work of the police during the many years of the so-called troubles.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) said that police morale is particularly low at the moment, and I do not doubt that. I question whether unhappiness about the 50:50 recruitment policy is a greater cause of low morale than being the target of terrorist bullets and bombs, as was the case in the 1970s and 1980s. I should have thought that even with unhappiness about the recruitment policy, morale in the new police service is not as low as it was when terrorists regularly and systematically targeted officers.

It is said that there is great rejoicing in heaven over a sinner repenting, and I am sure that, on the 50:50 recruitment policy, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) falls into that category. I do not want to make political capital out of that. Surely on a matter such as Northern Ireland we should be prepared to look again at statements that we have made and consider them seriously in the light of current events. I hope that if the Government had decided that they had been wrong on one issue or another, they would have the courage and honesty to come to the Dispatch Box and say so. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on doing precisely that.

When it comes to being positive about the police service, we should bear it in mind that there have been several landmark events in the past couple of years, including the opening of the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in November 2000, the enactment of the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill and the establishment of police district commands in April 2001. On a matter that is pertinent to my other comments, last year the Chief Constable announced that he would be able to recruit more than 300 new officers, when the original target was only 260. Despite the reservations of some Opposition Members, the police service managed to recruit 40 more recruits than it told the Secretary of State it would be able to, even with the 50:50 restriction.

Mr. Dodds: The hon. Gentleman referred to the morale of the police service and asked whether it is lower now than it was when people were being shot and so on. I am sure that he will accept that morale is low because many members of the service feel that they have been betrayed. What would the hon. Gentleman say to the chairman of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland, who expressed his disbelief at the plan suggested by the Secretary of State and claimed that it would prevent ordinary, decent people from joining the district policing partnerships? He said:

"An independent appointee who has terrorist baggage is by definition far from independent. Appointing such people devalues the meaning of the word."

Mr. Harris: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I had intended to refer to that point later in my comments, so perhaps he will bear with me.

Landmarks of the past couple of years include the appointment of the Northern Ireland Policing Board to replace the Police Authority; in November 2001, the first recruits under the new arrangements entered training, the policing board assumed its powers, and the Royal Ulster Constabulary changed its name to the Police Service of Northern Ireland for operational purposes, changing it formally on 5 April 2002. Most important, the Social Democratic and Labour party took up its responsibilities to participate in policing arrangements in Northern Ireland after decades of refusing to take part on behalf of its constituents. I congratulate the SDLP on doing so. The DUP's motion appears to reflect a desire to exclude more people from such arrangements, but we should be taking steps to ensure that Sinn Fein, too, faces up to its responsibility to participate in the policing board.

I shall now explore the motion in more detail—perhaps in so doing I shall reply to the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds). DUP Members are urging the House to oppose

"offering non-elected convicted terrorists places on district policing partnerships."

I am curious about their objection: is it to non-elected members, or to people with terrorist convictions? If the latter, I am not sure what position they have taken until

[Mr. Harris]

now by agreeing to sit with Sinn Fein in the Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly, and only abandoning it—*[Interruption.]* When the cameras are not there the DUP Ministers have worked well with Sinn Fein Ministers in the Assembly.

Lady Hermon: It will help all hon. Members, especially the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris), to state that the reason why we object to people with terrorist convictions being members of district policing partnerships is the recommendation in the Patten report—the Government want that report to be fully implemented—that independent members of district policing partnerships should

"provide expertise in matters pertaining to community safety."

Can the hon. Gentleman explain how anyone with a terrorist conviction can bring with him or her expertise in community safety? That is our objection.

Mr. Harris: I have great respect for the hon. Lady's views and for DUP Members. My point is simply that since the Government have already made a commitment not to appoint people with terrorist convictions to the policing partnerships at present—the time is not yet right—it would not be useful for the House to debate what qualifications such people need. The Government have said that the time is not yet right for such people to be appointed, and I for one am happy to accept that commitment.

I have no doubt that I will be asked—I can see the question on the lips of Opposition Members—what my definition of completion is. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) mentioned the disbandment of the IRA, but that is not part of the Good Friday agreement, so if that is what his party seeks it is seeking something that is not to be found in the detail of the agreement.

I am aware that at least one of my colleagues wants to speak, so I shall try to be brief. We in Scotland are used to members of nationalist parties continually talking down Scotland in general and its economic achievements in particular. I hear an echo of that in the DUP motion. The text of the motion is not rooted in reality. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said, the process of achieving normality in Northern Ireland was never going to be completed overnight, but it is disingenuous of DUP Members—especially the hon. Member for North Antrim, for whom I have a great deal of respect and who is not nearly as scary in real life as he appeared to be when as a boy I saw him on television—to suggest that the threat to individual lives in Northern Ireland is greater now than it was when the Good Friday agreement was signed. That is simply not true. Look at the economic statistics, the jobs that have been created and the confidence created by the Good Friday agreement—not by the Government, but by the agreement and by the people of Northern Ireland who signed up to it. The confidence that that has inspired in the single community of Northern Ireland is something that we should respect, not talk down.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way? He need not be afraid.

Mr. Harris: I give way.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman bear in mind the fact that never in the history of Northern Ireland has so much information been in the hands of Sinn Fein-IRA? That information is in the form of 1,000 documents containing people's names, addresses, details of their motor cars, the names of family members, where they are employed, what time they leave home, and so on. All that information is, for the first time, in the hands of the IRA—1,000 documents about people who serve the Government. Is that not a cause for people to be really concerned about what is happening?

Mr. Harris: If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the alleged spy ring at Stormont, we all share his concern. It is a matter that should concern the security forces and does concern the Northern Ireland Office. However, his party stayed in the Northern Ireland Assembly for a long time before that event took place. In his speech today, he mentioned other events such as the Castlereagh break-in and the arrests in Colombia, but throughout that period his party—rightly—stayed in the Assembly. I have to ask whether the DUP walk-out a few weeks ago had more to do with the run-up to Assembly elections in May next year than with genuine concerns about recent security developments.

I ask the House to support the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The motion does not reflect political reality in Northern Ireland, except as a cynical exercise in very early electioneering.

6.57 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): This has been a useful debate. I hope that the Democratic Unionist party will have many more Opposition days—this is the first occasion on which my party has secured an Opposition day debate.

I shall respond to some of the points made during the debate, but I hope that the House will let me make a few comments on my own account first. There are four main elements in the motion, the first of which is an awareness of the continuing terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland. I join my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) in denouncing loyalist violence. More and more, the Unionist community is seeing that loyalist paramilitaries are more interested in securing their own self-interest than in securing the Union or the position of the loyalist community. Their activities should immediately be brought to an end—they bring nothing but dishonour to the cause that they claim to uphold.

Much has been said about the extent of terrorist activity on the part of the Provisional IRA. During the course of its so-called ceasefire, its members have murdered many people and have been involved in the shooting or paramilitary beatings of hundreds of people. We all know of its gun-running from Florida, its training activities with FARC guerrillas in Colombia, the raid on the Castlereagh special branch headquarters,

and its spying activities at Stormont—all from an organisation that purports to be on a ceasefire, an organisation that the Government continue to try to appease.

The recognition by the Government of the need to suspend the Assembly marked their recognition that Sinn Fein-IRA were involved in unacceptable activity. It is difficult to understand the Government's logic—they suspended the Assembly because of bad behaviour by the IRA, but will restore it by making concessions to the IRA. When the Government accept that the IRA has not behaved, I cannot accept that it is prudent to make more concessions to get it to behave; that is simply attempting to buy the silence of the Provisional IRA.

Lady Hermon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is unacceptable that four elected Sinn Fein Members absent themselves from the House, and therefore do not make themselves accountable to Parliament for the activities of their armed wing in Colombia, Castlereagh and elsewhere? Would he not welcome them taking their seats and making themselves accountable to all of us and their constituents?

Mr. Robinson: The Provisional IRA representatives who were elected to the House refuse to take the Oath and come to the House, but I believe that they should enter the House only if they are prepared to take an Oath to Her Majesty the Queen and abide by the principles set down by the Government of exclusive involvement in peaceful and democratic means. That is the way forward and should be the route of entry to the House and any other elected Chamber in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister lectures the people of the United Kingdom about how unacceptable terrorist activity is when it relates to the activities of al-Qaeda or other terrorist organisations throughout the world. It is therefore rather hypocritical of him to accept in his own backyard those same activities being carried out by organisations associated with those terrorist groups—he cannot send out both messages at once.

Several Members have found it difficult to accept the part of the motion that says that Sinn Fein-IRA are not fit to be in government. I should have thought that the argument was self-evident: an organisation cannot purport to represent the people of Northern Ireland through a Minister who is in charge of education but at the same time is a member of the army council of the Provisional IRA. What trust and confidence can anybody have in the representatives of Sinn Fein-IRA being part of the democratic process when they know that they are attempting to undermine the very principles of democracy on which the Assembly was established? It is a matter not simply of trust and confidence but of confidentiality and setting an example. The Provisional IRA is clearly still active in terrorism and has not accepted the principle that to enter the democratic process one must be exclusively committed to peaceful and democratic means.

The reality is that the IRA is not shaping up for peace. In the past few months, there have been personnel changes at the top level of the Provisional IRA. There has been a significant change in the army council: the most ruthless killer and thug in the ranks of the Provisional IRA—Sean Gerard Hughes, who has been linked to many murders on this side of the water and in Northern Ireland—has been brought on to it. He has been linked to the south quay bombing in Canary Wharf, which brought the previous IRA ceasefire to an end in 1996 and in which two citizens were killed. He was also responsible for the murder of 12 soldiers at Warrenpoint, the mortar bomb in Newry and the killing of Justice Gibson and his wife. Does it sound like the IRA is putting a dove on its army council? If a dove was anywhere near Sean Gerard Hughes, he would kill it, but not until he had tortured it—that is what he has done to many of the victims of his organisation, and he was directly linked to those murders.

It is clear that the IRA is not shaping up for peace but is putting one of its most ruthless terrorists on to its army council, which is not consistent with the picture that the Government are attempting to paint of the intentions of the Provisional IRA and its political representatives in Sinn Fein.

Other behaviour by the IRA is not consistent with the picture painted by the Government. It still intends to use the principle of the threat of violence and its execution, turning the tap on and off to extract concessions from the Government. I agree entirely with the Conservative spokesman about the Government's tactics. Even if I agreed with the direction in which the Government say they want to go, I would never use their tactics. We have seen how they used those tactics in relation to decommissioning and terrorist prisoners. They let all the prisoners out and hoped that the IRA would come along and decommission its weapons. The Government made no attempt to extract concessions through the process.

Once again, the Government are using those same tactics. We are upfront, but the Government suggest that they will do something for Sinn Fein if it does something in return. Sinn Fein, however, will simply pocket that concession, and will look for something new from the Government to make the concessions that it wants. The Unionist community does not regard those things as concessions—it does not believe that disbanding an organisation that should not have been there in the first place is in any way a concession either to it or politics in general. Nor does it believe that it is a concession to hand in illegally held guns, as they should not have been possessed in the first place. The Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and, indeed the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office have got it entirely wrong by making further concessions to the IRA.

The Social Democratic and Labour party, one of whose members has made a brief appearance today, has referred to the police being used as a political football. It, however, used the police as a political football by dragging them into the Belfast agreement. The only problem for the SDLP is that it does not want anyone to unravel what it has managed to put together as part of a political deal. The police have been used abysmally recently, and their morale has indeed hit rock bottom. The sickness rate, which has been referred to today, indicates the low morale in the Police Service.

I, of course, am opposed to the making of terrorist concessions—it is not right that convicted terrorists should be members of a policing partnership, as that will not encourage anyone else to join those partnerships.

Mrs. Iris Robinson (Strangford): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be the ultimate insult to allow former terrorist prisoners to be part of the district policing partnerships, given that one of Sinn Fein-IRA's main objectives was to kill and maim police officers? To this day, they continue to gather information on police personnel.

Mr. Robinson: Of course I agree. Some of the arrangements for district policing partnerships are about a relationship between the partnership and the police. How can the police have confidence in a policing partnership whose membership includes people who have targeted and killed their colleagues in the past? Confidence and trust cannot exist in those circumstances. If the rules that the Government are attempting to change to bring convicted terrorists on to policing partnerships had been in place a year ago, I suspect that Denis Donaldson could have sought and gained membership of a policing partnership. The Government suspended the Assembly because a spy ring came to light and Government details got into the hands of a terrorist organisation, yet the Government suggest putting terrorists on police partnerships, where they can gather more information. That seems a peculiar rationale, and it stands logic on its head.

The Minister suggested that a leap of faith was required. She related that to what is generally known as taking a risk for peace. One cannot take a risk with the lives of people in Northern Ireland. The issues that we are considering are much too important; the Government cannot afford to take risks with them. The Government would be in a position to determine whether Sinn Fein had delivered on its end of the bargain, which they are trying to establish only after a period of time.

Some hon. Members said that if someone has a past it does not mean that they do not have a future. As a Christian, I believe that. I believe that lives can be transformed and that people can be redeemed. However, the first signal of redemption is repentance. Sinn Fein-IRA has shown no repentance. The second signal is changing one's life. There has been no change on the part of Sinn Fein. The Government could assess only after a long time whether it deserved the sort of concessions that they propose in the second schedule to the draft Bill and that they have offered to Sinn Fein-IRA.

I do not wish to take time from the Under-Secretary's reply, but I want to respond to one matter. It was suggested that the Democratic Unionist party should make its position clear about whether convicted terrorists should be part of an Executive. It was implied that we were comfortable with that, but we voted against it in the referendum and we voted in the Assembly for the exclusion of Sinn Fein. As an Assembly Minister, I never attended a Cabinet meeting. I did not go to the Executive because of the presence of Sinn Fein-IRA. I could operate in the role only because decisions could be made entirely in my Department. The Democratic Unionist party's position is clear: there is no place in government for those who are inextricably linked to violence and those who represent an unrepentant and armed terrorist organisation. That is unacceptable in the Executive and in policing partnerships.

7.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Angela Smith): We have had a long debate in which many views have been aired. I thank all hon. Members who contributed. Like the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), I welcome the discussion and the exchange of views. There are several opinions that I cannot share, but I respect the depth of feeling about them, and the reasons for their expression.

Hon. Members should welcome the Government's openness in publishing an additional text for consideration with the draft clauses. The Government are right to be open and transparent about their thinking. They are also right to be firm in making it clear that no moves will be made about former prisoners sitting on district policing partnerships as independent members except in the context of acts of completion.

The proposal depends on acts of completion. My hon. Friend the Minister made that clear this evening, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State stressed that last week, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister emphasised it in his speech in Belfast in October and in response to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) in Prime Minister's questions last week. It is worth repeating the Prime Minister's words. In October, he said that republicans must

"make the commitment to exclusively peaceful means, real, total and permanent . . . We cannot carry on with the IRA half in, half out of this process . . . There is no parallel track left. The fork in the road has finally come."

In response to the hon. Member for North Antrim on 27 November, the Prime Minister said:

"It is not merely a statement, a declaration or words. It means giving up violence completely in a way that satisfies everyone and gives them confidence that the IRA has ceased its campaign, and enables us to move the democratic process forward, with every party that wants to be in government abiding by the same democratic rules."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2002; Vol. 395, c. 309.]

David Burnside: What are the acts of completion? The Government set a date of 2008 as the deadline for the completion of decommissioning. That does not inspire confidence.

Angela Smith: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman cannot accept the assurance. The Prime Minister's words are clear. He referred to exclusively peaceful means that are real, total and permanent and that satisfy everyone and give them confidence. I do not understand how we can be much clearer about the Government's intentions. I am sorry that hon. Members are not prepared to rely on that.

Let me consider specific questions.

Lembit Öpik: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Angela Smith: I shall try to take questions later, but I am short of time and I want to respond to hon. Members' points.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) praised the Government for publishing the additional text for consideration. He said that it was right to do that. I was struck by the comments of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). He said that we

cannot heal in a week or a fortnight but that the healing process was under way through the Good Friday or Belfast agreement. He outlined the challenges, which were evident from our debate.

My hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) and for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) praised the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the chief constable for their work in tackling violence and criminality wherever they occur and whoever perpetrates them. The work of the organised crime taskforce shows the Government's commitment to tackle organised crime from paramilitaries or any other source.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) asked about the Patten report and former prisoners serving as independent members on district policing partnerships. Patten did not recommend that they should or should not serve. He said that district policing partnerships should have a mix of political and independent members and that the rules for independent members might be put on equal footing with those for political members. Former prisoners can already serve on district policing partnerships as councillors. They are therefore eligible for appointment as political members, but the Government have made it clear that that is conditional on acts of completion in the future. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford welcomed that comment.

Lady Hermon: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary for giving way and am pleased to see the Minister on the Front Bench for the winding-up speech.

I want to draw to Ministers' attention the careful wording that Chris Patten used on the day that the report was published. He warned

"strongly against cherry-picking from the Report."

He clearly recommended that

"independent members should be selected to represent business and trade union interests and to provide expertise in matters pertaining to community safety."

Angela Smith: The hon. Lady picks out a point from the Patten report that will be discussed in the long and detailed debates on the Bill.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford welcomed several points in my hon. Friend the Minister's speech. I welcome his comments about the policing board and the way in which it has operated. I regret that I could not welcome all of his remarks. He accused us of underestimating the intelligence of the people of Northern Ireland. I assure him that, from the short time that I have been a Minister in Northern Ireland, I am not likely to do that.

The hon. Gentleman also accused the Government of easy card shuffling tricks. The issues are complex and such accusations are unhelpful. The Belfast agreement is not for renegotiation. He should consider how far it has brought us and what we have gained from it.

The hon. Gentleman asked about police manpower. The Patten report said that there should be a minimum of 7,500 officers on the basis of peace and normality in Northern Ireland. Paragraph 13.9 states that

"the approximate size of the police service over the next ten years should be 7,500 full-time officers."

There are currently approximately 6,900 full-time regular officers and almost 2,000 full-time reserve officers. Since last November there have been 580 recruits and more than 200 are currently in training. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart and the hon. Members for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) and for North Down asked about the 50:50 recruitment policy and whether it applied to civilians. Paragraph 15.9 of Patten makes it clear that the ratio should apply to officer and civilian recruitment. It is a shame that the hon. Member for East Londonderry cast aspersions on the merits of officers who are recruited under the 50:50 policy. I assure him categorically that there has been no dilution in the quality of police officers. I hope that he will accept that.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Angela Smith: The hon. Gentleman has not been present for the debate and I am therefore reluctant to give way to him.

Concern has been expressed about 50:50 working. If the measure does not work, the Act makes provision for it to be set aside, but there is no evidence that 50:50 recruitment is not working. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) asked whether, if a Catholic trainee resigned, a non-Catholic trainee would also have to resign. It is patently absurd to suggest that that would be the case. There would have to be no such resignation.

The hon. Member for North Down made a point about intimidation. I take on board the seriousness that she attaches to that issue, and I commend her for doing so. Intimidation is clearly a major factor, and we all want to see it end immediately. There are other factors involved in these issues, however, including a lack of identification with the Police Service, and the fear of a loss of contact with family, friends and community. I have to say that a lack of encouragement from community leaders also plays a part. It is time for leaders from all parts of the community to encourage support for the police, and also for them to stop coming out with this nonsense that we have somehow diluted the ability of the police by introducing 50:50 recruitment. The PSNI can recruit enough trainees: 540 have been recruited this year, even though Patten envisaged only 370.

The hon. Member for North Antrim asked whether 50:50 recruitment would prevent the chief constable from recruiting officers from Great Britain. Such recruitment occurs at constable level, so the chief constable is not prevented from bringing in experienced officers from elsewhere, and we must ensure that we bring in such officers more quickly. If the policing board were to ask for an exceptional measure to help to facilitate that, we would, of course, consider such a request very carefully, but there is no obstacle to the chief constable bringing in on secondment officers from Great Britain at any level. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's question. He asked whether the ombudsman's powers to investigate would be retrospective; that is not our intention. He also asked whether her powers had been restricted. We do not

[Angela Smith]

believe that the draft clauses have that effect. It seems right, however, that, in circumstances in which she may play a similar role to that of the policing board—for example, in investigating police policies and practice—she should be subject to the same caveats in relation to information that she may seek from the chief constable.

I would like to thank all hon. Members for their contribution to the debate. It has been a helpful debate in the context of the Bill, but, without the agreement—some hon. Members have made it clear that they are very unhappy about the agreement and do not support it—there would not have been the relative peace that we have seen in recent years. I accept that the situation is imperfect, but it is certainly better than what we have experienced in years gone by. In my first week in Belfast, a bomb was defused in the city centre. On the Friday evening, I was stopped and welcomed by a Belfast resident who discussed with me what had happened that day. She said, "When I heard about the bomb today, I wondered whether we were going to go back to how it was." She told me how scared she had felt that this could herald a return to the situation in which she had grown up. She did not want her children to grow up in a similar environment. It says far more than any statistics I could read out at the Dispatch Box that she felt that her children's lives were different from the life that she had had as a child.

The critical condition that must be met if the agreement is to operate fully is that we obtain an assurance from all those involved that they are committed to the exclusive use of peaceful means. I repeat the Prime Minister's words from his speech on 17 October, in which he said that republicans must

"make the commitment to exclusively peaceful means, real, and total and permanent",

and that we cannot carry on

"with the IRA half in, half out of this process".

The fork in the road has come.

In our view, the future of Northern Ireland is best guaranteed by the fullest possible implementation of the agreement, which, crucially, means democratic politics, with violence entirely removed from the picture. That is what the House wants, and I also think that it is what the people of Northern Ireland want.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 6, Noes 298.

Division No. 14] **[7:24 pm**

AYES

Burnside, David
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Hunter, Andrew
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Iris Robinson and
Mr. Gregory Campbell

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman

Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Meacher, rh Michael
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Jim Murphy

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the enormous strides towards a more peaceful society in Northern Ireland and the significant developments in policing that have been achieved in recent years; further welcomes the changes to policing proposed in the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill; in particular endorses the Government's view that the time is not yet right to allow unelected ex-prisoners to serve on district policing partnerships; and further welcomes the Government's openness in sharing with this House and the people of Northern Ireland its thinking on how this might be achieved in the future, in the context of acts of completion on the part of paramilitaries.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have the Government approached you wishing to make a statement about the significant changes in the way in which they intend to deal with smallpox? They appear to have made at least two statements to the press, but none to the House of Commons. Could you ask whether there has been a mistake and the message has not yet reached Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I know of no such statement.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why did the House not divide on the amendment to the motion, although strong voices were saying "No"? Has the House so little power now that even a tiny minority cannot express its freedom?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman ever has any difficulty in expressing his thoughts. It is for the Chair to decide whether Divisions are called.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the Secretary of State, I must inform the House that Mr. Speaker has not selected any of the amendments tabled to the Government motion. Let me also say that the debate is limited to three hours. There are four Front-Bench speakers—five including the Liberal Democrat—and Back-Bench speeches must be limited to 12 minutes. I hope that Front-Bench speeches will be as brief as possible; if not, there will be very little time for any Back-Bench speeches.

7.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): I beg to move,

That this House endorses the strategy of Her Majesty's Government in the Convention on the Future of Europe to establish structures for a Union of sovereign member states; rejects the alternative of a federal superstate; and resolves that the Order of 12th June 2002 relating to the Standing Committee on the Convention be renewed for the current Session of Parliament.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak as the Government's representative on the convention, which is designing a new political architecture for a new Europe. The debate also gives me an opportunity to be accountable to the House, and in that spirit I will be generous in accepting interventions.

We are at a defining moment in the history of the European Union, and the convention has two great tasks. The first is to make a success of the EU's biggest ever enlargement, with 10 countries joining our 15; the second is to reconnect the EU with its citizens. Within 18 months, 10 new countries will be able to share in Europe's success story—50 years of peace, stability and prosperity, and extraordinary achievements such as the single market and the single currency. But the institutional architecture devised for six nations is barely working for 15, and must be reformed to work for 25 or more.

As the Prime Minister said in his speech in Cardiff last week, we need a new constitutional order for a Europe reunited after the bitter legacy of the cold war. Our vision is of a Europe of sovereign nation states co-operating to tackle shared challenges such as pollution, international crime, terrorism and the need for economic growth. Our vision is of a Europe with full employment, social justice, democracy and human rights—a Europe that is a leader in the world, with Britain as a leading European power; a Europe that is a global force for good, aiming to banish international poverty, injustice and oppression.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): The social stresses generated in the weaker areas of the eurozone by the single interest rate and the single currency will obviously require substantially increased transfers of public expenditure from the richer to the poorer countries in that zone. Under what political authority has the convention envisaged that such transfers should be approved, and what arrangements for democratic accountability has my right hon. Friend told the convention that he considers constitutionally acceptable?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before the Secretary of State answers, let me repeat what I said earlier about interventions and responses to them.

Peter Hain: I welcome my hon. Friend's question. Let me simply say that the single currency has not featured in discussions in the convention, at least so far.

The convention is a new way of doing business, with representatives of Governments not from member states but from candidates, and European and national parliamentarians. It was set four tasks by the Laeken European Council last December.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Does the Secretary of State recall the fine articles he used to write saying that the single currency was unacceptable, that decisions were being made by bankers who were neither elected nor accountable, and that voting would become increasingly irrelevant?

Peter Hain: As I said, the single currency has not been discussed in the convention. I will happily answer the question, however. The single currency is a reality in Europe. Whatever debates we had 10 years ago, we must face up to that. Will Britain remain isolated for ever—if the Opposition's policies are adopted—or will we make a common-sense decision based on economic circumstances? That is the question.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Just before my right hon. Friend finishes his very short speech—*[Laughter.]* My right hon. Friend said that this was a defining moment in European history. Will he elaborate a little on how the Government see Parliament's role in endorsing a European convention, and also how he sees the electorate's role in defining a constitution that may govern them for many decades?

Peter Hain: One reason for my presence tonight is Parliament's importance in the debate. That is why I am accountable to Parliament. As my hon. Friend knows, however, if any treaty emerges from the convention's discussions following an intergovernmental conference it will be a new treaty, which, in the normal way, will require legislation here. The House will determine its position on that treaty. In the meantime, I think a debate is needed. That is why I spoke at a Foreign Office convened conference of local authorities last week and why I am joining any discussions that it is practical for me to join, as are other members of the convention team representing the House.

Mr. Allen: Will my right hon. Friend also answer the second part of my question—about the involvement of the people who will be governed by this constitution? Every western democracy that has had a constitutional settlement has involved the people. However difficult it may be, will my right hon. Friend consider how that can be achieved?

Peter Hain: The people are involved, through Members of Parliament such as my hon. Friend. That is the proper way to deal with matters such as this.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): The Secretary of State has emphasised the importance of democracy and of Members of Parliament expressing their views. Can he explain a rather unusual motion passed on 12 June, which states that the Standing Committee on the Convention is not allowed to express an opinion of any sort on the work done by the commissioners, and can pass only a motion saying that it has considered the report from the United Kingdom representatives to the convention? If the Secretary of State believes that Members of Parliament should express a view, would it not be right to allow the Committee to express a view on whether what has been decided is good or bad for the people, or irrelevant in some respect? Is it not an insult to democracy to establish a Committee that is prevented from expressing a view of any sort by a motion?

Peter Hain: I am trying to make progress as you asked me to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I will take interventions.

Parliament decided on the procedure, which is open and democratic. We have our own parliamentary representatives, who are present in the Chamber this evening, and the hon. Gentleman and everyone else will have a chance to question them. Indeed, they have already given evidence to a Joint Committee.

As I was saying, last December the Laeken European Council set the convention four tasks: to achieve a better division and definition of EU competences, simplification of the EU's instruments, more democracy, transparency and efficiency, and consideration of a new constitution. British representatives are playing a full and constructive role, and I welcome the contributions of Members of both Houses.

As the Government's representatives on the convention, Baroness Scotland and I have participated actively in its plenary proceedings and working groups. We are thinking radically and building alliances for British ideas to secure reform, in order to create our kind of Europe, but we are also listening. We have not gone into the convention with a rigid British blueprint; we have asked questions and entered into real discussions about reform, rather than simply repeating the same old nostrums. Where there are arguments to be fought on points of principle, we are getting stuck in. Where good ideas are proposed, we are embracing and fine-tuning them to make the system deliver what our citizens want.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): In the context of good ideas that need to be proposed, does my right hon. Friend agree that the future of the 1957 Euratom treaty, which has dominated energy policy in Europe for the past 50 years, needs to be on the convention's agenda, with a view to being included in the discussion at the intergovernmental conference in 2004?

Peter Hain: A friend of mine raised this issue with me for the first time over the weekend, and I am sure that it will be considered in convention proceedings if there is scope for doing so.

At the moment, too many people believe that the process of taking decisions in the EU is impenetrable and distant, that there are no clear means by which they can influence these decisions, and that the bureaucracy in place to implement them is complacent and inward-looking. People have lost a sense of what Europe is for—a point amply demonstrated by increased votes for anti-European parties during this year. So we need a new sense of Europe's purpose, to reconnect Europe to its people. This means identifying what citizens expect from the institutions that govern them and acknowledging that they will look principally to their national Governments to deliver answers, but demonstrating that co-operating with our European partners in many policy areas can add value, and that—where it does so—a willingness to pool sovereignty is in our national interest.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the European Union has adopted many important measures that affect citizens, in areas such as equality rights, the environment, working conditions and so on? Does he further agree that the work of the convention should be about helping citizens to understand what measures have been adopted and their effect, and has he any plans to push for an easily digestible form of what the EU is about for our citizens, rather than the complicated treaties that exist at the moment?

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend makes very telling points, particularly her suggestion for a concise new constitution to replace the current tangled web of impenetrable treaties. That is an objective that we must try to secure.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): If better definition of competences, greater democracy and an enhanced role for national Parliaments are key objectives of the right hon. Gentleman, can he please identify for the House a single example of a European Union directive or regulation that has been repealed under the terms of the protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality in the treaty of Amsterdam?

Peter Hain: It is precisely because we need to ensure that the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality are properly enforced and policed that we are proposing a new mechanism, to which the convention has agreed in principle. That is a British idea, which I shall explain to the hon. Gentleman in a minute.

We already pool sovereignty with the United States of America and others in NATO, because by doing so Britain has stronger defences. Pooling sovereignty in appropriate policy areas can make nations stronger; so, too, in the United Nations, the resolutions of which have the force of international law. Everybody, including Britain, has to respect them, but as a permanent member of the Security Council, we get to make the laws. We also pool sovereignty in the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund, in international treaties such as that banning land mines, and in the European Union. By pooling sovereignty, the British people have greater influence in building a safer, more stable world.

Pooling sovereignty can mean compromises. That is sometimes hard for certain commentators and politicians to understand, but real people know that in real life, we cannot always get exactly what we want. Nor can other countries in these international bodies,

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but we can better advance British interests by being right at the centre of NATO and the United Nations—and, indeed, of the European Union. That means creating a new, delivery-oriented EU, identifying and focusing on the policy areas in which the EU can contribute, and creating a decision-making framework to drive this through in an efficient, transparent and democratic way.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Do the United Kingdom Government totally dissociate themselves from the outburst against Turkey by the former President of France, who chaired the convention, and should not Turkey be welcomed as quickly as possible, once it meets the necessary conditions? Were not those remarks from the chairman of the convention totally wrong and anti-Turkish, and do they not seem to betray a belief that Europe should be a fundamentalist Christian affair?

Peter Hain: The answer to all my hon. Friend's questions is yes.

We must preserve Europe's ability to adapt quickly to new challenges, and to address old issues in new and innovative ways. It is the flexibility of our current system that enabled us to react to the new political realities, following the attacks of 11 September. The world changed, and the EU was able to reflect that change by agreeing on common policies and mechanisms to fight terrorism together. Acting together through the "justice and home affairs" agenda, with the Commission taking the lead, we can improve security for all Europeans.

We need a new European Union constitution, which, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) said, must be clear and concise. It must have a short and inspirational preamble. It must clarify what the EU is, what its objectives and values are, and who does what. This would help to bridge the gap of understanding between the EU and its citizens. It would also mean a better-organised EU that is even better able to deliver practical benefits for citizens.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Does my right hon. Friend think that such a constitution might act as a very real and necessary brake on the Commission when it decides to interfere in the business of member states?

Peter Hain: Yes I do, and that is one of the purposes—although not the exclusive one—in designing this new constitution.

The chairman of the convention, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, has presented to it his draft outline constitutional text. Flesh now needs to be put on the bones of this skeleton. The drafting of individual chapters and articles will begin after Christmas, and a consolidated text is likely to be issued at or near Easter. The Giscard text mirrors our thinking in a number of key areas. It is founded on the basic premise of a union of sovereign states, not a blueprint for a federal super-state, and it aims to settle the relationship between the EU and its member states for the foreseeable future, halting the sense of permanent treaty change that disturbs so many of our citizens. The draft text also reflects our proposal for a subsidiarity mechanism whereby national Parliaments can monitor new EU proposals to ensure that it is acting only where it needs to act. Assessing subsidiarity involves a political judgment, which should be vested in national Parliaments. In practice, they will be e-mailed new Commission proposals for determining any breach of subsidiarity or—equally important—any breach of the principle of proportionality: whether new legislation, even if laudable, is too heavy-handed and intrusive. This new early-warning mechanism would make national Parliaments the watchdogs of subsidiarity and proportionality.

Mr. Allen: May I ask that my right hon. Friend seek the services of a poet, rather than someone who is competent in Euro-babble? Many hon. Members will fear that, if such descriptions are going to get longer, those outside this place will not understand them.

In my right hon. Friend's view, will the concept of subisidiarity be justiciable by local authorities and regional authorities within the countries of the European Union, rather than merely the nations—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend does raise an important point. We are in favour of subsidiarity being determined not by the courts but by elected political representatives—a point that is also important in respect of proportionality. As he knows, national Governments and Parliaments have the right to go to the European Court of Justice, and that factor will doubtless form part of the outcome. However, we should not encourage the courts in a rush to judgment in determining these matters.

Mr. Bercow: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again. I am sure that he wants his answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) to be complete. Will he confirm that the protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality says that the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality shall respect the general provisions and objectives of the treaty, particularly as regards the maintaining in full of the acquis communautaire and the institutional balance, and that it shall not affect the balance between national law and community law? That is the reality; that is the record. Will he confirm it?

Peter Hain: The answer is yes. I am always impressed by the hon. Gentleman's ability to recite from articles, treaties and legislation without a text in front of him.

We are pleased that the draft text also includes the idea of an elected President of the European Council, which we and others have been advocating in the convention. However, there are a number of proposals that we do not support, such as changing the name of the European Union. It is a successful brand name. Giscard's suggestion of a United States of Europe implies a federal superstate, and his Europe United sounds more like a football team. Significantly, nobody supported a name change when that was discussed in the convention.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in addition to the points that he is

making against a name change, there is a danger that the process will be seen as focusing on cosmetic inessentials? What people really hope for from this process is a community, a union, that they understand. They see what the powers are and how they can influence them, and they do not care that much what the name is.

Peter Hain: I think that they do care about the way in which it is delivered, but my hon. Friend's essential point is correct. People want to see outcomes, practical benefits and clarity in the way that the European Union works and the accountability of its institutions to citizens.

For the EU of 25 and more to function effectively and efficiently in the future, we need more than a constitution that sets out the status quo. We need reform, and some of it needs to be radical. We want to maintain the institutional balance and strength in the European Union by making all of its institutions more effective. We have to begin with the Council of Ministers, because although democratic legitimacy should reside in many different parts of the EU's structures, democratic accountability lies first and foremost with the Council.

The EU's strategic direction should come from heads of Government in the European Council. The institution should also provide stronger political leadership. People expect their head of Government and Ministers to represent their interests and will hold them to account in their national Parliaments, media and elections, but how can a Council of 25 or more Governments drive the EU's strategic agenda?

The Council as it is today is not operating coherently or efficiently. The rotating presidency, for example, was originally devised for a community of six member states. When there are 25, each member state will hold the presidency once every twelve and a half years, or eight times a century. The presidency system has enormous attractions. It gives every member state, large or small, an equal stake in running the union. However, if a much larger EU is to be effective and cohesive, the six-monthly musical chairs presidency needs replacing with a much longer period to establish and deliver strategic objectives.

Ann Winterton (Congleton): Surely the whole point of the EU is that the Commission is the driving force. The Council of Ministers cannot override the Commission, as we shall shortly see in respect of fisheries. Is the Minister suggesting that in future the acquis communautaire will not be binding on every member state?

Peter Hain: No, of course I am not suggesting that, but the Council should be the political engine.

Ann Winterton: It is not.

Peter Hain: Exactly—that is the point. That is why we need to reform it, making it stronger and more coherent.

One way of improving coherence might be to have four countries each chairing two of the eight Councils of Ministers for perhaps a year or longer. That would enable greater continuity and more systematic consultation between the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament than the musical chairs system allows at present. It would be essential to have a rotation system, of both Councils and countries, to ensure equality between member states. At any one time there should be three small countries and one big one making up the team presidency, since there will be 19 "smalls" and six "bigs" in the enlarged European Union.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Do the Government favour removing the power of initiative from the Commission to create legislation and placing it with the Council of Ministers?

Peter Hain: No, we do not propose removing the right of initiative; it is important to retain it.

The chairmen of the individual Councils should work together as a steering group—a team presidency—to ensure that the strategic direction given by the European Council was implemented. The work of the team presidency steering group would need effective co-ordination by an elected President of the European Council, as we and other member states have suggested, serving for five years to match the life of the Commission.

Mr. Bryant: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way again. A significant benefit of having an elected President of the Council for five years would be to put an end to the stop-start nature of much of the present process in the EU. What would it do to change the relationship between the President of the Council and the President of the Commission?

Peter Hain: The President of the Council would be a much more authoritative figure than at present, but that is not to diminish the role of the President of the Commission. They will need to work together, as already happens under the six-monthly rotating presidency system. Under these proposals, we will have a much more effective, full-time President of the Council, able to provide the coherence and strategic direction that heads of Government need.

Reforming and strengthening the Council does not mean downgrading the other EU institutions, as some of our opponents make out—quite the contrary. I want to see a stronger Commission, enforcing the general interest at the centre of Europe's institutional architecture. Only a strong Commission will be able to retain its vital independence, acting in the interests of the EU as a whole, and not subject to political interference or vested national interests. Without a strong Commission driving through change, none of the Council's decisions would come to anything. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members want a weak Europe, one that cannot help defend us against terrorism, fight international pollution and deal with the need to generate jobs and greater growth throughout the European Union, with which we have 60 per cent. of our trade. It is in Britain's interest to have a strong Commission when it comes to asylum policy, agricultural reform, energy liberalisation and enforcing the lifting of the beef ban.

Dr. Palmer *rose—*

Peter Hain: Although the European Council is populated by democratically elected leaders, it needs

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essential checks and balances, as does the Commission. That is a role for the European Parliament as much as for national Parliaments. We want to see a strong and influential European Parliament exercising its extensive powers responsibly.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): In the discussions on the convention and the concerns about giving the European Parliament a more prominent role, has there been any discussion among members about the most effective way of involving citizens in future elections to the European Parliament?

Peter Hain: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend. Apart from being an outstanding Member of this House, he was also a Member of the European Parliament, and his expertise is particularly appropriate. His suggestion is part of the convention's agenda. [HON. MEMBERS: " Get on with it."] I will, but I am open to taking interventions, including many from Conservative Members.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton) *rose—*

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) admirably chaired the convention's working group on the role of national Parliaments, securing consensus in the group and the wider plenary for national Parliaments to play a greater role at the EU level and to increase contacts between Members of this House and Members of the European Parliament.

The Government have always made it clear that we support the charter of fundamental rights, which was proclaimed at Nice, as an excellent way of enshrining key values across Europe.

Equally, however, we have always made it clear that the charter proclaimed at Nice was not suitable for incorporation in the treaty. Issues of legal certainty would need to be resolved before we could consider that. We cannot support a form of treaty incorporation that would enlarge EU competence over national legislation. New legal rights cannot be given by such means, especially in areas such as industrial law, which are matters for domestic, not European, law.

By engaging positively in the discussions in the charter working group, my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Scotland has been able to make colleagues aware of our views and of our difficulties. Some of our colleagues appreciated—perhaps for the first time—that they, too, would have problems with full incorporation of the charter in their countries. We have achieved a number of changes to tie rights back to existing treaty articles and to distinguish more clearly between aspirational principles and directly effective rights. Our key objective has been to insert strong horizontal articles that block the charter from being invoked to change nationally determined domestic law.

We have agreed to nothing yet, except to consider what is on the table. Given that what is on the table has moved very much in Britain's direction, we are obviously interested in it. The convention has agreed to set up a new working group—bringing the total to 11—on social Europe. The group needs to target social exclusion through creating more decent jobs in a dynamic and competitive European economy. It should be about pursuing the Lisbon agenda for economic reform even more actively.

I hope that members of the convention who take part in the group will not fall into the trap of simply rehashing tired old schemes for more rigid European-wide regulation of labour relations. Instead of protectionism for existing jobs, the agenda should be creating new jobs underpinned by decent minimum standards. We support the concept of a "social Europe" but it must be economically competitive and efficient; it must generate full employment, not entrench unemployment. It must give everybody the opportunity to work, and not protect only those who are in work.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does the Secretary of State agree that it would help to strengthen the European Union and all that it stands for if provision were made in the constitution for member states to withdraw if they want to do so?

Peter Hain: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt support President Giscard's draft text because it proposes exactly that.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does the right hon. Gentleman support it?

Peter Hain: I do not see a problem with it. If anybody is silly enough to want to withdraw from the EU, they should be entitled to do so. I guess that the hon. Gentleman would be in the lead.

Some critics have argued that the convention is about giving up even more national powers to Europe. That is simply not the case. The discussions that we have held about who does what, or, in Euro-jargon, "where competences lie", have not been about moving those competences to the EU; rather, the concern has been to make the current set-up clearer so that everybody knows where responsibility lies. That is a crucial element in making Europe more accountable.

The basic premise of our confident engagement in Europe is our ability to take decisions and support ideas that are in Britain's interests. Crime and immigration are at the top of people's agendas. Tackling those issues is partly a domestic policy matter for national Governments, but there is also a strong European dimension. Moving away from the unanimity rule in some areas of justice and home affairs will enable decisions on such crucial matters as crime, drug dealing, asylum and illegal immigration, for example, to be made more easily, and action to be taken more speedily, to make all of us safer and more secure.

Lifting our veto and agreeing to such common EU decision making on border security measures or a common arrest warrant is not selling out British interests. Quite the contrary, it is common sense. However, we have said firmly and repeatedly that we will not tolerate attempts to take fundamental decisions, for example about taxation and social security, out of the hands of national Governments. Such a move would clearly not be in Britain's interests.

Mrs. Browning: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the Franco-German proposal on tax harmonisation as it was clearly spelt out on the front page of the *Financial Times* today. Will he use the British veto on that matter?

Peter Hain: I understand that the French spokesman in Brussels said that no such proposal as that reported in the *FT* exists and that he said something even more uncharitable about the report off the record. I shall obviously not repeat that as the House is family oriented.

Nor do we countenance a shift away from the current intergovernmental approach to the EU's foreign and security policy or to defence. Yes, those areas must be made more effective and efficient—as must the rest of the EU—but such matters must remain in the hands of national Governments, co-operating freely. For example, we have said that we could support a single legal personality for the EU but not if it jeopardises the national representations of member states in international bodies; not if it means a Euro-army; not if it means giving up our seat on the United Nations Security Council; and not if it means a Euro-FBI or a Euro police force.

There have been, and there will continue to be, ideas in the convention with which we do not agree. Such is the nature of open and broad debate. However, we are at the centre of the debate. By engaging actively and dynamically and by working in partnership with others, Britain is helping to set and shape the European agenda, and our confident approach is getting results.

As the world becomes more global, people are thinking more locally. People only want the EU to act when it genuinely has something to add. They want it to work on the issues where working together is better than working alone; to combat cross-border crimes, such as drug and people trafficking, but not to tell us how to police the streets; to agree limits to the industrial pollution affecting our continent, but not to tell us whether we can build roads or houses on individual sites; and to provide opportunities for our students to study abroad, but not to tell us how to run individual schools.

The Government are clear about where we stand in Europe. We support the enlargement of the Union because it will make Britain stronger, safer and richer.

David Winnick: My right hon. Friend was good enough to say yes to the questions I put to him earlier. On enlargement, would it not be appropriate for him, given his special responsibilities, to make it as clear as possible that Britain welcomes the strong possibility that Turkey will join the EU and for him to dissociate himself from the notorious remarks that I quoted earlier?

Peter Hain: I welcome my hon. Friend's question. My answer is yes, we want to see Turkey join the EU. That is EU policy. Turkey is one of the officially recognised candidates for accession. The president of the convention was speaking for himself alone when he declared his opposition to Turkey's membership.

We support the work of the convention because it is the best way to deliver the practical benefits that British citizens want: more jobs, greater prosperity, safer streets, cleaner skies—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton) shakes her head. Does she not want cleaner skies or safer streets?

Ann Winterton: After European enlargement we shall actually have less of that famous influence in Europe that the Prime Minister is always going on about.

Peter Hain: There speaks the true voice of the Conservative Back Benches, opposed to enlargement, to reunifying Europe and to welcoming back Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and all the other countries that were divided from us by the cold war. Is that really Conservative party policy?

We relish the debate about Europe, conducted in the plainest terms, because we are confident, unlike the Opposition, about rising to the challenge to deliver in Britain's interests in the convention.

8.18 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I shall try to be somewhat briefer than the Minister, given that more than a sixth of the time that we have to debate this issue has already passed.

The debate will inevitably touch on accountability in Europe—indeed, it already has—but I would like to ask some questions about accountability at home. Who in the Government leads on the future of Europe—the Foreign Secretary, who is not here, the Minister for Europe, who is here but did not lead, or the Secretary of State for Wales, who has led tonight, but not for Wales? Seriously, if in future we want to know the Government's position on the convention, do we table questions for the Wales Office or do we still table them for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

Peter Hain: That issue was made absolutely clear by the Leader of the House last Thursday, when the same question was raised. I remain the Government's representative on the convention. Is it not interesting that, since I have been in that position, Britain's agenda is finding favour and the French and Germans have put their Foreign Secretaries on the Convention on the Future of Europe? What does the right hon. Gentleman think I am doing here? I also appeared before the European Scrutiny Committee to answer questions only the other week.

Mr. Ancram: The right hon. Gentleman may not have noticed, but he is not the Foreign Secretary. I note that the Minister for Europe is not trusted to set out the Government's policy on the convention. Perhaps that is because of what he said last week:

> "Electing a right-wing conservative Government is always a disaster for any European country."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 27 November 2002, Vol. 395, c. 112WH.]

That cannot be very clever, when nine of the 15 member states have centre-right Governments, and Austria has just decisively re-elected one.

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): The difference is that all those centre-right Governments believe in Europe, unlike the anti-European right-wing

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

party to which the right hon. Gentleman belongs, which will never be elected as long as it maintains its anti-European course.

Mr. Ancram: Once again, we see the hon. Gentleman correcting his words. He should be careful about what he says, because I am sure that his remarks last week will have been noted with great care in some of the chancelleries of Europe.

With enlargement—which we welcome—on course, Europe is at a crossroads. Its challenge is to give back to the peoples of Europe a sense of ownership over the EU institutions. A bigger European Union must not become an even more distant one. At Laeaken, it was rightly declared that

"the European institutions must be brought closer to its citizens".

The convention has been disappointing in that regard. It had a great opportunity comprehensively to review how Europe was working and to jettison those practices and rules that were distancing it from its peoples. It has failed to do that. In particular, it has failed to tackle the problem of remote institutions.

Indeed, the Giscard draft treaty seeks further to centralise employment and social law, which even in the United States of America is left to the individual states—hardly a decentralising charter.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman should declare the debate on the institutions a failure, given that the convention has not yet had that debate.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Lady should listen. I said that, before it started any deliberations, the convention should conduct a fundamental review of how Europe is working. It is a great surprise to Conservative Members that, almost three quarters of the way through its time, it has not done that.

Recently—and very flatteringly—the Welsh Secretary adopted my phrase "a partnership of sovereign states", but everything that he and the Government are doing is moving slowly but surely in the opposite direction. Whatever he may have told the House tonight, the Government are integrationist. Last week, the Prime Minister called once again for a European superpower.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): No.

Mr. Ancram: Yes, he did, and it is about time that the right hon. Gentleman understood what his Prime Minister is calling for. He also called for a unified foreign policy and for a massive abolition of Britain's remaining vetoes. For Conservative Members, that is the voice of integration. It may not be the voice of the motion, but then again the motion would delight a sackful of weasels.

The Conservative party will continue to seek a Europe that is more accountable, more democratic, less centralised and more relevant.

Mr. Allen: I respect the right hon. Gentleman's position, but can he imagine a form of words that would reassure him on his greatest fears, of centralisation and a federal superstate, and see a place for those words in a European constitution, so that he need never fear what any Prime Minister or Executive might say in the future, because those words would be enshrined clearly in a constitution?

Mr. Ancram: I will explain later why I do not believe in a European constitution, but I believe that the words that we should see are "national Parliaments". That is where the strength should lie.

We are attempting to bring the EU closer to all its peoples. For all the Government's words analysing the problems of alienation, there have been few specific proposals to solve them. There is a worrying parallel with the common agricultural policy. For years we pressed the Government to make specific proposals on CAP reform, but virtually none has been produced. Instead, the vacuum was filled against our interests by France and Germany in October in Brussels.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said, we saw today a report that the French and Germans are jointly proposing tax harmonisation. The Secretary of State's denial of that holds no water for me, given all the Government's previous denials that were then followed by actions that showed that the stories were right in the first place.

We will introduce detailed proposals—I wish to make some this evening—that will, in part, reflect aspects of the work done by respected senior members of the Conservative party earlier this year, but especially the important work being done by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and our European parliamentary colleagues who are in the convention. They will in due course produce their own recommendations, and I look forward to taking them into account.

A reformed Europe should meet a number of criteria: it must add value, its power must not compromise national sovereignty, and it must demonstrably provide stability and prosperity. What is clear is that Europe does not need any more bureaucracy or regulation—it is already hobbled by red tape and a one-size-fits-all currency—nor does it require any more power; if anything, it has too much already.

Mr. Bryant: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I will give way, but this is the last time that I do so because I am very conscious of the time.

Mr. Bryant: I feel suitably chastened and grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I just wonder whether he feels that it is none the less important for the Commission to have a certain degree of power, especially in relation to the regulation of state aid. If we are to ensure that we have the necessary long-term stability and economic flexibility, we need a strong Commission in relation to competition law.

Mr. Ancram: I shall come to the Commission in due course in my remarks, and I will not pre-empt what I want to say.

The EU needs to re-engage with the peoples of Europe. Giving it a constitution will not achieve that; it will only vastly increase the authority of European

institutions over the member states. We believe in a lighter approach to Europe through treaties, rather than putting Europe's future into the hands of lawyers and judges. I was interested to see the remarks of the EU ombudsman, Jacob Söderman, who said last week that

"it seems to me that two of the ideas put forward—a president of the European Council and Congress—would take EU decision making to even higher levels rather than bring it closer to the citizens".

That view reflects our concerns about what is proposed at present in the convention.

Until now, the EU has been created by treaties between sovereign member states. The institutions that those treaties have established and the relationships between member states are of a special nature, but the EU has throughout its existence fundamentally remained a partnership of nation states. A constitution would change all that. It would give the EU autonomous authority and be a crucial building block in the creation of a federal, supranational European superpower.

Two years ago in Warsaw, the Prime Minister said that Europe did not need a written constitution and that it would not have one. Tonight, the Secretary of State for Wales tells us that we need a constitution, which, for all his protestations, could well include the charter of fundamental rights and will contain all the elements of a constitutional basis for political union.

The Conservative party agrees with the European Scrutiny Committee that the concept of an ever-closer union is no longer desirable or realistic—for some of us, it never was. Nothing is more objectionable to the British people than the European ratchet effect—what the theorists rather splendidly call functional integrationism. We believe in an EU that is a genuine partnership of sovereign nation states. We believe that its legislative process must be a genuinely two-way affair. We want to forge a new partnership between the institutions in Brussels and national Parliaments throughout the EU.

Noticeably, the national Parliaments receive only a passing mention in the Giscard draft treaty, yet we in the House know that national Parliaments are the bodies with which people most identify. They are far closer to their electorates than any European body could ever be. National Parliaments must be put at the heart of the new Europe if we are to meet the democratic deficit and re-engage the peoples of Europe with European institutions.

The importance and role of national Parliaments should be strengthened, therefore, and enshrined in any new treaty. It must be made clear beyond doubt that the EU has competence or shared competence only where the treaties grant it and that powers not explicitly granted to the EU remain with member states. The description of and limits to such powers granted must also be clearly defined. We support the need for a definition of competences to be included in the treaties, but not a constitution.

I welcome the convention working party's proposals on subsidiarity, but they do not go nearly far enough. I agree with the European Scrutiny Committee that we need new procedures to enforce subsidiarity and that decisions should be made by a political watchdog, not by the European Court of Justice. National parliamentarians should be able to intervene on subsidiarity at the level of national Parliaments and through a subsidiarity panel or watchdog. I was grateful for what I understood to be a general welcome to the proposition from the Secretary of State for Wales, as it was a proposition that emanated some time ago from the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Bercow: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Lord Mackenzie Stuart, a former president of the European Court of Justice, is on record as describing subsidiarity as "gobbledegook"? He went on to claim that the notion that it constitutes a constitutional safeguard shows "great optimism".

Mr. Ancram: As a Scottish advocate who practised in the Scottish courts for many years, I would be cautious about criticising a Scottish judge. In a sense, my hon. Friend is right that subsidiarity operates at the moment with the effect of gobbledegook. I am suggesting a manner in which we can make it mean something and properly enforce it.

One way in which I would like it to be enforced is that reservations on subsidiarity expressed by, say, five national parliaments should be enough to halt a piece of legislation. We believe that all national Parliaments ideally should have an EU legislative scrutiny committee to scrutinise legislative proposals before they proceed to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. I see the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) smiling, but that is what happens in the Danish Parliament at the moment, and it is very effective. I believe that we can lead the way on this among other member nations.

All national parliaments, including ours, should be encouraged to enhance their scrutiny of European legislation. We continue to propose to replace our COREPER representative with a new Minister for European Affairs. We could lead immediately by example in that area. The new Minister would face questions in the House every two weeks. That could also help, in co-operation with our European parliamentary colleagues, to prevent "gold-plating" of European proposals by national Governments.

As for the exercise of power at the European level, we support the aim of clarifying and simplifying the treaties, but not when that entails transferring even more powers to the European Union. The intergovernmental method of decision making in foreign affairs, defence and criminal justice, through the second and third pillars of the European Union, must not be absorbed into a single EU structure. The ways in which human liberties are protected through the ECHR and our national courts are adequate. We therefore believe that there is no need for further protection. In particular, the incorporation of a legally binding charter of fundamental rights into a new treaty would lead to a vast increase in the power of the European Union over the member states and of European judges over the political process. That would further exacerbate the democratic deficit, which the convention is intended to try to fill.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): When might the result of a referendum on a treaty be binding on Europe? In Denmark and Ireland, the people spoke, but

[Sir Nicholas Winterton]

Europe did not accept the decision, and huge expenditure by the Governments of the day in those countries sought to reverse the decision of the people.

Mr. Ancram: Clearly, individual referendums are matters for the countries concerned, but I share my hon. Friend's concern in the respect that it is bad for democracy in Europe, and bad in terms of trying to interest people in the political process in Europe if, when questions are asked, and the wrong answer is given from the point of view of the Government or Europe, they continue to ask the question until they get the answer that they want. That is not necessarily the right way to proceed.

We propose, too, that there should be a rough European equivalent of the Law Commission, to examine the acquis communautaire, to identify out-of-date legislation and to slim down the 85,000 pages of EU law. We also want a simplified decision-making process. The EU currently has 30 different ways of making decisions. We propose to bring that down to just two: binding laws and non-binding recommendations. Binding laws shall, basically, deal with the rules for the single market and other essential areas. In other areas, the EU should have the power to issue recommendations for member states, which are always free to adopt higher standards if they so wish.

We support moves to make the Council a more open institution. It has been far too secretive, allowing Governments to blame each other for unpopular laws and for added bureaucracy. Council voting should be on the record and in public. We would also like the General Affairs Council to sit every two weeks in open forum and not just deal with foreign affairs issues. The Spanish Government have led progress on this issue.

With enlargement, the current system of rotating Council presidencies simply will not work. Something has to be done. We oppose, however, the proposal for an individual president elected by his peers for five years. Let us leave aside the Prime Minister's retirement plans—we believe that the concept is fundamentally wrong. It would do nothing to make the EU more accountable or democratic or to decentralise it. Indeed, it would do quite the opposite. We support team presidencies, with perhaps one large member state working with two small ones for one or two years. Such a reform would have many benefits. It would provide longer-range Council planning, it would be a model for international co-operation and, above all, it would not be a threat to the position of the small member states of the EU.

Peter Hain: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his opposition to a full-time president of the Council is shared by all the federalists in this debate? They do not want such a president because they want all the power in the European Parliament and the Commission. They do not want a strong Council. How is that compatible with his vision of a Europe of nation states?

Mr. Ancram: I will always gratefully receive support from wherever I can find it. My reason for opposing a five-year presidency has nothing to do with federalism. It is a centralising proposition that would make the post even more remote from the peoples of Europe than it is currently. One could have all sorts of anomalies. Someone might be a Prime Minister at the time that he is elected to a five-year presidency. He might lose a general election in his country two months later, but would remain in the presidency even though he had no remit from his country to exercise that authority. There are many anomalies, so a five-year presidency would not be the right way to go.

The Commission, too, is in need of reform. Its monopoly of legislative initiative compromises the EU's democratic standards. We want a streamlined Commission, with its powers of initiation curtailed. The Commission should move towards becoming a secretariat under proper democratic control, in which the European Parliament would have a central role to play. We would like directives to be issued once again on a genuine framework basis, with the Commission only stating the desired outcome. Methods of implementation should then be left to the national Parliaments.

Mr. Bryant *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: We would like to see a new system of full and junior commissioners, with the larger member states being guaranteed full posts. Smaller member states would have a proper voice through their junior commissioners.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: I shall not give way again. I want to finish my speech as I have been speaking for too long.

We support the need for pan-European defence co-operation, but strictly and only within NATO. The Euro army should be finally laid to rest before its inadequacies embarrass Europe further.

There is another issue that the convention should just leave alone. The continued mad dash, boosted again by the Prime Minister last week, for a united foreign policy is to fly, particularly at this time, in the face of reality. It will not happen and it would not work if it did. We have a right to our own distinct view on international matters. We should fight to preserve that right and not to compromise it.

These are some of the ways in which we can build a European Union that is more dynamic, more adaptable and better able to play a role in the modern world. It is the antithesis of integration and centralisation. It disperses power back down the chain. I want the European Union to succeed as a partnership of sovereign nation states. However, to succeed, it must re-engage with its peoples. Centralisation will never be the answer. It is interesting that politicians from the accession countries often tell me that they do not want a centralised Europe. Those countries have not freed themselves from the yoke of Soviet centralisation to submit to the same from Brussels.

Tonight's debate is useful, but we need a far broader national debate on the future shape and structures of Europe. This debate is too important to become a narrow discussion conducted by what I would call Euro technicians. The future of the EU will fundamentally affect the lives of all the peoples of Europe, including the

people of Britain. We should ask them for their view. I would like the Government to publish a Green or White Paper upon which such consultation could then take place. The British people would make it clear in no uncertain terms just how much they believe is wrong with the European Union and how they would like to get the worst of it off their backs. They do not want the European superpower that the Prime Minister promised them last week. They want the same Europe as we do—a Europe less centralised, less intrusive and more responsive. It is time that the Government began to speak for Britain in Europe, rather than for Europe in Britain.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

8.40 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am not starting as I intended to, because I have been reminded of the words of Eli Weisel:

"It is not because I cannot explain that you do not understand—it is because you do not understand that I cannot explain."

I was struck by what the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said. He made me smile, not because I disagreed with him, but because if he cared to read and understand the convention documents, he would realise that the vast majority of the things that he called for have also been requested by a large number of people at the convention, including the British representatives. There is a huge amount of agreement. I wish that his desire to debate Europe were based not on calling for Green Papers and White Papers, but on listening. There is tremendous agreement on how the European Union can be improved. I accept there is disagreement on how best to achieve that, but there is no right or wrong answer at this stage. The point of the convention is to find the most satisfactory way forward.

When the convention started eight months ago, it was not clear what we would achieve. Some people thought that we would produce options. It is now clear that we will produce something that represents a constitution. The United Kingdom has been strongly represented. Despite Cabinet changes, and my delight that we have a new Minister for Europe, I was extremely pleased that the convention representation remained the same. My right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain) has been strong and effective, and I would not have wanted a change, despite the fact that he is now Secretary of State for Wales.

It should be recognised that the convention breaks historic ground. Both national and European parliamentarians are involved in treaty changes for the first time. That is a huge step forward. Treaties used to be cooked up by civil servants and approved by Heads of Government. They were then delivered to Parliament, which could say yes or no. That has changed and we are involved, but that puts a huge responsibility on parliamentarians. I use that word deliberately. If the House, as a Parliament, wishes to play its role effectively, Parliament as an institution must find its voice. It has to stop name calling across the Benches. It must take stock and think about what is at stake for parliamentary sovereignty—I also use that term deliberately—rather than national sovereignty.

The real issue is not one of federalism or centralism. Instead, it is how parliamentarians—national and European—hold the Executive to account. If we are honest, we have been far from perfect in that. Some of the limitations have been institutional. If hon. Members care to look at the report of the working group, they will see that it supports the Seville recommendation that the Council of Ministers opens its doors. It also supports not only the much better flow of information, but the idea of making far more politically intelligent use of it.

To use scrutiny properly and not just as a replacement for sovereignty, it must have a proper political impact. When we scrutinise European legislation, it must be seen as scrutiny of the Executive. What are at stake in the convention are the mechanisms for doing that. The contention that federalists are the real threat is not true. There are true federalists at the convention, but they are in the minority. However, I must issue a note of caution to the Government. The long accepted British view is that in order to prevent the federalist influence, it is necessary to promote the intergovernmental alternative. That is not necessarily so, because the intergovernmental method can simply mean that we replace a remote federal structure with a remote group of Ministers, and although they represent majorities, they are not necessarily more accountable. How do we make them more accountable?

The step taken on subsidiarity is hugely significant. I agree with the mutterings that I detected in the House that subsidiarity on its own is not the issue. Subsidiarity was defined in the treaty of Maastricht, and a protocol requires its observance. However, on no occasion has a decision been blocked. Evidence concerning the observance of the principle is scant, and we ask for much more evidence. The British insistence on continually combining the word "subsidiarity" with "proportionality", and our success in doing so, has emphasised the importance of that combination.

The right hon. Member for Devizes suggested that five member Parliaments should make up the watchdog on subsidiarity. We decided that there should be a significant number, which was translated by many as being about 40 per cent. However, that structure on its own will not be sufficient. If Parliaments do not wake up to their responsibility and if parliamentarians do not develop a mechanism by which they share their experiences and exchange their views, there will simply be a process of divide and rule. The danger of the convention is that although we will refer to national Parliaments in the constitution and give them mechanisms, parliamentarians will not use them unless they wake up to their responsibility.

European Union decision making will have to be firmly based in the national institutions. If hon. Members will forgive the analogy, the situation reminds me of putting up a tent as a child. The tent is held on the ground only if we peg it down, and national Parliaments must be those pegs, because the electorate relates to them. If all the proposals in the convention and in the working group of national Parliaments are implemented and work as they should, the sign of success for me, and the desired outcome, will be evident in my Friday night surgeries.

At the moment, if people ask, "Did you agree with this directive?" I can honestly say, "I never heard about it. I did not know it was coming. I was never asked.

[Ms Gisela Stuart]

They did it." The convention and the constitutional structure on the table at the moment, will create a mechanism whereby I can say, "I knew that it was coming. I was asked whether I wanted it to go ahead. We collectively had a say, and we said yes." We have to put an end, once and for all, to the silly division and competition between parliamentarians at national level and those at European level. We have to start to work together, but operating at different levels.

Mr. Bercow: Does the hon. Lady envisage any reduction in the 80,000-page, 31-chapter acquis communautaire? If not, will she concede that she is effectively signing up to the doctrine of the occupied field?

Ms Stuart: Rather than proposing, as the right hon. Member for Devizes did, to set up an institution that would review all that, I want to make a precise point about it, and I shall return to the matter.

I turn now to the constitution. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) asked what would be a sign of the success of the new constitutional structure. For me, it would be an introductory part that is understandable by everyone, as well as more technical points. However, I would be looking for more fundamental points in the interests of logical coherence and of national Parliaments.

The first is that if there is a clause describing how to enter the Union, there must logically be a clause describing how to leave the Union. Whether countries do that is entirely up to them. If, in the constitution, we describe precisely how competencies from member states become shared competencies and sole competencies, there must be an analogous article clearly describing the way in which those competencies can travel back. That, in my view, must be there. That is my indirect answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) about whether I could ever envisage a reduction. I think that there must a mechanism for travelling back.

I fundamentally disagree with the observation made by the president of the convention, who described the process a "refounding of the Union", the implication being that either the resulting constitution would be ratified by a country, or that country would be out of the Union. To my mind, the constitution will be a treaty like any other, to be ratified by the various countries and to come into effect only when all the member states have ratified it.

I have a final word of caution about the courts. In the convention, I have detected a tendency to regard the courts as the final arbiter of what is or is not democratic. The courts have a huge role to play, not least in enforcing the internal market, but there is a range of decisions that are fundamentally political. It is up to politicians to express themselves in clear terms on such issues, and they should be left in the hands of politicians. Matters of subsidiarity are political decisions. In the end the courts may have a role—analogous to judicial review—in determining whether proper processes have been followed, but judges must not replace political decision makers. Several members of the convention see things that way.

By next summer we will have a draft constitution. We do not yet know whether the Heads of Government will accept it; I very much hope that they will. The House has been extremely supportive of its representatives and I am grateful for that. I regard representing national Parliaments, not only at the convention but in the praesidium, as the most important role I have been asked to perform. I shall listen with great care to the debate so that in the convention the House's representatives will be able to reflect the view of parliamentarians.

8.51 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who made a thoughtful contribution. I pay tribute to her and to her colleague who also represents the House in the convention for the work that they have been doing. I do not agree with every last opinion that has been expressed, but it is clear that they have been doing a thorough job.

We must welcome this Government-sponsored motion on the convention—the first since it began its work earlier this year. It is a shame that it has been a long time coming; it is none the less welcome now that it has arrived. The Government have stated that we should reform the European Union to create a strong and effective body. Ministers have stressed the need for Britain to be at the forefront of the debate on Europe, and argued that the convention must not represent another missed opportunity in the grand British tradition of watching developments in Europe from the sidelines.

In his speech in Cardiff last week, the Prime Minister spoke of

"the creation of a new Europe",

which would be done

"methodically, inclusively and transparently".

That is a fine ambition, which should set a high standard for the Government to live up to, but so far there is little in the public domain to support that aspiration. There has been no White Paper—not even a Green Paper—on the Government's position on the future of Europe. What we know has emerged from this short debate, or from media reports. Those reports make it obvious that the Secretary of State for Wales has made spirited contributions to the convention as a whole, but we here in Parliament are largely in the dark about most of the proposals being made, although their tone has become clear. A White Paper has been necessary from the outset; the timing has now become rather urgent.

As the Secretary of State for Wales said, the German and French Foreign Ministers are now taking their place at the convention. Without wishing to undermine his own contribution, I must ask why our own Foreign Secretary is not adding to Britain's firepower within the convention?

Peter Hain: A difficulty faced by both Joschka Fischer from Germany and Dominique Galouzeau de Villepin from France is the fact that the convention is a busy responsibility. Their appearances so far have been

fleeting, and I do not think that there is any prospect of the Foreign Secretary being able to put the work in, as he has global responsibilities.

Mr. Moore: We shall not ask what is happening in Wales in the meantime. Surely it is accepted that the Foreign Secretary would not be present at all times. If the right hon. Gentleman had listened carefully, he would know that I spoke about adding to our firepower at the convention, not replacing it.

We support calls for the reform of the European Union. The continent is at a crossroads, with significant enlargement in prospect and the impact of globalisation becoming more obvious with every passing day. The EU's purpose has changed since the European Coal and Steel Community was founded in 1956 with six members. In size and scope, it is unrecognisable from the vision of 50 years ago. With those changes has come a growing remoteness from the people whom the EU is supposed to serve. Whether by design or otherwise, much of its activity has become inaccessible, non-transparent and unaccountable. Europe clearly needs to sort that out, but not with the fixes that have often characterised previous developments.

As the Governments and institutions of Europe prepare for a revolution, citizens need to be put at the heart of the Union. There should be proper recognition of the principle that decisions be taken at the most appropriate level within the Union, and there should be an overhaul of the institutions to make the Union effective and accountable. The convention's proposal for a constitution for Europe is an important way of achieving those aims. The details are not fully fleshed out yet, but they offer some useful pointers and plenty of opportunity for debate. Current treaties are cumbersome, virtually unreadable and come complete with thousands of pages of supporting detail. In the real world we cannot avoid the legislative load, but in a constitution we should set out the founding principles of the Union. As the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) set out in Westminster Hall last Wednesday, we should aspire to make the constitution, if not inspirational, at least readable.

We support the inclusion of a charter of fundamental rights in such a constitution, as that is the clearest way of ensuring that citizens understand their relationship with those who govern them, at whatever level. The Prime Minister has said that he opposes the charter and its incorporation. In a speech last week, he said:

"we cannot support a form of treaty incorporation that would enlarge EU competence over national legislation".

I shall ignore the fact that earlier in his speech he had said plainly:

"we must end the nonsense of 'this far and no further'"

A quick glance at the charter will show that the most common phrase states that any article should be

"in accordance with Community law and national laws and practices".

Article 16, on freedom to conduct business, and article 28, on the right of collective bargaining and action, are just two examples covered by that stipulation.

That approach should not scare governments; if it does, that suggests that their commitment to reconnecting Europe with its citizens is paper thin. Ministers, in their contributions to the European debate, have spoken of a "Union of nation states", neglecting or downgrading the idea that it should be a union of peoples as well. The charter may need to be amended to so that that idea is expressed in treaty language, but if we are serious in our goal of the reform of Europe it must be included. Likewise, we must ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is enshrined in the new constitution.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Did my hon. Friend notice the merriment among Conservative Members at the very idea that subsidiarity might be included in the new constitution? However, we all remember that the former Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, promoted that idea.

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend has made a good and valid point—*[Interruption.]* May I continue?

Decisions must be taken at the most appropriate level in Europe. We welcome the absence from the draft document of the previous refrain of "ever closer union", which sits uneasily with that principle. In passing, we reject, as the Government motion puts it,

"the alternative of a federal superstate".

We do not believe in such a concept. The Union is more than simply a union of sovereign states: the people must count as well. Subsidiarity is important to that end, and we need to ensure that when we make a commitment to the principle, there are proper ways in which to make it work.

The balance between the different parts of the different policies has shifted over the years. We need a clear statement in the new treaty. We support the idea proposed at the convention of an early warning system based on national Parliaments and the European Parliament. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston said, we should not shirk our responsibilities in Parliament and simply blame everything on Brussels, in time-honoured fashion.

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Gentleman has spoken at some length about subsidiarity. I am sure that he knows that the original concept derives from Catholic teaching, and a 19th century papal encyclical. To which definition of subsidiarity does he subscribe? Does he believe that the Committee of the Regions should play a more important role in the new Europe?

Mr. Moore: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding us of the origins of the concept, although I hope that they are not especially relevant to the debate. The appropriate level for decision making and scrutiny should be determined according to the subject. For example, education should be tackled in individual countries. In the past few years we have accepted the principle that decisions about education should be ceded to Wales and Scotland, and we hope that that will happen in the English regions, too.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moore: I am still answering the previous intervention. On the environment, we are increasingly

[Mr. Moore]

realising that pollution does not recognise boundaries and must therefore be considered accordingly. However, we must reform the institutions and make them more accountable and effective. So far, subsidiarity has not been sufficiently clear.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I speak as the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. Does the hon. Gentleman support me and many other hon. Members from all parties who believe that the House deals with European secondary legislation in the most despicable way? We need much more effective scrutiny of such legislation, and the ability to amend it—and to reject it if hon. Members decide to do that.

Mr. Moore: I do not want to disappoint, surprise or upset the hon. Gentleman, but I agree with him. It is entirely fair that the House should take more responsibility and be better at scrutinising. There is a desperate need for improved scrutiny at all levels in the European Union. For example, the Council of Ministers could meet in public, and the President of the Commission could ensure that his state of the union address was subjected to detailed scrutiny and put to the vote in the European Parliament. It is also important to endorse the principle of freedom of information in the European Union

There is common agreement that Europe is at a critical point, and there is much speculation about where we will end up, not least about the United Kingdom's destination. We desperately need the blueprint to which the Minister said that he was not currently working. We need a White Paper and a commitment to further debate in the House. If we are to achieve reform, the people of Europe must be taken along with it. We must begin that process here.

9.3 pm

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): I support the Government's stated position of supporting a Union of sovereign member states and their rejection of the alternative of a federal superstate. When I listen to some of the Government's supporters, however, I wonder whether I support the Government's position more than the Government do. On some matters, we slide increasingly towards a federal superstate.

I have never been an expert on Euro-jargon and I do not want to approach the debate in that fashion. I want to consider democracy, because Europe is the greatest example of a disconnection between politicians and the public. For some time, debates in Europe and on Europe's development have been elite-driven, top down and marked by apathy and almost hopelessness among the population. That disconnection is dangerous for democracy, because if people feel that they cannot affect the decisions that have an impact on their lives they will look for non-democratic solutions.

It has often been said that we live in a post-ideological age, but it is almost as though a new ideology of Europeanism has infected the body politic in this country.

Mr. Bryant: Internationalism.

Mr. Davidson: It is more than that. I do not see Europeanism as just internationalism. Indeed, in many regards it is the very antithesis of it, because it draws in the wealthy while putting up barriers against the rest of the world, particularly in relation to the operation of the common agricultural policy and the way in which it deliberately penalises the third world. I want to reject the drive towards Europeanism that we often see coming from some of the zealots in politics. I also want to reject the anti-Europeanism—which is often just "little Englandism"—that we hear from some Conservative Members. As in so many things, therefore, I find myself in the centre, speaking with the moderate's voice of reason, and seeking a third way. As a supporter of New Europe, and of saying yes to Europe and no to the euro, I seem to be in an ideal position to lead us forward in the name of moderation.

We need to consider not only the jargon that many of my colleagues have used, for understandable reasons, up to now; Europe needs to be translated for people in terms of its practical impact. No matter what we say about constitutions, structures and the like, people in this country do not and will not understand why France can defend its farmers while we cannot defend our fishermen. Until Europe starts to work for people in this country in a way that they can comprehend, there will continue to be a disconnection. The need for a poet was mentioned earlier. I fear that many people might consider William McGonagall the most appropriate. For hon. Members who are puzzled by that reference, a trip to the Library might be advisable.

I seek clarification from the Government on a number of points. We need to boil some of this down to basics. I am not clear whether any proposed constitution would stop the drive towards ever-closer union that was incorporated in the treaty of Rome, and which has been reiterated in subsequent treaties, or whether such a constitution would make it clear that the objective of European linkages was no longer, inevitably or irrevocably, ever-closer union. If ever-closer union remains the text, people will see that consistent centralisation is in progress. We need to be clear about that.

There is no doubt that we are in the process of creating a European superstate. We already have the flag, the anthem, the drive towards an army, the move towards a president, the propaganda division, the drive towards centralisation and, indeed, the rights of initiative. I see the rights of initiative as a drive towards ever-closer union. When mention is made of the need for the Commission to have political independence, it is not clear whether that independence would be in the best traditions of our civil service—dealing with matters in a non-partisan fashion—or whether it would involve the Commission as an actor in its own right. If the Commission is to be the civil service of the Union, political independence has to mean civil service-type independence, rather than an independence that would allow the Commission to act in its own right, with its own drive and direction.

I also want to clarify the issue of the departmentalisation, based on the French model, that the European Union has consistently pursued. I understand subsidiarity, and I support more powers

for the regions, but the departmentalisation model that the European Union is driving forward is about breaking up nation states into departments, divisions and smaller areas, and linking them to an ever-stronger centre. There would be an imbalance of power between the ever-stronger centre and the individual departments, so departments would become supplicants rather than partners. We need to be clear about how that operation would work.

We also need to be clearer about harmonisation. I heard with interest and some happiness the indication of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales that he is not aware of any French or German aspiration to harmonise taxes. I cannot help but think that he is perhaps ill informed on that matter, but if that is his view, it is the best understanding he has at the moment.

We must be clear about whether we are prepared to harmonise taxes—in the first instance, corporation tax and valued added tax. I can understand why people want that as part of the creation of a single market, and its logical extension is, of course, harmonisation of personal and property taxes—the harmonisation of almost all taxes. I am not clear about whether the Government remain wedded to their view that there should be no move in that direction or whether they will carry their view in the discussions on the convention.

The single market needs to be reined back in some areas, particularly where it impinges on issues such as health, which are restricted to or remain with national Parliaments but where the single market may have influence. I have always believed in high taxes on tobacco as a health issue, yet the single market undermines this country's policy of putting high taxes on tobacco for health reasons, as people can import cheap tobacco from the rest of the EU—there is an allowance. We must state that there are areas into which the single market will not move and that the assumption must not automatically be that the single market will prevail in clashes with other policy areas.

I am a supporter of modernisation and there are a number of areas in which the Government must look for substantial EU modernisation before they say that they are prepared to move forward. I can think of three examples that would be immensely popular in this country. First, we need modernisation of budgets so that we can reduce the fraud, corruption and waste that the Court of Auditors consistently reports on. I cannot see why we wish to cede further powers to or move forward with an EU that is incapable of running its own financial affairs. That is an overdue and essential element of modernisation to which any Government who say that they favour modernisation in principle must stick.

The second example is the common agricultural policy. I cannot understand why a Government who are wedded to the concept of modernisation have been prepared to accept the almost total absence of progress on modernising the CAP, which not only taxes poor people in my constituency and every other area by raising food prices to inappropriate levels but ruins agriculture in and the economies of many third-world countries. I always regarded the dumping of CAP surpluses as an obscenity at a time when much of the world was starving, yet the Government have been unable to modernise in that area. They must consider it with substantial urgency. The third example is foreign aid, on which progress is necessary.

My final point is on political language. A number of my colleagues disagree with me on a variety of issues, but I believe that debates ought to take place in a comradely fashion. To me, being described as an enemy by people on my own side with whom I disagree is entirely inappropriate. Saying that the

"enemies of Labour are the enemies of the euro"

is absurd, as it equates being an opponent with being an enemy, being anti-Labour with being anti-euro and being anti-euro with being anti-Labour. I hope that the Minister, as one who has been a member of this organisation for a considerable time, will make it clear in his winding-up speech that he rejects such partisan tribalism.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend was my friend, is my friend and shall be my friend. I cannot conceive of his being an enemy to anything except that which is evil.

Mr. Davidson: I welcome what the Minister says. Can I take it, then, that he will go back to Britain in Europe and the Labour Movement for Europe and say that they should never produce material that describes opponents as enemies?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

9.15 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson). He spotted that the harmonising and centralising drive in the European Union has become almost an ideology of its own, which not only threatens democracy but brings in its train grotesque mismanagement and even corruption from the policies and administrations that have been centralised in Brussels.

The publication of the draft constitution that we are considering will give further impetus to those very forces. It is a hugely significant event. It means, for instance, that although this country has done without a written constitution throughout its history, a written constitution will now be imposed on it—but a constitution that we have not drafted or written ourselves.

Until very recently the Government opposed a European constitution, with good reason. A constitution is an attribute of statehood. The draft constitution published in Brussels offers us dual citizenship: in other words, it already equates the European Union with a state. It is highly disingenuous of the Government to claim now that their previous opposition was all a mistake, and that for the first time Europe will somehow be able to achieve certainty and clarity in regard to respective powers. The truth is that the constitution that has been published will be a centralising force.

For instance, it is clear from the draft that the intergovernmental pillars that secure and protect the intergovernmental mode of decision making in the

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

European Union are to go. Article 14 tells us that the Union has "a single institutional structure" in its new form. We also read that it will have a single legal personality. Those developments alone have enormous implications for foreign policy, for defence and for this country's rights and abilities to participate in international agreements. The European Union will replace the right of member states to do that, and to engage with other bodies. The same applies to justice and home affairs; they, too, will be part of the new single constitutional structure.

I am a member of the working group in the convention, which is about to report. I am the only dissident, or the only person who will oppose the recommendations. I will do so because under the recommendations cross-border crimes of all sorts and crimes against what are described as the interests of the European Union will be approximated across all member states. In this context, "approximated" means harmonised. Moreover, the decision will be made under qualified majority voting.

This Session, the House has before it six criminal justice Bills. They deal with extremely important matters that are of great concern to our constituents: penalties, sentencing, criminal justice procedures, rules of evidence, and whether this country should adopt double jeopardy. I oppose the latter proposal, but at least it is a matter to be debated and decided in this House. However, I have to warn the House that if, as is certain, the working group's recommendations are adopted by the convention and form part of this new constitution—all those matters and more besides—including immigration and asylum—will be decided at European Union level by qualified majority voting, and will come under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

These matters are at the heart of the nation state and of parliamentary democracy; they are about the coercive powers of the state and they raise very sensitive issues of accountability and control. They are about our common law traditions, which differ from those on the continent. Yet it is now proposed that these decisions be transferred upwards to the European Union and centralised there. What is so damaging is that the convention was set up to try to close the gap between the institutions of the European Union and the people of Europe. The European Union is widely regarded as remote and technocratic, but if we remove decisions about criminal justice, sentencing and immigration further away from the electors and from this House, that gap will widen even further, and the democratic deficit will be uncontrollable. Of course, that will play into the hands of the extreme right. Why have elections and change Governments here if it makes not the slightest difference to criminal justice, immigration policy or whatever?

I am extremely worried by the fact that the Government representative on the working group, Baroness Scotland, who displays great charm and knowledge, has agreed to most of that, which goes well beyond established British Government positions. I have offered to help on a cross-party basis. I wrote to her three weeks ago, offering to defend what I regard as the British interest, but I have yet to receive a reply, so I conclude that all this has been planned. The Government are, I am afraid, dissembling if they claim that this new constitution will not profoundly alter the relationship between this country and this House, and the institutions of Europe.

The same is true of the charter of fundamental rights. Members will be aware that it was negotiated two years ago on a clear understanding that it was only a political document containing aspirational rights, and that it would not be legally binding then or in the future. These promises were given repeatedly, explicitly and emphatically from the Government Dispatch Box by the Prime Minister, and by the former Minister for Europe, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), who is not in his place. It was even said that copies of the *Beano* would be just as legally significant as this new charter of fundamental rights. The Government were, of course, right to oppose the charter's being legally binding, because when those rights become judiciable and enforceable by the European Court of Justice a huge new mechanism for centralisation and EU action will be opened up.

Those assurances did not last very long. The working group's final report, on incorporation of the charter—I have a copy in front of me—makes it absolutely clear that it will be incorporated into the constitution, and will be legally binding. Page 3 explains that the charter will become legally binding either in the text of the constitution, or as a protocol. It states:

"The Group as a whole"—

in other words, by unanimity, including the Government representative—

"underlines that both these basic options could serve to make the Charter a legally binding text of constitutional status."

How is that reconciled with all the promises that we received from the Prime Minister and other Ministers at the Government Dispatch Box? How do we expect the public to believe what we tell them about Europe? How do we have an honest, open and straightforward debate about these matters when the Government give copper-bottomed assurances in the House that are overturned a year or two later? The Government are still not admitting it, as we heard from the opening speech in the debate. The Minister said that the charter has been changed significantly. It has not been changed significantly—that is crystal clear from the text of the working group. On technical drafting adjustments, it says:

"It is important to note that these adjustments proposed by the Group do not reflect modifications of substance. On the contrary, they would serve to confirm, and render absolutely clear and legally watertight, certain key elements".

Yet the right hon. Gentleman was talking as though this was a great British triumph and that everything had changed. It is simply not true. The Minister on the working group, Baroness Scotland, should have told him the truth. *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Gentleman is willing to intervene, I will accept his assurances to the contrary, but let us hear it from him.

Peter Hain: The right hon. Gentleman heard it from me earlier in the debate. We have secured in the draft

report a series of horizontal articles that stop the charter being enforced to change our domestic law. That is the key.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: What are horizontal articles?

Peter Hain: The hon. Gentleman should study the report and the debate rather than relying on recycled prejudice.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have these wonderful horizontal articles and they do not add up to a row of beans. I have just quoted from the report, to which the Minister from the upper House has signed up. It says that apart from certain technical drafting adjustments, the text that we are presented with is exactly the same. That is what has been agreed. Which is correct—the right hon. Gentleman's slightly evasive assurances from the Dispatch Box or what appears in black and white in the conclusion to the treaty?

There is only one solution—to ask the people in a referendum. I agree with the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) and have signed his amendment to that effect. Let us ask the people what they think. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) advanced a good alternative treaty. I think that it could be worked on and improved, but let us ask the people who they trust and what they want—the constitutional settlement advanced by the Government, with its centralising momentum and all that is wrong with it, or a treaty between free and self-governing states of Europe along democratic lines, as proposed by my party.

9.27 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): It is a pleasure and a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). He and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) have represented this House and all of us in the discussions that have been taking place. It is not an easy task and they have both carried it out very well in their own very distinctive ways.

The differences between hon. Members should not obscure the fact that Members on both sides of the House and from all political points in their party signed up to an amendment put before them asking that proper and due consideration be given to the European constitution that could govern our way of life for decades. Everyone in the House found that it was possible to sign up to that. It may be procedural; it may just be democratic. It does not go specifically for one viewpoint or another, but it reflects, I hope, a parliamentary wish that is evident in all parties, which is that this place is nothing and has no role if it cannot have a say on whether the country has a constitution. That is why there was a broad sweep of opinion, even in the brief time that was allowed for us to table an amendment that supported our Parliament and our people, in putting forward our views and having a sensible and open debate.

I happen to be pro-European and pro-constitution, but my views should prevail only after due argument, after all of us have debated the matter and after the nation has considered the possibilities. After all, the right hon. Member for Wells signed the amendment not because he thought that a national debate would arise and that it would find in my favour, but because he thought that such a debate would find in his favour. I am prepared to fight those battles in public, on television or in the Chamber, because I and those who share my view must win others to our position. There is no short cut. There is no way, by sleight of hand, that we can impose a constitution on the people of the United Kingdom.

I am sorry that the shadow Foreign Secretary has left the Chamber. He made many points to which Members of all parties should pay great attention. Some colleagues may argue that those points resonate with the prejudices of British people. Whether or not that is true, they resonate with the views of British people. Many people fear that the European project is moving too quickly and without checks. The right hon. Gentleman put those points to the House clearly and openly. As I pointed out when he kindly allowed me to intervene, if he feels that we should not acquiesce to certain aspects of a European constitution they should be made clear in the constitution itself. If, like the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), the right hon. Gentleman feels that subsidiarity is a dead letter, the constitution should make clear how subsidiarity could work. If, as many Opposition colleagues believe, the role of the nation state is under threat, the constitution should make it crystal clear, in words that reassure them, that that is not so and that it would not be legal to undermine that role.

There must be a clearly written constitution and if we are to achieve it, our Parliament must be given rights in the process. It is nice to hold a debate such as this, but it was granted on a grace and favour basis. The Government have kindly allowed us to speak on the subject. We are not debating it as of right; we are not debating it because Parliament decided that it was a good thing to do and that it was an essential prerequisite for the development of a European constitution.

Parliament must establish certain rights in respect of the process. With great respect and admiration, I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston that a constitution that arises from an illegitimate process will itself be illegitimate and can but fall at the first serious hurdle. We must build in a process for the appreciation and acceptance of a constitution and we must make clear what it stands for in words that reassure not only the British people but the majority of Conservative Members.

I have to take some issue with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, much though I am loth to do so because he has been a strong and articulate advocate of the European project and on that matter I put trust in him above almost anyone. However, there is a clear distinction between coalescing existing powers in a treaty and forcing that treaty through the House on a three-line Whip and agreeing to a wholly new constitutional settlement for the people of this country.

The first is a legitimate function of the Executive. That is the role and the right of the Executive—much as some of us may object on occasion. However, the second—the constitution—cannot possibly be seen either as being in the gift of the British Executive or of a collection of European Executives. It must be something that the people of this country sign up to and are prepared to accept.

[Mr. Graham Allen]

I agree with the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) that one way forward would be a White Paper, which would open up the debate and let us all see what is at stake. The House could then get involved in proper pre-legislative scrutiny. It will not surprise the Chairman of the Procedure Committee if I say that such a process would involve all Members of Parliament, and that if it was online the whole nation could participate. If we created a constitution in that way, it would not have 40 or 50 founding fathers, as the United States constitution had, but several million founding fathers and mothers. Such a constitution would enjoy the support of the population as a whole.

In the end, however, that would have to be endorsed by the British people in a referendum. There may be some who wish that we were not committed to the referendum on the euro—many Members, both Government and Opposition, have expressed that view—but if we accept that it is legitimate to have a referendum on that subject, it must be equally legitimate for constitution making, which cannot be a lesser process than mere monetary union, as a European constitution would influence our lives for many years to come.

Those in government should not be afraid of partnership or of bringing the House along with them and trying to persuade colleagues; rational argument may prevail in the end. Equally, we should not be afraid of entrusting to the British people, after a thorough national debate, the decision whether to sign up to a constitution.

We have heard again the old chestnut about judges ruling the roost. Judges are all over statute law already, but they would only ever come into this equation if politicians disagreed so fundamentally that no reconciliation was possible or if those politicians acted illegitimately. Many hon. Members could give a whole series of examples of where that has happened. In those circumstances, the judges may be a protection for the peoples of Europe, and not the problem that some fear.

We were reminded earlier of the quotation about needing a poet to draft at least the preamble, although I think that a poet could do the whole lot. President Giscard d'Estaing's draft is up to about 300 pages of Euro-speak. It is impenetrable and makes the EU sheepmeat directive seem a racy read. We need to pull together the vision, motivation and drive that were evident in the US constitution. Although the principles of that constitution were agreed in a large committee of 40 or 50 people, Madison was then sent away with a quill pen and ink to compose something that people would be prepared to die for. Giscard's Euro-speak might cause a number of fatalities, but not for reasons of the poetry, artistry and elegance that Madison was able to contrive.

The challenge for the Minister is not merely to find a beautiful word for that most beautiful concept in democracy of subsidiarity, so that schoolchildren can carry the idea around in their pockets and in their heads, but to find the poet—perhaps someone who is here tonight or someone in some corner of Europe—who can pull together the inspiration that will mean that people are prepared not, we hope, to die for, but to fight for a constitution that will unite the peoples of Europe, so that when we go to France we never again have to do so with a rifle over our shoulder but can do so simply to enjoy the wonderful wine.

9.39 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) makes a very important point in suggesting a referendum because the one thing that he and all colleagues in the House must be aware of is that there is a feeling of hopelessness among the general community on matters relating to Europe. People are concerned about what is happening.

People who are sickened about it realise that they can do nothing, that their Members of Parliament are powerless and useless in these matters and that things are getting worse. Certainly, if we take the further major step to have a written European constitution, which will interfere with virtually every aspect of our work in Parliament, they will feel particularly angry if it is forced on them without their agreement. Of course a referendum is not a means to ensure that one point of view prevails, but if the people vote for something and it turns out to be horrendous, miserable and horrible, at least we can say that they have responsibility for it.

Quite frankly, what is upsetting me is the fact that the House of Commons has not realised the extent to which power has already gone. I shall give two brief examples. Colleagues are well aware of the fact many elderly people in Britain now receive the great benefit called the winter fuel payment. They got that from the House of Commons because we agreed that elderly people living in Britain were entitled to money to help them with the cost of the cold.

How many people are aware—I was told about this in a parliamentary answer on 6 November—that, because of an instruction from the EU, we now have to pay the winter fuel allowance to people from the United Kingdom who go to live in places such as Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Reunion, the Azores, Madeira and the Canary islands, where the sun shines all the time and it is not cold? According to the Government, that will cost £10 million. How on earth is that sensible? How is it correct for us to say that if people go to live in cold Canada, they do not get a penny, but they do if they go to the Azores or the Canary islands? Quite honestly, that is nutty, crazy and a stupid waste of money, but what on earth can we in the House do about it? The answer is, sadly, nothing at all.

The Minister may remember that the Government introduced a great Bill to say that foreign nationals could not give money to British political parties. Because of people's worries about foreign companies and individuals—perhaps in Hong Kong or elsewhere—giving money to political parties, the Government introduced that great Bill to make it unlawful. The Bill was presented to Parliament, but in the House of Lords, where the Government have such clever Ministers, they had to say that, unfortunately, they could not go ahead with it in its present form. It had to be adjusted because they were not allowed to exclude parts of the EU.

It was apparently all right for a company in Germany, France or Portugal to give money to the Labour party, the Conservative party or any other party in Britain, but

not for people who lived in Turkey, Canada, Guadeloupe or places like that to do the same. However, the Government then made a second surrender: they had to say that, sadly, because of EU instructions, they could not exclude places that were EU overseas territories. That put us in the absurd position whereby individuals living in British Guiana were not allowed to give money to the Liberal Democrats, but people were able to do so if they lived in French Guiana. That was madness, crazy and illogical, but what on earth could we do about it? The answer is absolutely nothing. *[Interruption.]* This is not funny; the Minister should not laugh about it. When a democracy is dying, Ministers should get upset about it. We should not have silly twits trying to pretend that nothing will happen although new things are being introduced.

Mr. MacShane: It is not British Guiana—the Empire is all over; it is finished.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Of course the Minister is right. All I was pointing out is that, because of the instructions that the Government received, people are not allowed to give money from British Guiana, but they are from French Guiana. That happens to be true. It is shocking and stupid, and the fact that the Minister is laughing about it makes nonsense of the Government's attitude to democracy.

What can we do about spending, waste and extravagance? I have another written answer from the Government telling me that last year, as part of the EU food process, we had to destroy 47,000 tonnes of cauliflower, 153,000 tonnes of tomatoes, 118,000 tonnes of nectarines, 255,000 tonnes of peaches and 229,000 tonnes of oranges, costing a fortune. People get upset about that. They say that it is crazy and stupid, and they ask what we can do about it. The answer is absolutely nothing.

Mr. Davidson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although the cauliflowers were destroyed, all the turnips became Liberal MPs?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I accept that the hon. Gentleman is—I mean this sincerely—one of the more honest Members of the House. He must be as sick as I am about the billions of pounds spent on destroying food and on dumping food in the third world and doing damage to countries that are starving. What we can do? Can we go to Members of the European Parliament? No. If the European Parliament closed its doors tomorrow, no one would notice apart from the taxi drivers of Strasbourg.

What about the graft and corruption? I have a lovely story, of which the Minister must be aware, about a former lay preacher from Essex who was on the wanted list for all kinds of things. He went along to the European Union saying, "I've got a grand plan. I want to try to help the prostitutes of Hungary." He was given £140,000. This gentleman did not use the money to help the prostitutes of Hungary; he bought himself two new cars and a new house, and nothing was done to help the prostitutes of Hungary. When that kind of thing happens under a democratic Parliament such as the House of Commons, we can do something about it. That is the basis of democracy, but, unfortunately, in the European Union, nothing can be done.

We cannot even discuss upsetting, distressing issues such as capital punishment and corporal punishment, because of the European convention, not the European Union. We have a Home Secretary who wants to do something about asylum seekers, but I have told him time and again about one individual in Southend-on-Sea who came here nine years ago as an asylum seeker from Turkey and who has been appealing repeatedly under all the various European rules. That is paid for by the British taxpayer, and, unfortunately, there is nothing that we can do.

Ms Stuart: I do not want to disagree with the hon. Gentleman, but I urge him not to mistake the European Union with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. I think that he has just done so, and that adds to the confusion. The issue of corporal punishment to which he referred had nothing to do with the European Union.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I assure the hon. Lady that I am well aware of the differences between the convention and the European Union. She will be aware of aspects—for example, the gentleman who was sent over at great expense to Germany—in which the European Court of Justice gets involved, as does the European convention and the European Court of Human Rights. Both are surrenders of and interference with our power, and we cannot do much about it.

On the issue of tobacco, does the Minister care or does he want to laugh about the fact that, last year, £1.2 billion of our money—European money, poor people's money—was spent on growing high-tar tobacco in places such as Greece, and was then dumped in the third world and eastern Europe? Does he worry about that? Is he concerned? What can we do about it? The answer is absolutely nothing. The tragedy is that our rights and freedoms are disappearing daily with every single treaty, all of which I voted against. Every time, the Ministers say, "There's not much in this, we've got safeguards, everything will be fine," and the power simply disappears.

There are two things that we can do. First, it is vital to have the referendum. Secondly, perhaps the Minister will confirm that it would strengthen the European Union if there were an exit clause by which member states that wished to leave would be allowed to do so. Giscard D'Estaing has put forward an ambiguous clause, to which the Minister has said that we do not object. At least an exit clause would give people some freedom and protection.

I do not want to take up time. As someone who has been a Member of Parliament for a long time, however, it is appalling to see how people are simply switching off from democracy, and not just people such as ourselves. Young people think that it is pointless and useless. So many constituents say, "I know that nothing can really be done about anything nowadays." If people are concerned about issues such as the export of live cattle, what can we do? Absolutely nothing. I wish that Governments of all parties would realise that democracy matters. If we let it disappear, the people will suffer. I hope, therefore, that the Government will try to reclaim powers for democracy and not simply hand over more and more. Someone such as you, Mr. Speaker, who performs a great task in a democratic Parliament

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

will be aware that our democracy is dying. It is time that people in all parties started to fight for its retention and to restore it.

9.50 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): This debate was intended to provide an opportunity for my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) to report to the House what has been going on in the convention. It is regrettable that their speeches were restricted to 12 minutes. I would very much have liked to have heard much more from them. They made extremely thoughtful speeches, and I agree with much of what they said.

I wish to pick up an enormously important point that the hon. Lady made. I hope that I understood her correctly when she said that the acquis communautaire could be addressed by creating a mechanism to enable competences to be repatriated. She also said that a second crucial element of dealing with the acquis communautaire would be an exit clause. Both are crucial, but I hope that she understands that all attempts to create a reverse ratchet in the EU have failed. That is why many of us have become sceptical about more proposals of the same ilk. I shall say a bit more about the exit clause shortly.

I want to discuss the original purpose of the convention. The task set of it by the Laeken declaration was to enable the institutions of the EU to adapt to enlargement and to tackle the so-called democratic deficit. In addressing those questions, the convention needs fully to grasp two points. First, an enlarged EU will unambiguously have to be an EU of nation states. The applicants from eastern Europe will not accept anything else. For them, membership is a means of expressing their newly won sense of national identity. The countries that have shrugged off socialism imposed from Moscow do not want another form of suzerainty to come from Brussels.

Secondly, if the convention is to make any progress, it must grasp and accept that the democratic deficit cannot be cured by rearranging constitutional pieces on the EU chessboard. A little more power to the Parliament here and a little less to the Commission there will not work. Proposals that enable the EU to acquire some of the trappings of a state—passports, flags and the like—do nothing to help, either.The European Parliament cannot plug the democratic legitimacy gap. Does anyone believe that the electorates of Europe will look to the European Parliament to articulate their sense of identity? No one believes that, and the hon. Lady made that point when she said that national Parliaments are the face to which the electorate relate.If the members of the convention are to make progress, they must realise and say that they have realised that democratic legitimacy comes from nation states and only from nation states. It comes from nowhere else. I have certainly not heard that point made clearly enough in the debate about the convention over the past few months.

The origins of the democratic deficit in the EU lie deep, but it was the Single European Act, and the erosion of the veto that came with it, and not Maastricht, Nice or Amsterdam that began to make many of our electorates uneasy. The Act triggered the search for safeguards and the recognition of the need for reassurance of the electorates. What has been the product of that? We have had the so-called doctrine of subsidiarity, proposals to create lists that clearly distinguish between national and EU competences, proposals for a states' right clause and proposals to enhance the role of national Parliaments among much else before and during the convention. I do not believe that any of them will achieve very much. I hope that the convention has grasped the fact that none of them will do anything to ally the deep concern that is growing in many parts of the electorates in the EU. It will not address their fears that any further transfers of power and, indeed, the exercise of some existing powers erode what many people consider to be their sense of national identity.

Some might say that those fears are unjustified, and we could have a debate about that. I would not necessarily agree with those who argue that point. In any case, that argument is irrelevant. Those fears, right or wrong, are a political fact and cannot be wished away. They touch on instinctive loyalties of nationality and are not easily assuaged. The only way to do that is for the EU to start explicitly acknowledging that democratic legitimacy flows from nation states and nowhere else. That is why I have long argued for an exit clause to be added to the treaty of Rome, as set out in my amendment.

For the first time tonight a Minister suggested that the Government might support an exit clause, although he did not seem to appreciate that the value of such a clause lies in getting at the heart of people's deep concerns not, as he put it, in suggesting that it might be of interest only to those "stupid enough" to want to leave the EU. Its value goes far wider than that. Such a clause could, over time, fundamentally improve the quality of debate about the EU in Britain. It would bring a greater sense of rationality and practicality to all sides of the debate.

Proponents of further integration would have to bear in mind the effect that any proposal might have on the balance of arguments for membership. It could act as a brake on some of the wilder ideas occasionally heard, especially from abroad. Those Eurosceptics who favour withdrawal—I am not one of them—would have to stop arguing that the EU was an irreversible and stealthy assault on nationhood. An exit clause would make it clear that the EU was not part of a final and irreversible treaty. The EU would join the long list of other institutions that also have exit clauses—NATO, the World Trade Organisation, the International Criminal Court, the European convention on human rights, the Council of Europe and so on.

Of course Britain, or any other country, could, in practice, leave now and no panzers would roll through the channel tunnel to stop us, but, as I said, our electorate, and those of eastern Europe, need to be reassured. Nor should any attempt be made to make life difficult for a leaving country. That is why it is so important that an exit clause also contains clear provisions to ensure that remaining countries assist the leaver.

Ms Stuart: Fundamentally I agree with the hon. Gentleman's argument on an exit clause. However,

what is his opinion of the proposal by the European People's party, part of his political family, to have an exit clause but only if it is agreed unanimously by all member states?

Mr. Tyrie: That is a trite remark. I am trying to make a serious political point about whether the EU should have an exit clause. I am not making a trivial debating point about what may be going on in the European Parliament.

I am not a sudden convert to the idea of an exit clause. I have pressed the case for such a clause for at least 15 years. I started thinking about it when the Delors report was first debated. There are good arguments for and against currency unions, and reasonable men can disagree about them, but one of the most ludicrous arguments is that the loss of monetary control involved in a currency union is inevitably a one-way ticket and involves the surrender of our nationhood. Currency unions have come and gone over the centuries, and they will do so again. It has always struck me as much better to have the ground rules for withdrawal from a currency union laid out at the start. That could have been done without destabilising the markets and it was a profound mistake that we did not put such a rule into the Maastricht treaty.

I have discussed an exit clause with a good number of people on the convention over the past few months. Initially, I faced strong opposition, including from some senior people. I am pleased that Guiliano Amato, whom I spoke to, and Giscard, whom I did not, appear to be coming around to the idea. I just hope that they fully grasp and articulate the importance of such a clause for entrenching the primacy of the nation state because only if they do that will they get full political value from it. The EU is not—it would be foolhardy to try to make it—anything more than a highly sophisticated set of reciprocal obligations between member states. Perpetuating the illusion that it is anything more, and many try to do that, particularly in continental politics, will at best waste a great deal of bureaucratic and political time; at worst, it will mix a dangerous nationalist cocktail. We are already seeing some evidence of that lethal mix in the domestic politics of France, Austria, the Netherlands and possibly Germany.

My deeper worry about the work of the convention is the lack of appreciation of the scale of the problems that the EU is accumulating, and I say that as somebody who is not a paid-up Europhobe. Those problems are not only the failure of so many policies. Is there anyone in the House who could honestly say that there is any major area of EU spending with which they could agree? There are no takers—not even the Minister, who is frowning. That is the scale of our problem in explaining these issues to the electorate. The convention has not fully grasped the scale of the problems that we are trying to deal with.

There are two straightforward commitments that the Government could make tonight—they have edged towards one of them—which would indicate an appreciation of the scale of the problems. First, it would be helpful if the Government said unequivocally that they fully support an exit clause, not only that they do not see a problem with it. The second, equally important point is that they should put any constitutional arrangement to the electorate in a referendum.

10.1 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie). I have enjoyed listening to the debate, and I want to focus on an area that has received little attention this evening or in the Standing Committee on the Convention. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), with whom I serve on the Public Accounts Committee, referred briefly to the matter, which is of huge importance to the future of Europe. I refer to financial accountability and the control of fraud in the European Union.

I first took an interest in the issue when I read the House of Lords report, "Financial Control and Fraud in the Community", in July 1994. I shall quote at length from page 1 of that report because it predicates what follows. It says:

"This is the Select Committee's fourth report since 1989 on fraud and financial irregularity in Community spending. Our 1989 report found that huge sums of Community money were lost each year because of fraud; that financial management was weak; that the failure both to detect fraud and take action when it was detected allowed the fraudsters to continue in business; and that for years there had been no political will to tackle the problem.

By 1992 we detected some signs that the situation might be improving, although there was a long way to go. We were too optimistic. According to the Court of Auditors' Report of November 1993 on the year 1992, there has been 'little or no improvement' in the Community's financial management, despite repeated criticisms made in previous reports."

That report made me realise, back in 1994, that this was something that one should keep an eye on, and I decided that I would do that. The 1995 accounts were qualified by the Court of Auditors, which says that the statement of assurance provides

"numerous illustrations of unsatisfactory accounting and financial management".

The same thing happened for the third year in a row when the 1996 accounts were qualified, saying that

"the Court declined to provide positive global assurance as to the legality and regularity of . . . the payments",

and it was estimated that about £3.1 billion went missing through fraud. It appears that there had been no change by 1998, for which the report says:

"For the fifth year in succession the Court found significant weaknesses in the management of the Budget and an unacceptably high rate of error in the transactions underlying payments."

When we reach the reports for 2000, we find the National Audit Office commenting that

"it remains a matter of serious concern that little progress has been made in reducing the high level of error, which meant that for the sixth year in succession the Court was unable to provide positive assurance on the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying payments."

Page 1 of that report says:

"Overall the Court's Annual Report and Statement of Assurance for 1999 showed little evidence of improvement in the financial management of the European Union compared with previous years."

In May this year, NAO reported on the accounts for last year, and once again the accounts were qualified. The report said:

"For the year 2000, the Court drew similar conclusions to previous years and for the seventh year in succession qualified its opinion on the reliability of the Community's accounts."

A number of points in that report caught my eye. First,

[Mr. Richard Bacon]

"The Court found that during the year the Commission had entered into legal obligations in excess of the amounts provided for in the Community General Budget."

Secondly,

"The Court found that the Commission was unable to produce complete and reliable information distinguishing between advance and final payments. It noted that, following similar findings in the Court's report on the financial year 1999, the Commission had said that it would take steps to set out detailed rules for each sector of activity and would apply classifications for different types of payment, in advance of revisions to the Financial Regulation being approved"—

but

"The Court found no such progress."

In relation to the accounting system, it was noted that

"As in the previous two years, the Commission experienced difficulties in providing the Court with a set of accounts for audit."

Last Thursday 28 November, the Court of Auditors report, which will not be reported on by the NAO until next year, was published. Once again, the accounts were qualified. The report stated:

"The Court has been concerned that, while in the past the Commission has recognised at least some of the deficiencies pointed out by the Court, it has not given sufficient priority or devoted sufficient reflection and appropriate resources to overcoming them within a reasonable timescale. The Commission has stated in its reply . . . its commitment to the modernisation and improvement of the accounting system. It now needs to develop urgently a detailed action plan with the necessary resources and a timetable that is both realistic and reasonable."

In other words, after eight consecutive years of qualified accounts, the Commission has not yet come up with a detailed action plan. Consider for a moment what would happen if the accounts of Marks and Spencer or Boots plc were qualified—the directors would be hauled over the coals straight away, in year one.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bacon: No—I am sorry, but many hon. Members still want to speak.

Earlier this year, at the beginning of January, the Commission appointed Marta Andreasen to two jobs—budget execution director and accounting officer for the European Union. She quickly pointed out serious and glaring shortcomings: there were no accounting books and no double-entry bookkeeping; staff of the Commission could enter the budget computer system and change entries without leaving a fingerprint or an audit trail. She raised her concerns and was rebuffed. She then tried to raise her concerns with the Court of Auditors and the European Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee, for which she was disciplined.

Compare that with what would happen in this country. In this country, if accounting officers for Departments, who are legally responsible for the way in which money is spent, do not like what a Minister is telling them to do, they are obliged to seek a direction from the Minister. That automatically triggers a process whereby the NAO is informed of what is going on. Having acted in that way, if the accounting officer subsequently comes before the Public Accounts Committee, he or she will be exonerated. In Europe, the exact opposite happened to the accounting officer for the whole of the EU. She tried to act honourably and to draw her superiors' attention to her concerns about the serious irregularities that were occurring, but she was rebuffed. What does that say about the EU's seriousness about getting control of those matters?

We are discussing the powers of the EU and its institutions and whether those powers should be extended—whether the European Parliament or the Council of Ministers should have more power, and whether there should be an elected president. What does that track record tell us about the competence of the EU to have any powers at all? What does it say about the competence of the European Union to have any money at all if it cannot look after the money it already has? The solution was eloquently stated in an article in *The Times* by Rosemary Righter, who said:

"Member states should put the Commission on notice that they will finance only those parts of expenditure that get a clean bill of health."

Taxation is a cardinal matter. It is hard to think of anything other than the acts of making war or imprisoning people that more closely defines what it is to be a state—what it is to have the powers of Government. My constituents work extremely hard to earn the money that they then pay in tax. It is not easy for them to earn enough money to clothe their children and pay the supermarket bills and still have enough left over to go on holiday. If the EU institutions cannot safeguard the moneys entrusted to them by the taxpayers of this country, it is at least open to question whether they should have them at all.

10.9 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), who had an important speech to make but, I sensed, delivered it rather rapidly.

Much has been said by many Members about a union of sovereign nation states, which, if we were starting now, would be highly attractive. It that union was working for global free trade and its members combined for the greater good on mutual interests and cross-border matters, I would wholeheartedly back it. However, we are not starting now. We are signed up to, or are about to sign up to, a common foreign policy and a common defence and security policy. We are well into a common agricultural policy and common fisheries policy, and face a common justice system. Most members of the European Union are already in a common currency controlled by the European Central Bank. We have already heard, although the Secretary of State denied it, that further economic policies, especially on the harmonisation of taxation, are on the agenda.

We have also heard how the convention will introduce a constitution for the European Union, incorporating the charter of fundamental rights. The EU has an anthem, flag, passport, a Supreme Court, and a President—in anybody's language, those are sovereign nation state requirements. We are therefore no longer facing the prospect of something further down the track. Ministers, including those in the Chamber, have always said, "Oh no, that is not what we mean. We do not want to go that far, and that will not happen. We will make sure that everything is all right; trust us." Ministers

throughout the decades have said that, not just this lot, but gosh, this lot are far worse and more enthusiastic about the convention than Ministers have been for a long time.

The convention does not offer something new or roll anything back. It merely adds the last few pieces to the jigsaw which the Prime Minister himself described in the past week as a superpower. I am opposed to such a concept, but I no longer regard it in the terms that have been used tonight. For many years, I believed that a fully federalist agenda would benefit a philosophy that subscribed to federalism. I have often argued the case for opposing federalism with many people, and shall no doubt do so in future. However, what is happening in the EU and the convention is not just about a political structure—it is about a political elite who will control Europe and have power in it. I pay great tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) for spelling that out much more clearly than I could. He has his finger on the pulse and, in my book, is at the heart of Europe—he has been to the convention, listened to the debate, and contributed to it. He has come back and spelt out exactly what is in store for us.

Over the years, especially in the United Kingdom, politicians have tried to tell other politicians and the wider public that what we see is not really what we are going to get. They say that things will not be quite as bad or bound up—there will not be such a big transfer of power. In stark contrast, however, if one studies carefully what leaders of countries across the EU have said throughout the decades, one realises that they are a lot more open and honest with their populations about the true agenda. Perversely, Labour Ministers are still denying that what we have been hearing at this late stage in the completion of the jigsaw is really going happen. On 16 February 2000, only two years ago, a former Minister for Europe, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), reassured the House:

"Let us not get carried away with the European super-state, with the charter of rights as a European constitution".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 16 February 2000; Vol. 344, c. 243WH.]

That was meant to placate us all. Some of us did not believe it then, let alone now. Only two years later, the superstate is almost a fait accompli.

The Government say so much, but they always cave in on Europe. Almost anybody can roll them over for little in return. The Secretary of State shakes his head, but if the Government had delivered a reformed common agricultural policy, he would be shown much more respect. They caved in on the collapse of the pillar structures, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) outlined. That applies especially to pillar 3 on justice and home affairs, which will be changed from being intergovernmental to EU. The jury is still out, but the outlook is not good, on whether Her Majesty's Government will stick up for pillar 2 on foreign affairs and defence. Another Franco-German axis is developing on that subject.

The Government denied the incorporation of fundamental rights into treaties, but it is clearly on the agenda. They have granted the EU personality and conceded that it will have a written constitution. Time and again, they have yielded to additional qualified majority voting.

After the convention, the final pieces of the jigsaw might be put in place to create what most of us would recognise as a state. However often the Minister dismisses the proposals for a title or a name, the European Union will be a country called Europe.

10.16 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): We have held an important debate, which was marked by several noteworthy contributions. I must begin with that of the Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain), the former Minister for Europe. It is a joy that we have not entirely lost him from European affairs. I enjoyed his book, which touched on Europe. It is entitled "Ayes to the Right"—I am sorry, it is called "Ayes to the Left: A future for socialism." Judging by right hon. Gentleman's gymnastics in changing his views on almost every subject, it could appropriately be titled, "Eyes to the Main Chance."

The right hon. Gentleman showed great prescience in his book, "A People's Europe", when he wrote that Europe was imperilled by its self-imposed monetarist straitjacket. I wonder how he squares that with his new-found passion for the euro. He also writes about Europe's

"preoccupation with free market competition".

The idea that that applies to the corporatist, interventionist, high tax mentality that prevails in much of the EU is patently absurd.

It is incredible that someone who nowadays keeps telling us that Britain is winning the argument in Europe argued in his book for a centralised European budget that was three or four times its present size. Prudence appears to have taken a bit of a knock in the past week or so.

Mr. MacShane: What has that to do with the motion?

Mr. Spring: It is the background to the Government's representative and his mentality.

We heard several good speeches. I especially commend those of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who are members of the convention. I pay tribute to the hon. Lady's analysis; I agreed with much of it. However, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells hit the nail on the head when he said that the constitution was a centralising move with all the implications that flow from that.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) spoke about the need for the Government to be seen to defend the interests of the British people. I agree with him. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) spoke about the need for a referendum if a constitution is created. I have some sympathy with that. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) took up the point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) mentioned an exit clause. That should be debated and considered. My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) spoke about the need for transparency in view of the fraud that has beset the

[Mr. Spring]

European Union. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) made a good speech about the jigsaw that leads to the creation of a superpower.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) on the one hand said that he wanted to reinforce the powers of the citizen, and on the other called for a written constitution, a charter for fundamental rights and all the baggage of centralisation. That is completely contradictory.

The problem is that the Labour party talks flabbily about constructive engagement to address Europe's underlying problems, yet seems utterly incapable of coming up with specific, clear ideas for fixing them. It has forgotten that it must travel alongside changing times. We have seen its European bloc mentality, which is perfectly understandable, born as it was out of the second world war and the cold war during the second half of the last century. That mentality sought to mould the EU into a bloc, but it is now well past its sell-by date. Those old views simply endanger enlargement because they detract from the need to reform the EU to make enlargement really work. The Labour party was wrong in the 1980s about the big geopolitical issues of our time, and now, with the zeal of a convert, it has leap-frogged into a position of accepting in practice a supranational, integrationist agenda in Europe that has already been made completely irrelevant by the new global geometry.

The challenge that we must truly address is the growing sense of distance between the EU and its members: the democratic deficit. The vast majority of the British people know that what they want from the European Union is a partnership of sovereign nation states working together for their mutual benefit. That is the Europe that the Conservative party wants to help to build, but, if we are to do that, the EU must encourage genuine review and reform. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes has set out very clearly just some of the key practical ways of providing critical pathways to achieve that.

The draft treaty on the convention's deliberations insufficiently reconnects the EU to its members. In article 3, for example, we find a reference to the

> "development of a common foreign and security policy, and a common defence policy"

as part of the EU's objectives. Of course, Europe needs to co-operate on foreign policy issues, but for us to abandon our own foreign policy capabilities would be to diminish our unique global reach and our historic understandings and links. On Thursday, the Prime Minister called for Europe to have a "unified foreign policy". What on earth did he mean? It can only mean that the Prime Minister looks forward to the day when European countries have no foreign policies of their own but speak with a single voice agreed in Brussels. Yet in the same speech, the Prime Minister said that he was opposed to the so-called communitisation of foreign policy. That is simply doublespeak.

We should be working towards the politics of practical co-operation. No European country should force its foreign policy on another. Each country should be free to have a policy based on its capabilities. Of course, much can be accomplished by agreement, but not by a single voice. This measure will not reconnect the EU with the voters; neither, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells pointed out, will the charter of fundamental rights. One of the most important ways in which we can reconnect is by minimising the intrusive impact of judge-led law as appropriate. We had assurances that the Government would never allow the charter of fundamental rights to become legally binding, and that it was worth no more than the *Beano* magazine. It is, of course, already playing a part in the European Court of Justice's jurisprudence.

The current state of affairs is nothing compared with the powers that the charter would give to the Court if it were incorporated into the treaties. It would represent a vast extension of the EU's powers. Only last week, for instance, it was being mooted in the European Parliament that the charter's incorporation would allow the EU to act in the media market. The Government have, as so often, backtracked from their previous clear assurances. We now hear that the charter's incorporation would be acceptable provided that there were horizontal restrictions on its application—whatever that is supposed to mean in practice—and that it would have no influence over national courts. I hope to hear from the Minister a clear and detailed exposition of how that could possibly work.

Europe today is not crying out for greater centralisation; it is asking for less. In the Prime Minister's speech last week, there was only one passing mention of the role of national Parliaments in the European Union, and that was only to approve of the convention's subsidiarity working group's report, which I found to be very meagre. That shows how little idea the Government seem to have of the need to re-engage the peoples of Europe with the European institutions. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes outlined early in the debate, that can be done only by strengthening the role of national Parliaments.

Faced with ageing populations and high unemployment economies, the EU's main mission must be its original one of promoting its member states' economies to build prosperity. It is almost incredible that the Government are so ambitious for the EU to take on more when the single market is not yet complete. In the current economic climate, we must work for growth to create jobs, yet even now the EU is adding restrictions that militate against employment creation.

The Conservatives want an EU that does genuine good for its peoples in this century. It must concentrate on its core tasks and it must be more open, democratic and accountable. National institutions—above all, national Parliaments—must have much greater control over its direction. Europe must look to the challenges of the 21st century, not the understandable hopes and fears of the immediate post-war period, which informed the development of the European Community.

Europe needs a sense of finality—an end to the ratchet effect and an end to the sense that we are on a journey to ever-greater centralisation. We must break open the debate on Europe's future, and the Minister's idea of holding a national competition to find a better name for subsidiarity is excellent. We need to leave all the jargon of Europe behind, as only open, comprehensible institutions will meet the needs of today.

This evening, we have proposed a practical path for Europe to take so that it can meet those needs. If it does so, Europe can help us all to deal with the challenges that the 21st century will inevitably throw at us, but if we take the Government's path towards greater centralisation and a de facto political union, we shall answer only the wishes of Europe's elites, not those of its peoples.

10.27 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I have a prepared speech that I could read to the House, but, if Members will permit me, I shall instead reply to the interesting points that have been made.

We have had a healthy debate on Europe, which is what our country needs. As always, I listened with great care and interest to the winding-up speech of the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who speaks for the Opposition on Europe. I am fascinated by his claim that we need a European finality. That is the demand of Herr Joschka Fischer for what we need from the convention. I believe profoundly—the Prime Minister made this point in his speech last week—that of course, Europe will evolve, change and grow in different directions. There will be no European finality.

I agree with the points made by a number of Members about sunset clauses and, as it were, drawing power back from Europe. That represents a good lesson for our Government, and—I shall try to make this my only partisan point, even though quite a number were put in the debate—some speeches, particularly those made from the Opposition Front Bench, conveyed a sense of the inferiority complex whereby we cannot be confident about Europe and cannot work in partnership on Europe.

Powerful arguments were advanced by some Opposition Members, but the notion that France, Germany and Poland—from where my father came as a soldier to fight with our forces in the second world war—want to dissolve themselves in a new common European state is so profoundly nonsensical that it is unworthy of what was once a great party. Some Members, but not me, may have the zeal of the convert, but one thing is worse—the complete nihilistic loss of faith of the apostate. Until that once-great party rediscovers its European vocation, it will remain without much hope.

One point constantly put in the debate was the fact that there is inadequate consultation on Europe. I would certainly say that there was inadequate coverage of it, or discussion of it—although we had an excellent debate in Westminster Hall last week, to which the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) and others who are present now contributed. I have appeared before two Scrutiny Committees. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has also appeared before Scrutiny Committees, as he has told the House. Next week we shall have a major debate on Europe before the Copenhagen Council; no Labour Member fears any debate that is intended to justify the position—and, indeed, to get things right. Contributions from all sides add to our store of value where Europe is concerned.

Moreover, there have been two consultations, one in 1997 and one last year. A clear choice was put to the British people: were they for Europe or against? They endorsed the party that was clearly in favour of Europe, just as in my time my own party, 15 years ago, put to the British people the policy of hostility to Europe—and, indeed, of withdrawal from it. The Conservative party was then in favour of taking us deeper into Europe. It was the party of the single market, the party of Maastricht, and it won its election.

Excellent speeches have been made by the representatives who serve on the convention in our name. Apart from the Government members, we have my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) and the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). We also have three representatives from another place, Lady Scotland and Lords Tomlinson and Maclennan, and representatives of all the main parties, including the nationalist parties, and from the European Parliament—Linda McAvan, Andrew Duff, Lord Stockton, Timothy Kirkhope and Neil McCormick.

I do not think there has been any time before when Britain has agreed to pool sovereignty—whether in the World Trade Organisation, NATO or, very indirectly, in the Council of Europe and the European Court of Justice—and parliamentary and elected representatives of the British people have been allowed, indeed instructed, to take part in debates on drawing up the new institutions. I welcome that development.

In the most thoughtful speech of the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston stressed the need for parliamentarians to hold the Executive to account. For the first time, in the early stages of discussion of the preliminary draft constitutional treaty, we are hearing references to national Parliaments. The proposals will increase the power of national Parliaments to hold the European Executive to account.

My hon. Friend also rightly stressed the relationship between subsidiarity and proportionality. During last week's Westminster Hall debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) invited the whole country to find a replacement for the word subsidiarity. I must report that I tried to find one on the net—I went through Google, and thesauruses—and every time I typed out the word subsidiarity, the answer was "Nothing known". I fear that we shall have to find the poet whom my hon. Friend asked us to discover.

Mr. Allen: May I throw two suggestions into the equation—"democratic proximity", or perhaps even "democratic intimacy"?

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State described Europe United as a football team, whereas "democratic intimacy" sounds like one of those perfumes advertised by scantily clad people. I leave it to my hon. Friend to come up with more metaphors.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) complained that there was not enough publicity for United Kingdom ideas, but every proposal and every speech is on the web. They are published by the Foreign Office, and by the parliamentary office of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston. It is true that there has not been enough discussion. There has been discussion in the House, but perhaps we need more serious discussion in our media.

[Mr. MacShane]

Let me say how much I—like every other Member, I am sure—missed the presence and contribution of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). We all wish him a speedy return to full health, and we look forward to experiencing his wisdom and vision again in our debates on European and international affairs.

My hon. Friend—and my good friend—the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) talked about Europe as being simply an association of wealthy clubs. However, surely what Europe will be doing in the next week or two is opening up the EU to some of the poorest European countries—I should mention in passing, without in any way wishing to be controversial, that all those countries are eager to join the euro—and, I hope, in due course, Turkey. That is the strength of the European Union: it has allowed countries that were certainly very poor when my hon. Friend and I were students—

Mr. Davidson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacShane: I will not, as I want to deal with the comments of other colleagues. Countries that were very poor when my hon. Friend and I were young members of the Labour party are now doing much better, thanks to their membership of the European Union.

The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory)—another "conventioneer", to use the technical term—made a very thoughtful speech. He said that tonight the House had to endorse Mr. Giscard d'Estaing's preliminary draft constitutional treaty, but the motion before the House explicitly rejects a federal superstate. I hope that the House will not divide, but if it does it should support the rejection of a federal superstate. The motion also asks for the Standing Committee on the Convention, which comprises the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, to be sustained for the current Session.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacShane: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman, given his role as a conventioneer.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Do I take it from the hon. Gentleman's comments that unless the constitutional draft is amended substantially, he will veto it as being unsatisfactory to the British Government?

Mr. MacShane: It is in fact called a provisional draft preliminary, so there is nothing to veto. We are going to modify it, and I hope that today's contributions from hon. Members will help us in that process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North made a powerful plea for us to take this constitutional process seriously, and that is exactly what we are trying to do. What is a constitution but a set of rules? In my eight and a half years in this place, all that I have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House—especially from those who are most critical of the European Union's work—is a demand for a set of rules. Now we are getting there, and some hon. Members do not like it.

In Bagehot's famous book, "The English Constitution", he describes the need for a constitution:

> "So changing is the world, so fluctuating are its needs, so apt to lose inward force, though retaining outward strength, are its best instruments, that we must not expect the oldest institutions to be now the most efficient."

That is exactly what we are trying to do with this convention: to make the way in which the European Union works more efficient, and to have clear rules that we all can understand.

We all pay tribute to the command of detail and the passionate opposition of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor). I understand that nearly 30 years ago, he resigned from the then Government in protest at the House's vote to enter the European Union. Indeed, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of that accession on 1 January 2003. He, too, asked for a set of rules that we can understand. At the end of this process we will see whether we understand them, but we will have such a set of rules. Article 46 of Mr. Giscard d'Estaing's preliminary draft constitution allows for withdrawal. It is for the Government to take a final decision on that matter, but in the end, this House can always decide to withdraw from the European Union. If that provision were included in the final constitutional treaty, I, for the life of me, would find it hard to object to it.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) pointed out that our representatives on the convention should have had longer to speak. I cannot disagree with him, but that is a matter for the Chair. He pointed out that the accession countries want a union of European states, and he is right. He claimed that he persuaded Mr. Amato—and, perhaps indirectly, Mr. Giscard d'Estaing—of the virtues of an exit clause. I congratulate him most sincerely, but may I set him a greater task: to persuade his own party of the virtues of a staying-in clause, because that is the main problem?

The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) listed examples of terrible fraud in the EU. He is absolutely right, but what he described is all the more reason to be in there, fighting in detail to ensure that such fraud is exposed. I read today that the National Audit Office notes that £150 million has been lost to the British taxpayer through that fraud. I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury has joined me. There is a biblical expression about motes and beams. Fraud involving the common agricultural policy in respect of our own farming community is not entirely exclusive to Brussels.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said that the convention was trying to get elected Governments out of the way, creating a jigsaw that will lead to a country called Europe. Again, the notion that France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland and Estonia will give up their identity, laws, culture and customs is nonsense. I cannot patronise them and I will not patronise the House by accepting these arguments.

We finish where we began, alas, on the debate between those in the House who want a stronger and more effective European Union in which nation states

have a clear and defined role, and those who want us to leave the European Union. That, again and again, is the difference. I commend to the House the motion whereby we will allow our conventioneers to carry on with their great work. I am happy to debate this again and again, as necessary.

Question put—

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 4 December, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

European Communities

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Agreement on Trade, Development and Co-operation Between the European Community and its Member States and the Republic of South Africa) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 7th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Income Tax

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (South Africa) Order 2002 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 30th October, in the last Session of Parliament.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Taiwan) Order 2002 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 30th October, in the last Session of Parliament.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Ordered,

That, on Thursday 19th December, there shall be no sitting in Westminster Hall.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

ADJOURNMENT (CHRISTMAS)

Ordered,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 19th December, do adjourn till Tuesday 7th January 2003.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

TAX LAW REWRITE BILLS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That Mr Kenneth Clarke, Mr Parmjit Dhanda, Mr Michael Jack, Mr David Laws, Mr Chris Pond, Dawn Primarolo and Mr Anthony D. Wright be members of the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Tax Law Rewrite Bills.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

COMMITTEES

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put motions 9 to 14 together.

Administration

Ordered,

That Mr John Hayes be discharged from the Administration Committee and Mr Peter Luff be added to the Committee.

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

That Mr Keith Simpson be discharged from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and Mr Bill Wiggin be added to the Committee.

Northern Ireland Affairs

That Mr Henry Bellingham be discharged from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and Mr Hugo Swire be added to the Committee.

Scottish Affairs

That Mr Peter Atkinson be discharged from the Scottish Affairs Committee and Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger be added to the Committee.

Trade and Industry

That Mr Philip Hammond be discharged from the Trade and Industry Committee and Mr Henry Bellingham be added to the Committee.

Transport

That Chris Grayling be discharged from the Transport Committee and Mr George Osborne be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITION

Abdullah Ocalan

10.43 pm

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): The petition I present is on behalf of Mr. Fernando Bauza and 512 other residents, mainly from the town of Hastings. They are supporters of the imprisoned Kurdish leader, Abdullah Ocalan, and many of them recently demonstrated outside my office. They claim that he was abducted in 1999 by Turkish agents and subsequently sentenced to death without a fair trail, and that the conduct of the Turkish Government has led to conflict with ethnic Kurds and contributed to the large number seeking refuge in England.

The Petitioners therefore pray that the House of Commons urge Her Majesty's Government to take such measures as lie within their power to intervene with the Turkish authorities to secure the release of Abdullah Ocalan.

The Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Motorised Wheelchairs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

10.44 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I am pleased to have secured this debate. My aim is that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), and I look ahead to anticipate issues on public safety and traffic management and to reflect on good practice for the future use of motorised wheelchairs.

On balance, it is good that many of us live much longer and that technology enables us to stay mobile for longer, but the consequences of those developments have not yet been fully thought through, still less adequately debated in public. My basic premise is that the use of motorised wheelchairs is growing fast and will continue to grow. As a result, the scope for conflict between different groups of road users will increase, so a competent and forward-thinking Government would want to plan ahead for the problems that may arise. I am pretty sure that I support a Government who are competent and forward thinking and I am certain that my hon. Friend the Minister has those qualities in spades.

Is there much use of motorised wheelchairs at present, and why do I claim that such use will grow in future? When I raised the subject recently in the form of two written parliamentary questions, there was a surprising amount of interest from the national media, especially *The Sunday Telegraph*, and from Disability Now. I realise that politicians cannot always rely on media interest alone as solid evidence of public concern, so I looked elsewhere for evidence.

The HAND partnership—Help, Advice and Advocacy for Norfolk Disabled People—is a not-for-profit charitable enterprise in Norwich whose activities include repairing, rebuilding and refurbishing disability vehicles, selling new ones and even hiring out vehicles. It provides services especially for people on low incomes and has been in business since 1987. That is evidence of sufficient demand to keep a business going.

More significantly, however, private companies sell such vehicles for profit. Among them is DMA Ltd.—Days Medical Aids—whose marketing director, Mike Warren, has been most helpful. He told me that the market has seen a 45 per cent. increase in sales since 1997: from 22,000 vehicles in 1997 to 32,000 this year. He estimates that about 145,000 people are driving those vehicles around our towns and cities.

Stephen Sklaroff, a deputy director general of the Association of British Insurers, told me that insurance for motorised wheelchairs is already widely available. He said that insurance may be bought for third-party cover only or as part of a package, for example, to include damage and theft. He told me that more and more people are buying cover.

I hope that the Minister can see that, even with the limited resources and time that I have at my disposal as an individual Member, I have found good quality evidence that there is a growing market for the buying and hiring of motorised wheelchairs.

Why did I decide to investigate the matter? In time-honoured fashion, constituency casework first brought it to my attention, although I saw the link between the parochial and national interests immediately. The issue has national significance.

Many hon. Members will have heard grumbling about the use of motorised wheelchairs—whether from the users themselves or from pedestrians and other road users. The first serious case that came to my attention in my constituency was of an elderly woman using a motorised wheelchair on a road in a village near Stafford. A car driver claimed that she had to swerve due to a sudden turn by the wheelchair user and her car struck the kerb. The car was damaged and the driver said that she was slightly injured and threatened to sue the wheelchair user for compensation. However, friends of the latter told me that she was a frail, elderly lady who had no savings and no insurance. Understandably, she was extremely upset at the prospect that she would be involved in a court case. My heart went out to that lady and I wondered whether insurance could have relieved her from worry about such a claim.

Subsequently, I held one of my regular meetings with the managers of a local housing association. Some of their stock is sheltered housing for elderly residents and they told me that they had noticed that more of the residents were using motorised wheelchairs. The managers face a range of challenges—from conflict between residents who use motorised wheelchairs and those who are on foot to issues relating to the safe storage of the wheelchairs when they are not in use.

The chief executive of the association wrote to me afterwards to list two incidents of a user driving into another resident on foot, and several incidents of users driving into property and causing damage. Sheltered housing schemes must be expanding, and there are bound to be such incidents all over the country. Even on the safe storage of the vehicles, some thought will have to be given to design standards for future schemes. There is evidence from my own casework that warrants raising the subject.

The current legal framework for the use of motorised wheelchairs is out of date. The present main Act is the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, which still refers to all motorised vehicles as "invalid carriages". That is surely an outdated expression. It has the whiff of the bygone age of the workhouse, and is a bit of an insult.

The body of the current law is in the Use of Invalid Carriages on Highways Regulations 1988, which define three types of vehicles: classes 1 and 2 are the lighter ones, which have a top speed of 4 miles per hour and are restricted to use on pavements, while class 3 relates to the bigger, heavier vehicles, which have a top speed of 8 mph and may travel on roads at their top speed but on pavements at the reduced speed of 4 mph or less. The regulations prohibit users of motorised wheelchairs from using their vehicles on motorways—I am pleased to hear that—cycle lanes or bus lanes. They permit their use on pavements, whereas road traffic law forbids the use of motorcars, motorcycles and cycles on pavements.

The exclusion of motorised wheelchairs from the definition of motor vehicles in road traffic law means that their users do not have to hold a driving licence, take a test, pay excise duty, hold third party insurance or even—perhaps alarmingly—pass an eye test.

The last piece of the legal framework is the DVLA code of practice for class 3 vehicles, published in June 2000. In fact, I think it has no legal backing, and a trade association sponsored it, but user groups were involved in its preparation, and at least its style makes for easy reading. However, I want the law to be reviewed. I want a code with legal status that deals with serious issues, such as users' fitness to ride, the vehicle's fitness for use and the need for third party insurance.

In his written answer to my parliamentary question on 31 October—at column 980W—the Minister said that the Department is planning to review the legal framework governing both the construction and use of the vehicles in the near future. I hope that this debate will be helpful to the Department in pointing out some of the issues that will need attention, and in attracting the attention of interested groups, so that they may contribute to his review.

I want to deal briefly with four issues: traffic management; fitness of users; fitness of vehicles; and insurance. On the first issue, the growth in the use of motorised wheelchairs will cause more conflict between their users and other road users, including car drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. The Department's current approach is best described as pretty much laissez-faire, but will it be adequate in the years to come? I expect the use of motorised wheelchairs in town and city centres to keep on growing.

Shopmobility schemes such as the one that I visited in Stafford recently are doing excellent work allowing shoppers who may be elderly, infirm or disabled to be mobile around shopping centres. Such services are to be welcomed and encouraged. We can expect people to continue to use the pavements to get around shopping centres. In centres that are dispersed, and in suburban and rural areas, we might expect users to be tempted to ride faster and to use roads as well as pavements. What should we do about that? Do we continue to impose a speed limit of 4 mph on pavements? Do we allow faster vehicles to use the roads, or indeed require them to use only the roads? What of the prohibition on using bus lanes and cycle lanes? When councils are doing good work with the new local transport plans to tackle issues of public transport and road safety in a more strategic way, what should we do about these vehicles?

As we plan and create networks of bus lanes, bus priority junctions, cycle lanes and safer walking lanes, should not we also plan how motorised wheelchairs fit into the scheme of things? The vehicles are comparatively lightweight and, of course, their users are very vulnerable people, so should we consider how to offer them the same level of protection as that given to cyclists and pedestrians? Indeed, in the future, should cycle lane networks be made available to those using motorised wheelchairs? I hope that the Minister will give serious thought to those questions.

As for the fitness of users, most of the people involved will be elderly, infirm and disabled. It might be a cruel blow to develop the technology to aid their mobility, only to deny them access to it because we consider that they are unfit to operate the vehicles, so I concede that we need to tread carefully in this area.

Rosemary Saw contacted me about her aunt, who, at 78 years of age, was persuaded to stop using her bicycle and started to use a buggy with three wheels and an electric motor. Years later, her eyesight and memory began to fail, and sometimes she could not remember how to get home. Rosemary Saw says that there is nothing in law to aid worried relatives to get people to stop using those vehicles. She said that, at the outset, there was no test of her aunt's ability to use such a vehicle or of whether she could read a number plate at 25 yd, and that when her insurance was renewed annually no questions were asked about her fitness to continue to operate the buggy.

In a similar vein, my own Stafford access group has contacted me. It is a group of disabled people who agitate for improved services and access to building and areas for disabled people, and I have met it often. It quotes with approval the practice of the local Shopmobility in using questionnaires to check the fitness of users to control the vehicles that are loaned to them. The group asked me to consider the safety of the user and the general public, given that medical conditions are a legitimate subject of public interest. I am asked whether there should be a requirement for an annual statement of fitness to operate, and I am happy to pass that comment on to the Minister.

The fitness of vehicles is particularly relevant when they are used on public roads. The code of practice is short in that regard; it encourages owners to check regularly whether the vehicles are in good condition and recommends a safety check at least once a year. Indeed, the code says that the vehicles should have lights and reflectors, that users should wear something fluorescent by day and reflective at night and that the vehicles should have an audible warning device, a horn, and—listen to this—amber flashing lights when driving on dual carriageways.

One correspondent has contacted me to say that many motorised wheelchairs do not have reflectors and that the dominant colour of the rear of them is black. He says that he feels that the vehicles should be a light colour at the back and that reflectors should always be fitted. Again, I pass on those comments to the Minister.

I come now to the thorny issue of insurance. There is no legal requirement for insurance. The code of practice states that an insurance policy is strongly advised and that suitable schemes are not too expensive and are available to cover personal safety, other people's safety and the value of the vehicle itself. I do not wish to force people with a mobility need off our roads and pavements because they cannot afford the insurance, but the insurance need not be a burden.

However, one correspondent has taken me to task, asking why wheelchair users should be picked on when cyclists pose a greater danger and saying that they should be made to take out insurance, but my first concern is for the peace of mind of the users of motorised wheelchairs. The Association of British Insurers has told me of a current case where a claim for about £75,000 has been brought against a user. The present cost of comprehensive insurance is about £40 a year.

Another correspondent has told me that, some years ago, she was knocked down by an electric wheelchair, needed hospital treatment for an ankle injury and still has difficulty climbing stairs. She is suing, and the HAND partnership would welcome a compulsory requirement for third party insurance, provided that

[Mr. David Kidney]

there were safeguards against mis-selling and profiteering. The partnership shares my concern for the users of the vehicles and believes that insurance offers protection and peace of mind. It says that several of its clients have been victims of attempted robberies and that one man was dragged from his vehicle, beaten up and his vehicle was stolen.

The purchase of a vehicle is a considerable investment. Prices vary between £1,000 and £3,000, and buyers sometimes do not have the resources to purchase a replacement for a stolen vehicle or to pay for repairs to a vehicle that is damaged. The HAND partnership has had three cases of malicious damage to clients' vehicles this year alone.

Mr. Warren of DMA, a company that sells these vehicles, says that insurance gives users confidence to be able to go out and about and enjoy their independence. He points out that many of the insurance packages also include "breakdown assistance". Reassuringly, he tells me that he does not believe that a requirement for compulsory insurance would affect the present growth in sales of vehicles. He expresses the belief that compulsory provision may raise awareness among the general public and riders of the potential risks, and promote caution and courtesy on the part of riders and pedestrians.

I favour compulsory insurance, but, of course, I would expect full discussion with all interested groups before the Government change the law. I would also expect further improvements in technology to bring down the capital cost of the vehicles, and perhaps packages including insurance in the sale price would bring down costs. The Association of British Insurers states that the insurance market would be ready to meet any additional demand for cover. Of course, the ABI would wish to discuss a number of practical issues with Government when considering formal proposals. I therefore urge the Minister to consult widely and consider compulsory insurance as an element in the review of construction and use that he is planning.

Lastly, I would expect the Minister to proceed on the basis of the best available evidence, and make proper use of monitoring and evaluation in any new schemes that he devises. Perhaps he will therefore be surprised to learn that I have already received the first bid for funding for relevant research: to identify and describe the apparent risks and benefits of their use; to establish the need for and nature of improved education and training; and to establish the scope for improved mobility for older people. I do not know the person who has contacted me with that bid for research funding, but if the Minister would like the details I would be pleased to pass them on to him.

What do I want to achieve from this debate? I ask the Minister to respond with details, as far as he can give them, of his plans for a review of the present legal framework for the construction and use of motorised wheelchairs. I hope that he will share my desire that people who are elderly, infirm or disabled should be helped to be as mobile as possible. I ask him to recognise and share my concern for the safety of the users of those vehicles and the safety of the public at large. Will he say something about compulsory insurance in particular? Lastly, will he join me in paying tribute to all those who have contacted me with constructive comments, such as those to whom I have referred in my speech?

11.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) on securing this important debate, and on the characteristic care and precision with which he has presented his case to the House.

Personal mobility is a vital part of daily life for all of us, and for many disabled and older people it is also the key to independent living. Losing the ability to go out and about independently can have a hugely damaging effect on an older person's quality of life. That is why the Government are wholly committed to addressing the transport and mobility needs of disabled and older people, not only in this important area but across the whole spectrum of public transport, the pedestrian environment and the private car.

We are well aware of the demographic trends to which my hon. Friend has referred, and of the need to ensure that we have the means to help older people retain that all-important independence. That is likely to include, for example, continuing to drive for as long as they can safely and comfortably do so, and offering them alternative forms of mobility when they come to the point of giving up driving. Mobility centres around the country, which the Department supports financially, have a key role to play in that. Of course, when discussing the subject of motorised wheelchairs, we are talking not only about keeping people mobile but about safety, not just for users but for other road users and pedestrians. My hon. Friend referred to some of those issues.

Before I respond to the main issue raised by my hon. Friend, it may be helpful if I briefly provide the House with some background on the legislation and the use of these vehicles. As he said, these vehicles are defined as "invalid carriages" in law. I agree with him that that is not a term that we would use these days—he called it an outdated term. I certainly do not think that we would describe the person who introduced the legislation—now Lord Morris of Manchester—as outdated. He continues to be a doughty fighter for disabled people. The sentiments and the measures in the legislation would certainly not be called outdated, but some of the terminology might well be.

My hon. Friend has already briefly set out the legal position, but I hope that the House will bear with me for a couple of moments as I complete the picture and clarify it for the record. The use of these vehicles on the highway is governed in legislation by section 20 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, and by the Use of Invalid Carriages on Highways Regulations 1988. No regulations govern their use off the highway. The 1988 regulations cover three classes of invalid carriage—one class for manual equipment and two covering powered vehicles. Class 1 covers manual wheelchairs. Class 2 covers those vehicles designed for use on the footway—what most of us call the pavement—that can travel up to speeds of 4 mph. Class 3 covers vehicles that can be used both on the footway, where like the class 2s they are limited to 4 mph, and on the road where they can travel up to 8 mph.

Powered wheelchairs and scooters should not be seen as an alternative to a private car. They were introduced to provide local outdoor mobility for disabled people who might otherwise be confined to their home. Indeed, for the purposes of road traffic legislation these vehicles are defined as

"not being a motor vehicle".

This means that powered wheelchairs or scooters do not need to meet the same construction standards as a motor vehicle, nor do their users need to meet the same fitness standards as those required of a driver. However, given the speed restrictions and other limitations set out in the regulations covering their construction and use, the level of control has generally been regarded as reasonable. Of course, as many of the users may have been, or are still, driving a car, they will have experience of the highway code.

My hon. Friend referred to construction and use standards, and the 1988 regulations require that all powered wheelchairs and scooters meet standards for lighting when used on roads, and there are also requirements for brakes, a horn, mirrors and a speed indicator to be fitted. All classes of these vehicles can be used legally by only one person and that must be a disabled person, someone involved in the sale or maintenance of the vehicle or the training of the user. Powered wheelchairs and powered scooters also need to comply with the CE marking requirements under the medical devices regulations.

I have set out the general background to the construction and use of these vehicles, so I will now focus on insurance, which I know is of particular concern to my hon. Friend. He has already referred to a question that he asked recently in the House on the issue, and I have also received correspondence from other Members on the same subject. When the legislation was amended in 1988, it was considered unnecessary to introduce a requirement in law for compulsory insurance. The previous regulations—which had covered class 1 and 2 vehicles—had made no provision and there were strong representations that the status quo should be maintained. The decision was reached in consultation with disability organisations and enforcement authorities. At that time, there was very strong opposition to compulsory insurance from disability organisations and no clear consensus among the other bodies consulted.

On that basis, it was agreed that the most effective approach was to provide clear guidance to the users of these vehicles about their responsibilities as road users, including strong advice on the desirability of obtaining insurance, either through household insurance or a separate policy. As my hon. Friend said, insurance can be obtained at modest cost and, of course, can bring considerable peace of mind to the user.

The guidance—a code of practice for class 3 vehicle users—has been updated since 1988, and has been supplemented by a training pack specifically aimed at the users of the class 3 vehicles that can be used on the footway and on the carriageway.

In addition to the insurance question, we are aware that there are other issues about the use of these vehicles that are of concern to my hon. Friend and to members of the general public. Dropped kerbs, for example, are essential to help all wheelchair and scooter users cross from one pavement to another. Many disabled people are concerned that there are not enough of them or that they are too high. We have tried to tackle that problem in a number of ways. Our guidance to local authorities on local transport plans makes it clear that they must consider the needs of disabled people from the start to the finish of their journey. The guidance reinforces the requirement in the Transport Act 2000, which places a specific duty on local authorities that in developing their local transport plans, they must have regard to the transport needs of people who are elderly and have mobility problems.

My hon. Friend knows that we have put a substantial amount of extra new money into local transport plans. The amount has doubled in his area of Staffordshire over the past few years and I am sure that his authority is putting it to good use, not least as a result of the pressure that my hon. Friend puts on it to tackle the issue that he has raised. The guidance is called "Inclusive Mobility" and will help authorities prepare to comply with the duties of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which from 2004 will require the removal of physical barriers to access.

Concerns have been expressed by some pedestrians, especially those who are frail or who have low vision, about the size and speed of the vehicles used on pavements and in shopping centres. There are also concerns expressed by motorists about the ability of some class 3 users to control their vehicle. As a result of those concerns, there have been calls for tighter controls, such as minimum eyesight requirements, compulsory training or a test of competence.

My hon. Friend asked about the review of legislation. I assure him that we take the issue seriously, but we need to recognise the balance between the needs of the users of the vehicles to maintain their vital independence and mobility and the needs of other road users. We are aware that the use of such vehicles is likely to increase and we want to ensure that the legal framework is right. For those reasons, as a competent and forward-thinking Government—my hon. Friend tossed us that bouquet and I pluck just one small flower from it for my Department—we have decided to hold a full review of the 1988 regulations, covering all aspects of the use of those vehicles on the highway. We plan to hold the review next year.

The review will include a wide-ranging consultation with all interested groups and stakeholders. It will cover the full range of issues that I have touched on and perhaps others that have not yet been identified. During the course of the review, we will be happy to receive any specific comments that my hon. Friend receives. I commend his constituents on raising the matter with him. It is proper that they should do so and we would welcome their contribution to the consultation. Once the review is complete, we will consider whether any changes are needed either to the law that governs the use of the vehicles or to the guidance that accompanies the regulations.

My hon. Friend would not expect me to prejudge the outcome of the review, but we are keenly aware of the

[Mr. David Jamieson]

balance that has to be struck between mobility and safety. As a result of misleading press coverage, which implied that we were committed to introducing compulsory insurance, we have received several representations from disability organisations arguing strongly against such a requirement. We also want to listen carefully to those opinions.

My hon. Friend has raised important matters in his customary powerful but persuasive way. I congratulate him on raising the problem on behalf of disabled people and other users of the pavement and the road. If I have not been able to answer all his questions in the short time available, I will be happy to correspond with him.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 3 December 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

NHS Legal Costs

1. **Mr. Clive Soley** (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): What estimate he has made of legal costs to the NHS incurred by patients taking legal action in the last five years. [82616]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): The NHS Litigation Authority has only collected information on legal costs incurred by the NHS in respect of all clinical negligence claims since April 2002.

Mr. Soley: In view of the amount of money and time taken, including that of professional staff in those cases, could we not find a way in which people can avoid suing, possibly by having a no-fault system? Alternatively, my hon. Friend may remember that some months ago a Mr. and Mrs. Maude chose not to sue, but put their money into a charitable fund, which was used to set up an online diagnostic service. My own constituent Mrs. Braganza also wanted to give money to a hospital despite the fact that it had made a mistake. We need to find a way of doing so that would alleviate both costs and time.

Mr. Lammy: I thank my hon. Friend for his comment. He may be aware that I was a clinical negligence lawyer before coming to the House—*[Interruption.]* I therefore know a little about the matter. The chief medical officer is currently reviewing clinical negligence and will report to Ministers shortly. As with all the options, a no-fault compensation scheme is one of the many things that he is considering.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): Does the Minister agree that prevention is better than cure, particularly in the national health service, and that in the past the role of community health councils has been extremely helpful in raising patients' concerns before legal action may have been necessary? Will he tell the House what measures the Government are taking to ensure the transfer of skills, knowledge and experience of staff and members of community health councils to the new structures for patient and public involvement in health?

Mr. Lammy: The hon. Lady will be aware that we are setting up the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, which will cover patients forums in all our primary care trusts across the country. We set up patient advice and liaison services to liaise with our constituents in hospitals, and a measure to establish a new inspectorate is going through Parliament. We are in close dialogue with the chair and new chief executive of the commission and I hope that I can make announcements shortly about the interim arrangements.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does my hon. Friend intend to make an assessment of the cost of needle stick injuries to the NHS? Will he consider introducing a directive to encourage hospitals to follow Barnsley district general hospital in having a needle stick injury strategy?

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue, which the Department keeps under review. Guidance has recently been issued, but he is right to raise what is an important issue in all our hospitals.

Children's Hospices

2. **Mr. Mark Simmonds** (Boston and Skegness): If he will make a statement on levels of funding for children's hospices. [82617]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Funding levels for children's hospices are determined through negotiation between hospices and primary care trusts. In addition, the new opportunities fund is considering applications from children's hospices to undertake a range of projects in support of children with life-threatening illnesses, for which funding starts next year.

Mr. Simmonds: I am grateful for the Minister's response. Despite the Government's rhetoric on palliative care, is it not true that only £4 million of the £50 million payout allocated by the Government has reached the hospice movement? Even more disgracefully, in many areas of England, is it not true that no moneys have been received whatsoever? If that is coupled with the employers' national insurance increase, which will impact on hospices from April next year, when will the Government get their act together and what will they do to expedite the payment of that well-deserved and much needed funding?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman's question was about children's hospices, but he has clearly asked questions relating to adult specialist palliative care. I am delighted to bring him up to date, as his information is a little out of date. He will know that the Secretary of State announced an extra £10 million of funding for this year, in addition to the £50 million of funding that will be going in next year. If he was in touch with his voluntary

sector organisations, he would know that they are delighted to be working in partnership with us to make sure that we get a new funding mechanism.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I am sure that my hon. Friend knows of the reputation of Derian house in Chorley and the care that is provided there. However, children and young people go there from all over the north-west and beyond, and it is difficult to get primary care trusts from a wider area to contribute money. Finance is always a problem. What help and support can the Under-Secretary provide?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right. I am well aware of the excellent services of the hospice to which he referred. He is also right that because hospices provide services for children from a wide area, we need to get PCTs working together. New funding from the new opportunities fund can help to pump-prime new and innovative services, often for palliative care at home and in the community as well as in hospices.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): The Government's

"overall contribution to children's hospices is unacceptably low ... Certain hospices have had their funds eroded ... There has been a steady regression of funding for Children's Hospices since 1997."

They are not my words but those of Barbara Gelb of the Association of Children's Hospices. Are not the Government letting down the most vulnerable children in our society?

Ms Blears: Not at all. The Government are absolutely committed to helping children with life-threatening illnesses. That does not simply mean hospice care, although that is an important component. We are also dramatically increasing the carer's grant, which helps disabled children. The Diana Community Children's Nursing Network operates throughout the country and provides community nurses to help children with a range of life-threatening conditions. The Government take such an important issue extremely seriously.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Is not it clear that there needs to be a step change in our approach to funding the hospice movement? The level of care and the specialisms that hospices provide nowadays mean that they can no longer rely solely on voluntary contributions. Can we please have a more planned and integrated approach that involves the NHS in the provision of hospice services?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right. We have embarked on exactly that course. Producing the National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines means that, at long last, we will have a proper service for palliative care. In the past, palliative care has been on the outside of the NHS. We aim to ensure that it is as much a part of the NHS as the rest of our treatment services.

Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Trust

3. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): What discussions he has had about funding for the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Care Trust. [82618]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): At the request of my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown), I met representatives of Avon and Wiltshire mental health care trust, the strategic health authority and local Members of Parliament on 29 October. The meeting enabled us to discuss both the financial pressures that confront the mental health care trust and national and local work to tackle the financial position.

Mr. Gray: I attended that meeting, and it was deeply unsatisfactory. The mental health care trust and the other local PCTs are starting life with debt of £100 million that they inherited from previous organisations. They are trying to live within their means, but that will mean closures of beds at the Cameron mental health care ward in Chippenham, of the day care facility in Malmesbury and at Rowden Hill, and of the rehabilitation centre at Devizes. Does the Under-Secretary agree that there is precious little point in her paying out funds to the trust if they have to be paid back in debt repayment? Is not there a strong argument for considering a moratorium on debt repayment so that the trusts can start their lives sensibly?

Jacqui Smith: Clearly, it is important that local health services live within their means. I know that much work is happening locally in the hon. Gentleman's constituency to ensure that we safeguard services.

Mr. Gray: Cuts.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman mentions cuts, but the mental health care trust received 12.8 per cent. more income in 2002–03 than in 2001–02. That is why it has been able to improve services, with six more crisis resolution teams, eight more assertive outreach teams, at least 12 more community gateway staff and at least 14 more staff to give carers breaks. It is a bit rich for the hon. Gentleman to argue for more money now; he did not vote for it when he had the opportunity to do so.

Hospital-acquired Infections

4. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): If he will make a statement on the incidence of hospital-acquired infections in the last 12 months. [82619]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Since April 2001, all acute NHS trusts have had to report methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus blood stream infections. The first year's data show that rates tend to be higher in specialist trusts and in the south and east of the country. Early next year, surveillance will be extended to other micro-organisms and adverse incidents associated with infection.

Richard Ottaway: Up to 5,000 lives are lost each year through hospital-acquired infections. Are not the Government being extraordinarily complacent about

the matter? The figure is almost double the number of lives lost on the roads each year. Does not that show that all the spending announcements in the world do not add up to a row of beans if lives continue to be lost through inefficient procurement programmes of sterilisation and contamination equipment? They have been getting progressively slower. The Government should get a grip and act to improve matters.

Mr. Hutton: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is a serious problem. We should tackle it on three different levels. First, it is important that we start to monitor the rates of MRSA and other hospital-acquired infections; we are doing that for the first time this year. No previous Health Minister—Tory or Labour—has been able to tell the House what the rates of such infections are. That is our first port of call. Secondly, we need to get in additional resources to improve standards of cleanliness and hygiene in our hospitals. We are doing that: there will be £62 million for the clean hospital programme and a £200 million additional investment to improve sterilisation.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman, however, that this is not just about money. That is why the third strand of our work involves the chief medical officer and others working with the service to improve levels of performance and to spread best practice in regard to hygiene and cleanliness. That is the right way to do this. There is a problem, but we are trying to address it.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): My right hon. Friend has rightly said that one of the keys to reducing MRSA infection is good hygiene on the wards. Does he not agree, therefore, that the disastrous privatisation of cleaning services under the previous Conservative Government seriously impeded efforts to tackle this problem? Will he tell the House how the agenda for change programme will facilitate involving cleaners and others in the ward team in raising the level of skills to remedy the problem?

Mr. Hutton: I agree with my hon. Friend that the record of previous Conservative Administrations has not been anything to crow about. It ill behoves the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway)—for whom I have a great deal of respect—to blame the Labour Government for problems relating to levels of cleanliness and hygiene. We have done more than previous Governments to tackle them, including—as my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) said—ending the disastrous experiment with compulsory competitive tendering, which had not improved levels of cleanliness in our hospitals. Agenda for change is a new pay modernisation framework for the NHS, which represents a significant step forward, particularly for low-paid workers, including cleaners. I hope that that will improve morale and retention among some of the most important workers in the national health service.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Those are complacent words from the Minister, nearly six years into a Labour Government. According to a new report from University college London, nearly 12 per cent. of patients suffer from what it calls "adverse events" within the NHS. That seems a long way from the Government's clean hospitals initiative. What actions is the Minister actually taking?

Mr. Hutton: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. We look forward to further exchanges with him, although I hope that they will be of a better quality than the one that we have just heard. To be fair to him, however, I think that he is mixing up two issues. He is confusing adverse incidents—which include a much wider variety of potential harm that patients could experience in hospital, including operations that go wrong, and so on—with hospital-acquired infections. They are different issues. I tried to outline to the hon. Member for Croydon, South the three areas in which we are taking action to improve the problem of hospital-acquired infections. Because of the steps that we have taken, a Health Minister will, for the first time ever, be able to report to the House on whether we are making progress in tackling the problem. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is a first step forward, but it is not the only step that we are taking. I have outlined fully all the steps that we are taking to deal with this problem. It is a serious one, and we are determined to get on top of it.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): Will my right hon. Friend give us a little more information about how he is collecting this data? Two years ago, when my father died from a hospital-acquired infection, I was surprised to discover that there was no mention of that fact on the death certificate. Why do we not record on death certificates the fact that a hospital-acquired infection has been involved? Are the other kinds of data that my right hon. Friend is collecting sufficient to enable us to get to grips with this issue?

Mr. Hutton: I am truly sorry to hear of my hon. Friend's loss, as I am sure that all hon. Members will be. The details that are recorded on a death certificate are, as I am sure he is aware, a matter for the coroner to decide. I understand that a review of those procedures is currently under way, however, and perhaps that is the right place in which to consider that problem. In relation to the data that we are currently record, it is true that, this year, we have been collecting data only about MRSA. Next year, however, we will extend the data collection to include salmonella, for example, and glycopeptide-resistant enterococci. That is part and parcel of our attempt to extend the data collection so that we can be in a position to deal with the important issues that my hon. Friend and others have raised.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I commend the Minister on the data collection; that is clearly the first step, and he is right to say that it has not been done before. He described the hospital cleanliness programme as a means of driving down hospital-acquired infection. Is he aware, however, that, of the 19 measures that went into that programme, part of only one of them deals with issues that might reduce hospital-acquired infection—that is, cross-infection as opposed to issues of cleanliness? A survey carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) and other colleagues showed that 60 per cent. of those who responded found that they had insufficient

resources for infection control. Is not the Minister worried that some of the other targets that the Government are setting are taking resources away from infection control?

Mr. Hutton: I do not think that that is a fair criticism. The hon. Gentleman, as I understand his position, is against pretty well any target of any kind for the NHS. He certainly knows how to spend more money, but he would be unable to account for any beneficial result of such expenditure. I agree, however, that it is clearly important to keep that whole area of work under review. I am not going to stand here for a second claiming that we have solved every problem—quite clearly, we have not. Removing such infections, particularly the avoidable ones, will be a long hard job. Remember, MRSA is resident in the community as a whole, and it is inevitable that it will come into hospitals as well. We have to focus on avoidable infection rates, which may be between 15 and 30 per cent. of the total, and working with the profession. The Chief Medical Officer is leading that work to find the right way forward, but concentrating on reducing waiting times in no way contradicts or gets in the way of reducing hospital-acquired infection rates.

Smoking

5. **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If he will make a statement on further measures he proposes to combat smoking and tobacco use. [82620]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The measures that we have so far taken have helped over 200,000 smokers to quit. We will now make available extra resources to advertise the dangers of smoking and to extend help for people who want to give up.

Andrew Mackinlay: Does the Secretary of State agree that the practise of smoking tobacco should be confined to consenting adults in private? Is it not time that he put pressure on his ministerial colleagues who are in charge of employment rights to protect, in particular, those people in the food and drink and entertainment industries, as well as others, who are obliged to endure and suffer the smoke of others? Will he ensure also that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Department for International Development are empowered to prevent British companies from trying to peddle that terrible drug among the poorest and most disadvantaged people in the world?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. Clearly, smoking is the principal avoidable cause of death in our country—it kills about 120,000 people a year and is responsible for one death in five, so action across the piece is necessary to reduce it. He raises in particular the issue of workplace smoking, which is a genuine problem, although he will be aware that the Health and Safety Executive has been considering it, as have we. In the meantime, we have been trying to persuade employers, through our local tobacco control alliances, to take action locally. We want to encourage more of them, especially in the restaurant and pub business, either to make their environment smoke free or to at least make it clear to consumers and workers where smoking is allowed. Many employers want to take such action. I agree that there is a lot more to do, but we are beginning to make real inroads into a real problem.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Given that the Government's own figures show that more and more young people are smoking, will the Secretary of State explain why the Government yesterday tried to block new European Union measures that will ban cigarette company sponsorship of Formula 1 a year earlier than planned? It appears to many that they were trying to help their friends in Formula 1 at the expense of the public's health.

Mr. Milburn: I begin by welcoming the hon. Gentleman to his new post.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): He will be gone in two weeks.

Mr. Milburn: I am getting some advice. Sometimes it is worth taking, the hon. Gentleman will find, although not from his own side. He started with a slight factual error, if I may say so, on the proportion of young people who are smoking. He may know that figures published today from the general household survey show that in 1996 about 13 per cent. of 11 to 15-year-olds were regular smokers. That had fallen to 10 per cent. by last year. Clearly, however, a lot more needs to be done to combat smoking, particularly among girls.

Yesterday, as the hon. Gentleman knows, there was a European Council of Ministers in Brussels to discuss the draft tobacco directive. The case argued by the hon. Gentleman is not the case that I put. There were two problems with the Commission's tobacco directive. It was not strong enough, and it was not clear enough. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have tobacco-advertising legislation in our country—opposed, incidentally, by his party—which is all about banning not just tobacco advertising but tobacco promotion. As for the question of clarity, one thing I have learnt over the last five or six years is that the tobacco industry will be relentless in delaying and preventing any measures that are necessary to protect the public.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to a reduction in smoking, and his work in making nicotine replacement therapy available to all NHS patients. That was a wonderful move. May I remind him, however, that 400 pupils are still dying every day in this country from tobacco-related diseases? The industry therefore needs to recruit 400 more young people a day, particularly teenagers, to this dreadful habit. What can my right hon. Friend do, in addition to what he is already doing, to discourage people from taking it up in the first place?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is right, and he speaks with some clinical experience and expertise. Four steps are necessary. First, we are now enacting the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill. From next spring, all tobacco advertising on hoardings and in the media will be banned, because we know that it is the recruiting sergeant for young people in particular. Secondly, from next year there will be stronger health warnings on

cigarette packets, and misleading doublespeak from the industry about certain products being "light" or "mild" will go. The strengthened health warnings will include warnings about the link between tobacco consumption and impotence. Thirdly, for the first time the Government will publish a list of the additives that go into every brand of cigarette, including everything from solvents to sweeteners. Fourthly and perhaps most important, in conjunction with the British Heart Foundation and the Cancer Research UK campaign, we will launch a £15 million advertising campaign pointing out the dangers of smoking.

I think that those measures, together with the help we are already giving to the seven out of 10 smokers who say they want to quit, will make a real difference and, most important, will save lives.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome that news, but the Secretary of State expressed concern about the European directive. What action have he and the Government taken to put pressure on the European Community to stop subsidising the growth in tobacco exports from Greece—and in our own exports, which are adding to the plight of the developing world?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point, which I should have made in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate).

The British Government at all levels continue to raise, in our discussions in Europe, the issue of subsidies for the tobacco industry, which must stop. As my hon. Friend said, they produce a product which, although legal, kills 120,000 of its consumers every year. It is therefore no surprise that the industry must recruit extra smokers. Eighty-three per cent. of smokers began smoking before they were 20. The industry claims that its advertising is not aimed at children and teenagers, but that is simply wrong. We know from evidence that the vast majority of brands most smoked by children are the most advertised. That is why we were right to introduce tough new anti-tobacco-advertising legislation.

Meat Hygiene Service

6. **John Thurso** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): When he next plans to meet the chief executive of the Food Standards Agency to discuss the Meat Hygiene Service. [82621]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Ministers have regular meetings with the chairman, deputy chair and chief executive of the Food Standards Agency to discuss issues of mutual interest, including the Meat Hygiene Service.

John Thurso: Is the Minister aware of the grave concern being expressed by vets throughout Scotland about the way in which the recent contract for official veterinary surgeons was awarded, and in particular about allegations that officials from the service pressurised vets by telephone into lowering their tenders? Is not such horse trading posing a real threat to both the quality of the service and the quality of meat for human consumption?

Ms Blears: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is absolutely vital that the Meat Hygiene Service puts quality first and has due regard to public health. He will know that the procurement process has been carried out in accordance with the Government's rules through the clear drawing up of a specification, the inviting and evaluation of tenders, and the making of awards. I am informed that there are 13 contracts in the highlands and islands, eight of which have been retained by local vets. A deliberate attempt was made to ensure a variety of suppliers, and local vets were encouraged to take part in the tendering process.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): The Minister will know that obesity in children has been a cause for concern in the past couple of years. I wonder whether she has discussed with the Food Standards Agency applying to food the same principle that has been applied to tobacco: labelling food that has all the wrong sugar content, so that parents can know how dangerous such foods are.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That point has nothing to do with the question before us. I call Mr. Fabricant.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): When does the Minister meet Ministers from other Departments to discuss the illegal importation of meat? Is she aware that, from time to time, meat that should be banned is being brought into this country and is entering the food chain? Is she further aware that in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, sniffer dogs are used to prevent such importation? When will she have discussions with Treasury and Home Office Ministers to ensure that ports of entry are tightly controlled to prevent such illegal meat importation?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that Ministers are in constant contact with Ministers in other Departments and in other jurisdictions to ensure that the meat that enters this country is of a high quality. As I said to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), public health concerns are obviously a key issue in all our considerations. The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) will also know that we have had considerable success in discovering criminal gangs involved in the adulteration of meat in this country. They have been prosecuted by local authorities, and substantial penalties have been imposed on them. This Government take the issue of ensuring that our meat is of the highest quality, and that the supply chain has integrity, extremely seriously.

Asthma Management

7. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): What assessment he has made of the Buteyko method of asthma management. [82622]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): Following the Adjournment debate on the Buteyko technique in June, the chief medical officer

asked his special projects officer to investigate the claims made for the technique. He found that the technique was helpful for some patients with asthma, but that more research was needed into it.

Mrs. Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will she look carefully at the trial in Nottingham, which is being funded by the National Asthma Campaign, and at the trial at Glasgow university? The latter has shown that asthma patients who are taught to breathe correctly can achieve a 98 per cent. reduction in reliever medication, and a 92 per cent. reduction in preventive medication. Does she agree that that is an excellent way to save on the NHS drugs bill?

Jacqui Smith: I understand that the chief executive of the National Asthma Campaign wrote to the chief medical officer in September, giving some of the preliminary results of the Nottingham inquiry to which my hon. Friend refers. The trial in Scotland, which is being undertaken by Jill McGowan, is still in progress and will not be finished until April 2003. At that stage, conclusions can be formally evaluated using peer review. I agree with my hon. Friend that, given the success that we have already achieved in reducing the incidence of asthma, we must continue to ensure that, where well-researched and successful interventions exist, they are available to patients on the NHS. What is important is that we do the research necessary to show that this method would be as clinically effective as the drug treatments that are proving effective at the moment.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Surely the Minister must recognise that sufficient evidence has been provided in this regard by the 1995 Brisbane trial alone. That trial showed that broncodilator use declined by more than 90 per cent., and that steroid use decreased by 49 per cent., through the Buteyko breathing technique. She has referred to other treatments that might be considered in the health service, but is she aware that some 12 complementary therapies—such as yoga, nutritional medicine and the Alexander technique, which deals with posture—could be inexpensively deployed? When will the Government take seriously such treatments, which are very effective, instead of just paying lip service to them?

Jacqui Smith: I am the lucky Minister who has to answer the hon. Gentleman's question on complementary medicines today. Obviously, approaches and techniques that give asthma patients lasting relief and greater control of their lives are to be welcomed. That includes the use of complementary therapies, which primary care trusts can commission if they consider them to be effective, in clinical and cost terms, for a particular health need. However, although techniques such as the Buteyko method and others to which the hon. Gentleman referred may have significant benefit, there is no robust scientific evidence that any complementary therapy on its own can provide a lasting cure for asthma. It would therefore be wrong to build up patients' hopes that their asthma could be cured without resort to an existing drug therapy. However, as I made clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), the chief medical officer and the Medical Research Council have accepted that more research is needed. Having been an asthma sufferer for some years myself, and I hope that that research will be undertaken.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Should not we consider asthma in the context of chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases? Is my hon. Friend aware of the COPD patient manifesto, launched on world COPD day in November? Will she join me in congratulating the British Lung Foundation, and local Breathe Easy groups such as the one in my constituency, on their work in raising awareness of these ailments, and in providing support for sufferers? Will her Department make a formal response to the COPD patient manifesto?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the role of professional, voluntary and patient organisations in raising awareness of conditions, and of some of the effective techniques that patients understand can be used in treatments. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be aware of the Department's expert patient programme. By means of a series of pilot schemes, it is looking for ways to ensure that professionals and patients can work together more effectively to enable patients to manage their conditions. I shall certainly look at the patient manifesto to which my hon. Friend has referred with close interest.

Eastbourne District General Hospital

8. **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): If he will make a statement on funding for Eastbourne district general hospital in 2002–03. [82624]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Eastbourne district general hospital is now part of the new East Sussex hospitals NHS trust. The total income for the trust this year is £178 million, an 8.5 per cent. increase in funding for its component sites over 2001–02. In the course of this year, the trust received an additional £440,000 to support additional activity.

Mr. Waterson: Is the Minister aware that that answer is a disgrace? Has he not seen my letter to the Secretary of State of 21 November, in which I raised the specific issue about which I want to hear—the trust's current deficit of £5 million? Where will that money come from? Will it come from the primary care trust, central Government, or from cuts in services in my local hospital?

Mr. Hutton: I am sorry to have offended the hon. Gentleman. I was going to thank him for writing to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and giving us an indication of what his supplementary question would be. I have no intention of avoiding the question that the hon. Gentleman has raised. He will be aware that the NHS in East Sussex received an additional £60 million in total for this year, an increase of more than 10 per cent. in cash terms. It is incumbent on me to point out that the hon. Gentleman voted against the NHS receiving those additional resources. However, I know that he rightly takes an interest in the NHS in his constituency, so I am sure that he will know that the

trust board met last Wednesday to discuss how to resolve the matters to which he has referred. The board has developed an action plan to deal with precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised. If he is not aware of the decisions taken last week by the trust board, I will ensure that he receives a full copy of its report.

Prisoners (Mental Health)

9. **Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): What recent assessment he has made of the health of prisoners. [82625]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): Since 2000, all prison service establishments and their NHS partners are expected to complete prison health needs assessments and prison health action plans. These identify, on a regular basis, the services required to meet prisoners' health needs.

Dr. Murrison: In a series of written answers, Home Office Ministers have shown themselves to have a lamentably low grip on the mental health of people in our penal institutions. I welcome Health Ministers' assumption of some of that role from April this year. What plans do they have for improving the mental health of people in prisons, particularly for increasing the rate of prescription of atypical antipsychotics? Can they assure the House that there will be the necessary transfer of funds from the Home Office to the NHS?

Mr. Lammy: The use of antipsychotic drugs is being considered by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. However, our mental health strategy, published in December, makes it clear that all prisons and their NHS partners should review annually their mental health needs and develop action plans to deal with them. At the same time, the NHS has funded mental health inreach teams; the number will rise from the current 22 to 70 by April 2004. Of course, that takes money and investment, and I wish that the hon. Gentleman's party would match our investment in that regard.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): We heard on "Newsnight" last night from Mr. Hellawell's assistant, Mike Trace, that the £50 million allocated to the prison service for drug treatment is not getting through. Will my hon. Friend carry out an audit and ensure that that money gets through?

Mr. Lammy: It is getting through. Some 25,000 initial assessments have been undertaken and there are 60 intensive drug treatment programmes, plus additional funds, announced this morning in the drugs strategy.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): The Minister should be aware that in the first six months of this year, the prison suicide rate increased by an alarming 40 per cent. Figures show that 70 per cent. of prisoners may be suffering from some form of personality disorder, yet the medical inspector of the inspectorate of prisons, John Reed, called care for mentally disordered offenders in prison a disgrace. Does the Minister agree that a prison spell should be an opportunity to administer proper treatment for mental illness, not to make it worse? When the ill-fated mental health Bill re-emerges, will he make sure that it focuses on providing appropriate and early mental health treatment and care for prisoners and other citizens alike, rather than banging up yet more people, adding to the thousands with mental health problems banged up already?

Mr. Lammy: I will not seek to make a party political point on such a serious issue. The prison service is part way through a three-year programme of work designed to reduce the incidence of suicide and self-harm among our prisoners. Close watch is paid to the mental health of young offenders at Feltham and other institutions, and extra provision made to prevent suicide.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the prisons inspectorate. The former chief inspector of prisons has said that the partnerships between the NHS and the prison service are successful.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): As part of its health improvement programme, Woodhill prison in my constituency has agreed an ambitious series of targets with our local primary care trust. Will the Minister clarify where the funding is coming from to make sure that those targets are met? Is it from the prison service or the PCT?

Mr. Lammy: Since 2000, there has been a close partnership between the NHS and the prison service. That means that by 2005–06, the NHS and the Department of Health will have increased funding by £46 million across the country, which will benefit my hon. Friend's local primary care trust.

Primary Care (Disabled People)

10. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): If he will make a statement on access to primary care for disabled people. [82626]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): We are committed to delivering primary care services that offer prompt and convenient access to all, including disabled people. The NHS plan sets a primary care access target that by 2004 all patients will be able to see a primary care professional within 24 hours and a general practitioner within 48 hours.

Mr. Boswell: But does the hon. Lady accept that in some parts of the country, including mine, it is difficult to get on a GP's list? It is even harder to do so for disabled people and it is exceptionally hard for people with a history of mental illness or with learning difficulties. What specific action does she plan to take to ensure that those very vulnerable people obtain the services they need and to which they are entitled?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, especially about people with learning disabilities. If they have been in institutional care, or are still in such care, they are often not on GPs' lists. That is why the White Paper, "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century",

made it clear that people with learning disabilities needed the same access to GPs and to primary care as everybody else. That is why, by summer 2003, we expect the local partnership boards to have put in place health facilitators, to help people with learning disabilities to access health services. That is why we have already issued for primary health care teams good practice guidance on meeting the needs of people with learning disabilities. In various parts of the country, there are already good and innovative training schemes, whereby staff and GPs in primary care receive training about and are made aware of the particular needs of people with learning disabilities.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is it not true that, more than anything, disabled people want to remain independent in their own home? Will my hon. Friend consider how the primary care sector of the health service can work with local authorities to bring down—almost to nothing—waiting times for people who want to adapt their homes or to put in bathroom conversions for level access showers to enable them to remain independent?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the role of adaptations and equipment in enabling disabled people to remain independent. Some of those issues are the responsibility of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. I have discussed the matter with ministerial colleagues there, and the Department of Health has made a contribution to the home improvement agencies in order to ensure that those types of adaptation are in place, especially for people who leave hospital. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced during the summer, we are also extending by 500,000 the number of pieces of community equipment available and that will benefit another 200,000 people over the next three years. Furthermore, I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill, if passed by the House, will also ensure that such community equipment is provided free to everybody who needs it.

Foundation Hospitals

11. **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): If he will make a statement on the financial and legal relationship between the Department of Health and foundation hospital trusts. [82627]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): NHS foundation trusts will be part of the national health service but they will be owned and controlled by the local community, not by the Department of Health. This modern form of local public ownership will be spelled out in detail in a guide to NHS foundation trusts that I hope to publish before too long.

Mr. Prisk: Although we shall welcome that guidance note, the Secretary of State needs to be aware that many of my constituents are confused by the conflicting statements from Ministers on the issue. Will he provide a definitive answer today on financial matters in foundation hospitals—for example, borrowing—and explain to the House who will have the final say? Will it be his Department, the Treasury or the regulator, or will it be locally elected governors?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the guide—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] The hon. Gentleman would like a guide so I will give him a guide and a hint. He asked about local governance. As I told the House during the debate on the Queen's Speech, the membership of those organisations will be drawn from people in the local community served by the local hospital. Those members will be able to elect governors who will oversee the work of the hospital board. As a consequence, for the first time there will be a genuine form of local public ownership that will put the public at the heart of our key public service. It certainly will not be national state ownership. It will be a genuine form of local ownership.

NHS foundation trusts will be free to borrow; they may do so from the private markets and they will have access to public sector resources too. Decisions about their right to borrow will be based on an assessment of their ability to pay; that is not an assessment that I will be undertaking.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Although the proposals are relatively controversial, as I am sure that the Minister would agree, does he accept that the co-operative and mutual role could play a really positive part in delivering those hospitals, if they go ahead?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend has made an extremely important point. Certainly for those on the Labour Benches—perhaps not those on the Conservative Benches—there is a well-established tradition of co-operation and mutualism, which is at the heart of the founding of our party and the wider Labour movement. In terms of their governance, those organisations will be firmly grounded in those traditions. They will be owned and run by members of the local community. Therefore, for the first time since 1948, there will be clear national standards and NHS hospitals, serving NHS patients, according to NHS principles. They will provide care, according to NHS standards and inspected by an NHS inspectorate, that is free and which is offered on the basis of need, not the ability to pay. The difference is that members of the local community served by the local hospital will have some say over the decisions that are taken by that local hospital. That is not a form of privatisation, which the Conservative party advocates; it is a genuine form of local public ownership.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): On 7 August, the Secretary of State said:

> "For some on the Centre Left the idea of transforming the public sector monopoly is heresy . . . In health, this means primary care trusts having control over budgets with explicit freedom to purchase care from the most appropriate provider—public, private or voluntary . . . And existing NHS hospitals should be able to become NHS foundation hospitals".

I completely agree with him.

However, the Chancellor, in his *Guardian* tapes this week, said that

"there will be problems in health if you try to introduce market forces. There is no way markets work in health care. If they did, you would have this extreme power of the producer over the consumer."

How can both those views be compatible?

Mr. Milburn: It is the hon. Gentleman who is fixated on market forces. Indeed, I think that one year he managed tell his party conference that, as an unreconstructed Thatcherite, he was wedded to the market inside the national health service. As I have explained to the hon. Gentleman, foundation hospitals have nothing to do with market forces, still less to do with privatisation. It is about public ownership. It is about ensuring that the local public, who are served by the local hospital, are at the heart of the governance of that local hospital; so no longer will the hospital be owned by Secretaries of State of whatever political persuasion. It will be owned and controlled by the local community.

Dr. Fox: Instead of treating us to philosophical gobbledegook, the Secretary of State would be more honest if he said that his view was right and that the Chancellor—the psychologically flawed, downgraded Chancellor—was wrong. But since he cannot answer the ideological questions, perhaps he can answer a practical one. He has told the House that three-star hospitals alone will become foundation hospitals. What happens if a three-star trust becomes a two-star trust during the transition period? Will the process be stopped? And once a hospital has become a foundation hospital, what then? Will it still be subject to the star rating or, once it reaches foundation status, will that no longer apply?

The Secretary of State needs to understand that he must give clear answers to practical questions, because there is a distinct impression that not only is the Cabinet at loggerheads on this, but that Ministers are making up the proposal as they go along.

Mr. Milburn: As for the rating, yes, NHS foundation trusts will be subject to the star rating system, just as every other part of the national health service will be, whether it is a primary care trust or other NHS trust. As for what would happen in the event of a three-star NHS foundation trust losing its three-star status, when the hon. Gentleman reads the guide he will see that the independent regulator whom we will appoint will have various intervention powers to deal with precisely those circumstances.

On the issue that the hon. Gentleman raised about only three-star trusts being allowed to become NHS foundation trusts, I should point out to him that there would be no arbitrary cap on the number of NHS foundation trusts. The more performance improves throughout the national health service, the more NHS foundation trusts we can have. But we have to start somewhere. We should start with those that have a proven track record of success. The hon. Gentleman might like to know that 40 per cent. of the current three-star trusts in the national health service come from the poorest parts of the country: places such as Doncaster, Sunderland, Hackney and Liverpool. So it will be a means not just of improving—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): If clinical outcomes and the quality of care in a foundation hospital decline markedly, will the guidance that the Secretary of State is issuing to the regulator include the possibility of the hospital losing its foundation status?

Mr. Milburn: Yes.

Agency/Bank Nurses

12. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): If he will make a statement on the amount spent on agency and bank nurses over the Christmas period 2001. [82628]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Data on the amount spent on agency nurses are collected annually. In 2000–01, £435 million was spent on non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting temporary staff. Information on the amount spent on bank nurses is not held centrally.

Norman Lamb: I thank the Minister for that reply. May I draw his attention to the fact that the Norfolk and Norwich hospital spent £1.1 million on agency nurses last year—nearly double the amount spent in the previous year and five times the amount spent in 1996-97? The cost of agency nurses appears to be spiralling out of control in Norwich and nationally and NHS Professionals appears not to be working as intended. Does that not demonstrate a failure of work force planning in the past five years? What steps are the Government taking to address that massive cost to the NHS to ensure that the extra money going into the NHS is spent in the most effective way?

Mr. Hutton: I agree that spending on commercial agency nurses is far too high, and we need to take action to reduce it. We shall do so, first, by establishing NHS Professionals, on which we are making progress. For example, nearly 2,000 additional staff have been recruited to NHS Professionals in London in recent months. It is making progress, but we need to do more. Equally important, one of the principal ways that we will reduce costs, if that is the hon. Gentleman's concern—it is mine—is by extending nationally the terms of the London agency project, which is working well in London, to reduce the number of commercial agencies that we use and the amount that we pay them for those services. We will be able to extend the London agency project nationwide in the spring of next year, which will help significantly in reducing the costs.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): One of the reasons why many nurses choose to work through agencies is that they can thereby obtain more flexible work patterns that reflect modern lifestyles and family demands. What is the Minister doing to encourage

hospitals to offer that to directly employed nurses, so that the cost of agency nurses does not spiral even further out of control?

Mr. Hutton: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I draw his attention to the fact that we are investing significant amounts of additional money in improving precisely the conditions of service that he mentions, especially child care and flexible working. The new agenda for change proposals will make a significant difference to the flexibility of employment in the NHS and, I hope, help to provide, at least in part, the solution that he and I are looking for.

General Practitioner Vacancies

13. **Mrs. Patsy Calton** (Cheadle): Whether general practitioner vacancies have gone up since 2001; and if he will make a statement. [82629]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The NHS recruitment, retention and vacancy survey shows that there has been an increase in the estimated three-month vacancy rate for GPs from 1.7 per cent. on 31 March 2001 to 2.7 per cent. on 28 February 2002. The higher number of all GPs working in the NHS, excluding GP trainers, has increased by 1,469, or 5 per cent., since 1997.

Mrs. Calton: Will the Minister explain why the Secretary of State announced the golden hello scheme twice in March 2001, yet failed to provide any guidelines, including the start date—1 April 2001—until November 2001?

Mr. Hutton: We announced that we had reached agreement on the scheme and, in November, we announced and confirmed its details, but the payments were backdated to April, so no GP lost out. I am sure that the hon. Lady will be pleased to note that, last week, I confirmed that the golden hello payment has been increased to £12,000.

Cancer Care

14. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on progress towards meeting his targets on cancer care. [82630]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Thanks to the hard work of those working in the NHS, we are already making real progress in implementing the NHS cancer plan. Patients are benefiting from improvements across all aspects of cancer care, and cancer mortality rates are falling.

Mr. Chapman: Does my hon. Friend agree that specialist oncology trusts have a key part to play in maintaining standards in cancer care? Does she also agree that any review of trusts needs to be driven by patient interests rather than by pre-judgment on an organisational or numerical basis?

Ms Blears: Specialist trusts remain an essential part of the cancer care system. I am delighted to confirm that at the Clatterbridge centre for oncology in my hon. Friend's area, a new CT scanner, three linear accelerators, a radiotherapy treatment planning system and an MRI scanner have already been delivered. I am also delighted to confirm that the patient's interest will be uppermost in our minds in relation to the whole of the cancer care system and the design of any new cancer care services for my hon. Friend's community.

Hunting with Dogs

3.30 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): It is an honour and a privilege to outline to the House my proposals for legislation to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the issue of hunting with dogs. Few people,would regard that as the most important issue for Parliament and Government to resolve, but it is a serious issue on which many Members of this House and members of the public have very strong and polarised views. That is why we must return to the matter again.

The last time that Parliament considered a Bill on hunting with dogs, no agreement was reached between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. That is why our manifesto promised to

"enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the issue of hunting with dogs".

That is why the Prime Minister gave me the job of fulfilling our manifesto commitment by designing legislation to command the support of Parliament and to make good law—legislation that will stand the test of time.

At the request of the Campaign for the Protection of the Hunted Animal and the Countryside Alliance, I took the conclusions of the Burns inquiry as my starting point. The terms of reference required Lord Burns to look at all aspects of hunting with dogs, and the authority of his report is acknowledged on all sides. The key issues emerging from the Burns report were cruelty and utility. Those two principles have run like a golden thread through the consultation process. Everything has been tested against them. Are we preventing cruelty? Are we recognising what farmers and others need to do to eradicate vermin or to protect livestock, crops or the biodiversity of an area? My Bill is based on the answers to those two questions.

After my statement in March, I started a wide-ranging consultation process involving all interested parties, Members of Parliament and the public. Initially, the response generated more heat than light: some 7,000 people wrote asking me to leave everything unchanged. That matched some 7,000 who asked me to "just ban everything". Others wrote detailed contributions, however, which were based on evidence and on their personal experience. In May, I asked for detailed evidence to be submitted against a set of questions and criteria, which were based on looking at the issues of cruelty and utility and other questions raised by the evidence that I had received by that time. The amount of serious engagement increased greatly.

In September, I chaired a series of public hearings in Portcullis House. The three main campaigning groups participated fully. Together, we heard expert witnesses from all sides of the argument who debated the merit of applying the principles of cruelty and utility to the activity of hunting mammals with dogs. I want to pay tribute to the leaders of those groups—the Countryside Alliance, the Campaign for the Protection of the Hunted Animal and the middle way group—who fully engaged in a mature and intelligent manner on an issue on which each of them feels passionately and deeply.

During the consultation, both sides welcomed and praised a process that has been fair, open and transparent. The two principles of cruelty and utility provide the golden thread that runs from the start to the finish of the process and through the drafting of the Bill. That golden thread is strengthened by the integrity of the process, the basis of principle and the strong focus on evidence that has led me to conclusions that I hope will command the support of this House.

I will publish a Bill this afternoon but, in advance of that, let me take this opportunity to outline my reasoning behind those conclusions. There has been support from all the organisations involved for the idea of drafting legislation on the basis of evidence and the two principles of cruelty and utility. That in itself is very significant and should be noted by Opposition Members.

On a number of occasions, John Jackson, chairman of the Countryside Alliance, said, "If something is cruel, we shouldn't be doing it", and animal welfare organisations have acknowledged "utility"—the things that need to be done for such purposes as eradicating vermin or to protect livestock. Indeed, they included a list of exemptions in the deadline 2000 option that we debated in the last Parliament. The middle way group has also acknowledged the validity of these two principles.

The Bill is designed to recognise utility and prevent cruelty. Let me briefly spell out what that means. The utility test involves asking what is necessary to prevent serious damage to livestock, crops and other property or biological diversity. The cruelty test involves asking which effective methods of achieving that purpose cause the least suffering. All activities will be judged on the evidence available about whether they meet both the tests. Where an activity has no utility and involves cruelty, it will not be allowed to continue. Incontrovertible evidence shows that the activities of hare coursing and deer hunting cannot meet the two tests, so these activities will be banned. Where an activity with dogs has general utility and there is no generally less cruel method, it will be allowed. Again, incontrovertible evidence has shown that such activities as ratting and rabbiting should be allowed to continue, and they will be dealt with in the Bill.

For some activities, the evidence is less clear-cut, so I propose to set up an independent process to consider on a case-by-case basis whether particular activities involving dogs meet the two tests. That is consistent with the Burns findings. The procedure will require an application to an independent registrar showing why there is a need to undertake the proposed activity and to show that the cruelty test is satisfied. The procedure will then allow a prescribed animal welfare organisation to provide evidence as well. If the registrar is satisfied that both tests are met, he will grant registration; if not, he will refuse. In considering applications, the registrar will also have to consider whether the applicant will be able to comply with standard conditions, such as requiring hunted animals to be killed quickly and humanely when caught. Applicants may also specify conditions to which their hunting will be subject.

If either side wishes to appeal against the decision, it can do so to an independent tribunal. The tribunal will be a national body with a president at its head appointed by the Lord Chancellor. A panel will have a legally qualified chair, normally sitting with two other members—one with land management experience and the other with animal welfare experience. This is similar

[Alun Michael]

to the fair and effective way in which housing law and employment law have been dealt with to a high standard over many years. Let me stress that we will not be establishing local tribunals.

At every stage, there will be balance, fairness, clear principles, transparency and an emphasis on evidence within a process that is based on clear tests and that enables hunters and those concerned with animal welfare to present their evidence. The onus is now on the people who want to undertake any activity to show that they can meet the tests of utility and cruelty. They might find ways of changing their activity to meet the two tests. That will be a matter for them, and I am not going to prejudge the independent registrar. What is clear is that if they cannot meet the tests, the activity cannot continue. It is simple. If the activity cannot meet the tests, the activity will not happen; if it can, it will.

A number of commentators have tried to suggest that there is an intention to go beyond the issue of hunting to other country sports. I want to make it clear that there is no such intention. It is spelled out in our manifesto commitment:

"We have no intention whatsoever of placing restrictions on the sports of angling and shooting."

I am also convinced by the evidence that there is no need to control falconry within the provisions of the Bill. In falconry, dogs are used to flush out quarry, so for the avoidance of doubt the Bill will specify such activities as exempted activities.

It may be argued that the two principles of utility and cruelty, on which I am basing my proposals, do not go wide enough. The social and economic contribution of hunting will be mentioned, or the argument that ancient freedoms should not be interfered with will be made. Those are serious points and I do not take them lightly, but the key point is that no one has a right, nor should have a right, to inflict unnecessary suffering on animals. Of course we want to keep to a minimum the constraints on people's behaviour and activity, but to ask for the liberty to be cruel would be absurd. Parliament has the right to set limits and has done so in the past. That is what the Bill does. It seeks to prevent cruelty associated with hunting with dogs. Even if someone is registered, that does not allow that individual to undertake activities in such a way as to cause avoidable or unnecessary suffering. People will be registered to hunt certain species with dogs in a specific area; they will not have licence to be cruel.

Let us not forget that we have to address the issue and bring it to a sensible resolution in a way that will stand the test of time rather than being a quick fix or a temporary solution that cannot be implemented. My conclusions are based on evidence and principle, not prejudice on either side of the argument. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will see the merit of the proposals because they are fair and reasonable. They balance principle and evidence and can be enforced.

Most people want to see cruelty prevented. They also want farmers, gamekeepers and others who have to manage the land to be able to do so. There is no magic wand. There is no quick win. The basis of principle and evidence provides a golden thread that runs through the whole process and provides authority for the proposals themselves. I believe that my proposals will stand the test of time and are right. I commend them to the House.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): May I begin by thanking the right hon. Gentleman sincerely for his courtesy in letting me and my Front-Bench team have an advance copy of the statement? That was much appreciated.

When the Government's Bill comes before the House, Conservative Members, Front and Back Bench alike, will have a completely free vote, as they have in the past. When the right hon. Gentleman commends the proposals, is he expressing the collective view of Her Majesty's Government? Will all members of the Government support the Bill as it has been described by the right hon. Gentleman? Can he even vouch for the support of fellow Ministers in his Department? Do the Government intend to use the Parliament Act to force through a Bill in whatever form it leaves the House of Commons? Is not it the truth that Labour Members of Parliament are not going to let the Minister get away—golden thread or no golden thread—with anything short of the complete ban that they have been calling for over so many years?

I have questions on specific aspects of the package. Let me begin with the licensing procedure. On whom does the Minister propose that the burden of proof should rest? Will it be for the applicant to prove—if so, to what standard?—that hunting meets the two tests, or will it be for the objector to prove that there are good reasons why the licence ought not to be granted? Once the licence has been granted, will it be permanent? If not, why not? Will there be a time limit? If so, on what grounds?

The Minister made much of the two tests. Does not he accept that both terms—cruelty and utility—must inevitably involve a subjective judgment?

Will the test of utility allow arguments to be heard about the importance of hunting in supporting conservation and about the impact that a ban would have on employment, especially in remote rural areas? Who will appoint the new registrar? How will the impartiality of that Solomon-type figure be assured?

The Minister proposes major restrictions on the individual liberty of our fellow citizens, yet the one omission from his statement was any mention of the new criminal offences that I presume he intends the Bill to create. What offences does he plan to create, and which people does he intend to criminalise? Is it the Government's intention that landowners and dog owners or dog keepers should face criminal penalties as well as people who might continue to hunt in defiance of a refusal of a licence? Is that sort of new criminal law a sensible priority for a hard-pressed and overstretched police service that is having great difficulty responding to reasonable public expectations at the moment?

What lessons has the right hon. Gentleman drawn from the experience of our neighbours north of the border? He proposes that hounds should continue to be used in falconry to flush out prey. He will know that in the previous Bill on this subject the use of dogs to flush out deer from woodlands and coverts was extensively debated, so will this Bill include a similar exemption for flushing out deer, as well as foxes, mink and other species?

The point at which I found myself in greatest agreement with the Minister was when he said at the outset that this is hardly a subject that comes high on the list of priorities for people in this country. Does not the Government's decision to give such a high priority to this statement and the proposed legislation indicate what an absurd sense of priority is possessing Ministers? Let us contemplate this afternoon's business: surely it is crazy that the Government should place a statement on hunting with hounds ahead of a statement on the crisis in our public examinations system. We know from the Government that—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not refer to the next statement. We will deal with that when we come to it.

Mr. Lidington: I accept your correction, Mr. Speaker. The Government, including the right hon. Gentleman's Department, have made it clear that they can find no time in their programme for a Bill to strengthen controls on illegal meat imports or to debate today's compelling report on rural poverty from the Countryside Agency, yet they can spare scarce parliamentary and ministerial time to debate a Bill on hunting at a time when our public services are in crisis. The Minister may hope that, for a while, his statement will distract the attention of his Back-Bench colleagues, but one thing is certain: this statement and this Bill have nothing whatever to do with the genuine priorities of the British people.

Alun Michael: May I start by dealing with one of the most absurd elements in the hon. Gentleman's comments? The Bill will come before the House because Members have voted time and again to introduce legislation, and I point out also that Members have turned up in large numbers to vote against legislation, so those on both sides of the House have engaged with the issue and made it a priority. This is a Government Bill, introduced to help Parliament to resolve the issue.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the issue of the Parliament Act. I dealt with that in March, and made the point that we hope that it will not be necessary for that Act to be applied, as we hope that people will engage with sensible proposals that will command the support of the House and, indeed, of another place. I hope to be able to persuade Labour Members, about whose views the hon. Gentleman asked, of the effectiveness of the legislation in dealing with the issue of cruelty associated with hunting.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of specific questions. It will be for the applicant to show that he has satisfied the two tests before registering for any activity, and a designated animal welfare organisation will have the opportunity to show evidence to the contrary. We envisage that permission will be granted for three years, after which a renewal can be applied for. The whole point of the two tests will be set out clearly and defined in the Bill, which I look forward to debating on Second Reading and subsequently. The two tests will be applied to the evidence that is offered, and utility will be carefully defined in the Bill, as I suggested in my statement.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the effect on employment. The evidence is that generally it would be minimal, but of course there could be an effect on individuals who, as in any question of employment, would have the sympathy and support of the Government and the House.

The hon. Gentleman asked about appointments. There are procedures for making sure that people appointed to any body with a regulatory function are appropriate and able to deal with the questions independently. The tribunal will be dealt with under the powers of the Lord Chancellor.

The hon. Gentleman asked about liberty. Surely he is not asking for the liberty to be cruel; people would be criminalised only if they broke the law.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that there should be simple tests. We will put simple tests in place to establish whether the law has been broken. We have been told that these are law-abiding people. In that case, I am sure that they will obey the law, as decided by Parliament. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have discussed enforcement with police at the most senior level, and my proposals are clearly workable.

There is one mischief about which many Opposition Members write to me—the problems that arise from illegal hare coursing. The Bill will tackle that by giving powers to the police to enable them to deal with illegal hare coursing, which they are currently unable to do.

On some of the particulars, I suggest that the hon. Gentleman wait to see the details of the Bill. There will be an opportunity to debate them on Second Reading and subsequently, so I do not want take up too much of the House's time now. However, as I said at the outset, we are taking the time to deal with this issue because, year after year, hon. Members have demonstrated that they believe that it has to be dealt with. In our manifesto, the Government indicated that we would enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the issue. I hope that the Bill that I will publish later today will indeed enable Parliament to do so on the basis of principle and evidence.

Andrew George (St. Ives): I, too, am grateful to the Minister for his usual courtesy in providing an advance copy of his statement.

The Minister will be aware that the Liberal Democrats have a party policy on the issue that favours a ban, but of course we would allow a free vote, to satisfy a range of views within the parliamentary party, all of which are cherished. On the basis of his statement, I can give the proposed legislation a cautious welcome, but much will depend on the Bill's capacity to set utility and cruelty thresholds at a meaningful, rather than synthetically low, level.

Livestock farmers want to be reassured that the Government have considered the impact of the proposed legislation on their current arrangements for the efficient removal of fallen livestock from farmsteads. The Government must take account of the need for an efficient method of fallen livestock removal, especially in view of their intention to ban on-farm burial in February.

Farmers will not want to find their activities outlawed by a Bill, especially when efficient and humane methods of on-farm pest control exist. I gave the Minister an example of one of my cousins who has a poultry farm and found an ingenious and humane method of dealing with pests.

[Andrew George]

The Minister said that he favours a ban on hare coursing and deer hunting, but will he ensure that, before the Bill is enacted, a proper deer management and culling plan is in place on Exmoor to avoid the predictable mayhem that would ensue in the area? If he favours banning hare coursing and deer hunting, what conclusion has he reached on the utility and cruelty case for pre-season cub hunting, which is undertaken mainly on the basis of dog training?

If the Minister favours the least cruel method, what is his view of the use of dogs that are not capable of efficient pursuit but are bred to prolong the chase? Above all, does he agree that there are many more important matters that affect country folk—for example, the future of farming and rural housing—than hunting and that the Government are concentrating a disproportionate amount of parliamentary time on those who happen to get their kicks out of chasing wild animals around the countryside?

Alun Michael: To take the last point first, I agree that many more important issues affect the countryside. It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman did not mention post offices, about which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made an announcement yesterday. She outlined the investment that the Government are making in preserving rural post offices. We are also taking steps to strengthen the rural economy, and to deal with rural housing and many other issues that are far more important than the subject of the statement. However, the matter must be tackled. It is important and hon. Members have made it clear that they want it to be resolved.

I am glad that the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) acknowledged that all views exist in his party and that the Liberal Democrats, like Labour Members and Conservative Members, will have a free vote.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned fallen livestock. There is a need to end on-farm burial because of its environmental impact and the European regulations. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), continues to hold discussions with the industry on the best way to deal with that.

The hon. Gentleman referred to Exmoor, and I acknowledge that there is a specific culture that relates to deer on Exmoor. I have spent time there and met all the groups to understand the reasoning behind their defence of hunting. The evidence is conclusive and that is why I believe it must be banned. However, I am prepared to spend time considering the consequences for the health and continuation of the deer herd on Exmoor, and to engage with those of all parties who have an interest in that as well as those who represent people in the Exmoor area.

Mr. Michael Foster (Worcester): From the evidence that my right hon. Friend has read, does he envisage that foxhunting in traditional areas such as Worcestershire and Gloucestershire will pass the utility and cruelty test? For hon. Members with short-term memory lapses, will he restate the commitment that he made to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about the possible use of the Parliament Act?

Alun Michael: I confirm that I made the position clear on the Parliament Act in March. I made two points. I said that the Government are committed to enabling Parliament to reach a conclusion on the subject and that the Parliament Act would be available in the event of conflict between the two Houses.

I also made it clear that we want to get legislation before the House and the other place that will command support on all sides because it is fair, objective and based on principles, and because it deals with the issue of cruelty in relation to hunting with dogs. It is our preference that, in considering legislation that comes from this House, the other place should support it and seek to improve it, rather than seeking to obstruct it. I hope that such legislation will be dealt with in that way.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): These proposals, with all their fatuous bureaucracy, truly represent the low point of Labour's third way. What representations has the Minister received from police organisations about whether the proposals are workable and enforceable? If they are thought not to be, will not they discredit the rule of law and divert scarce police resources from the real war on crime that his Government make so much of, while doing absolutely nothing for animal welfare?

Alun Michael: It is an odd suggestion that we have reached a low point by basing legislation on principle. The Bill is based on two clear principles: that of eradicating cruelty and that of allowing the utility necessary for land managers to undertake their work. I said in response to an earlier question that I had consulted the police at the highest level. I am satisfied that the measures will not only be enforceable but will make life easier for the police—for example, in enforcing the law in respect of illegal hare coursing, which causes a massive nuisance in some parts of the country. Indeed, many Conservative Members have asked me to take action on it. I am satisfied that the Bill will improve the situation and that it will be simple and straightforward to enforce.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I recognise the amount of work that my right hon. Friend has done on this issue, but does he not realise that it should not be the subject of a compromise? Those of us who believe strongly that hunting with dogs is totally inappropriate and should be banned hope that—with our majority in the House of Commons—that can now be done, and many of us believe that it should have been done in the last Parliament.

Alun Michael: I have not put forward a compromise—or a fudge, as it has been described by some. I have put forward proposals, as my hon. Friend will see when the Bill is published, that are based on principles and on evidential tests, and I hope that they will command the support of the House. There is a tendency for people to say either that we should leave things as they are, or that we should have a complete

ban. That approach is too simplistic. *[Interruption.]* I ask my hon. Friends to listen to this point. The Bill that was introduced on the last occasion, which was drafted by Deadline 2000, did not propose a simple blanket ban. It recognised utility, and listed some activities that could continue. We should be careful not to ban activities unless they fail the two tests of utility and cruelty. I promise my hon. Friend that the Bill that I will publish this afternoon deals with the issue of cruelty.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Cannot the Minister see that even his statement is biased and prejudicial? Surely the burden of proof in any licensing system should be with the licensor in turning down an application, rather than with hunting people having to justify their requirement for a licence every time they apply for one.

Alun Michael: Clearly, I disagree with that. If people want to undertake these activities with dogs, they will have to show that there is utility, that they have a reason for doing it and that no cruelty is involved. They will have to show that any suffering involved will be kept to a minimum unless there are no alternatives for dealing with land management issues. That is a simple and straightforward matter of principle.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this botched attempt to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds is unacceptable to many Members of the House of Commons? Will he make it clear to me that the Bill that he is publishing has been drafted in such a way as to allow hon. Members to amend it to bring about a complete ban? Will he also reiterate his assurance to me that, if the House votes in that way, a complete ban will be forced through Parliament—if need be, under the Parliament Act?

Alun Michael: I shall not repeat what I said to my right hon. Friend in March because that stands, but I ask him to consider whether he wants to outlaw ratting, for example, which seems to be the implication of his remarks. He has not seen the Bill as yet. When he reads it, he will see that it deals with the issue of cruelty. Surely cruelty should be foremost in the minds of Members of the House, and I shall seek to persuade my right hon. and hon. Friends that what I have drafted and introduced will indeed deal with that issue.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): What is the substance of the evidence that the Minister saw and which Lord Burns and his inquiry team did not?

Alun Michael: First, the conclusions of the Burns report and the evidence available to Lord Burns were available to me as my starting point. Secondly, the evidence that I saw will be available in the Library. Thirdly, I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman, before asking his question, took the trouble to consider the videos of the evidence and the discussions from the three days of public hearings in Portcullis House, which involved all three main campaigning organisations. I wrote to every Member of the House to point out their availability to all. That information is in the public domain and it is transparent. The process, I suggest, should be respected, as it is clearly respected by all three main organisations.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I thank the Minister for the time that he has put into this very divisive issue; I know that the job has been difficult for him. I welcome the fact that he has clearly changed his mind to accept what some of us—at least one or two of us—on this side of the House have said about a complete ban on hunting being wrong and unacceptable. Will he clarify this for me: if the Bill that he is introducing is a Government Bill, on which there will be a free vote, how can he possibly allow the Parliament Act to be used if it is amended?

Alun Michael: I do not think that I understand the final point. The Bill is a Government Bill, and I am acting on the Government's behalf in making proposals to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the issue. Of course, if a Bill were passed by the House and blocked by another place, it would be reintroduced, as we have indicated. It would be not for us but for Parliament to decide whether the Parliament Act applied. Indeed, it is a matter for you, Mr. Speaker, to decide whether the Parliament Act applies in any particular circumstances.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I have reservations about banning any of the activities covered by the Minister's statement, but does he understand that, because he put animal welfare at the centre of his remarks, the middle way group will have to give his proposals a cautious welcome? Does he also understand, however, that many will be concerned that, used improperly, those powers could lead to the banning of hunting through the back door? Is he open to suggestions on how the utility test could be modified to ensure that that does not happen?

Alun Michael: The question will be straightforward for any aspect of hunting that is not either accepted or banned outright—that is, it can take place only if it satisfies the two tests. First, there must be a genuine utility in it and it must be useful. Of course, that is the ground on which hunting has been defended over time. Secondly, it must satisfy the cruelty test. In other words, if it is cruel, it cannot be undertaken. So, the two tests are very clear and I believe that they will be applied clearly and successfully.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): May I commend my right hon. Friend for his political adroitness and unfailing courtesy during a process that many would consider to be the political equivalent of getting the black spot from Blind Pew? I say to him in all friendliness that he will be caught like piggy in the middle and I suspect that Parliament will indulge in a bit of pig sticking, which is a revolting pursuit when it involves either pigs or Ministers. Will he give the House an absolute assurance that the Bill is amendable—I assume it must be—and that there will be a free vote at every stage of its consideration?

Alun Michael: I can confirm both those points. The Bill, of course, is amendable and it will be dealt with on a free vote. That does not mean that I am relaxed about

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whether it should be amended, and I shall seek to persuade colleagues that it is correctly judged and that it deals precisely with the issues, not least that of cruelty, which is the one that concerns my hon. Friend.

I invite colleagues to read the Bill in the light of this question: what is the concern and why has hunting been such an issue for Parliament over many years? The answer, I suggest, is that Members of the House are not happy with the cruelty that is associated with hunting. If they read the legislation and see that it deals with cruelty, but does so in a way that allows land managers to do what they need to do to continue with their livelihood and activities, I suggest that we will have the balance right. If I get shouted at from both sides for trying to get it right, I shall take that as a slightly curious form of support.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Earlier this morning I was able to talk to hunt followers at a meet in my constituency, and to discuss the Minister's comments, which had already been leaked ahead of his statement. They considered those comments draconian, unnecessary and intrusive. Nevertheless, if the Minister genuinely proposes to introduce legislation that is based on "cruelty and utility" and if those criteria are fairly and objectively met, they will have no problem with it because, in so many parts of the country, hunting is not cruel and does serve a utilitarian purpose.

Is the Minister aware, however, that it is not just hunting that is on the line, but his integrity and the integrity of the Government in pursuing those two requirements and ensuring that they are fairly met?

Alun Michael: That was another absurd contribution. The hon. Gentleman has listened to people's comments on a Bill that they have not seen and he has not seen. I suggest that he was indulging in an exercise in prejudice this morning.

The hon. Gentleman should not believe claims that there have been leaks in advance. The fact is that we have engaged in an open and transparent process. I set out the principles of the Bill—the principles of utility and cruelty—in my statement to the House on 21 March. The evidence we have heard has been available on a website, on video and in transcripts throughout. It is not surprising that people may have looked at the evidence and reached conclusions on the nature of the proposals I would present; but I have presented my proposals in a statement to the House first, and will subsequently present them to the House in a Bill.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I welcome the statement and I welcome the Bill, to the extent that it can be amended. In an earlier statement, however, my right hon. Friend said that Ministers would be given a free vote on this issue. Is that still the case?

Alun Michael: It is a free-vote issue. A Government Bill is being presented to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the issue. I will seek to persuade colleagues to support the Bill, because I believe it to be right. I am happy to talk to them long into the night if necessary to explain why it will work, why it will be fair and why it will be right.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I am curious about whether the register system will work. Surely one side or the other will inevitably appeal. I am also curious about how the Minister will deal with someone out rabbiting whose greyhound chases a hare. How will he handle such enforcement issues?

Alun Michael: Such casual incidents would certainly not be caught by the Act. If the hon. Gentleman reads the report of the Committee stage of the previous Bill, he will see that spurious points of that kind were raised fairly repetitiously then.

The point is that the registrar and the tribunal will have to deal with the evidence that comes before them in the light of criteria established in legislation by the House. Those principles will be very clear. An applicant will have to demonstrate utility, and show that he or she could not have reached the same end without causing suffering. Applicants will have to satisfy those two criteria: it is as simple as that. If they satisfy the criteria, they will be able to undertake the activity; if they cannot satisfy them, they will not.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I regret to tell my right hon. Friend that most of my constituents who have been campaigning for a total ban on hunting with dogs well before the issue came before the House would have regarded his golden thread as somewhat pinchbeck if there had been no opportunity for the Bill to be amended so that the House could yet again debate the issue of a total ban. May I say that I am grateful to him for reiterating that if the House does return the result it has returned so many times in the past, he will exercise the Parliament Act?

Alun Michael: I ask my hon. Friend to consider this question: did she believe that she was voting for a total ban when she voted for the Deadline 2000 option—as I believe she did—in the previous Parliament? In fact, that option did not constitute a total ban. Some activities were allowed to continue because it was felt that they had utility and should not be banned. The Bill that I have introduced is not some form of shopping list. It enshrines the principles of utility and of eradicating cruelty. I hope that those two principles will command my hon. Friend's support, and that the Bill, which I shall publish later today, will do the same.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does not the right hon. Gentleman understand that there is no distinction of principle between shooting, hunting and angling? They are, in substance, the same, and in a free society individuals should be entitled to participate in all of them. Furthermore, it is the business of this House to protect minorities, not to trample on their rights. In a free society, the golden thread should be the liberty of the individual, not the tyranny of the majority.

Alun Michael: I am tempted to ask whether there is a doctor in the House. The right hon. and learned Gentleman should try to keep his temper, because then

he would be able to deal coolly and objectively with the principles that I am putting to this House. He is one of those who pressed me to deal with illegal hare coursing. This Bill will do that, and will do so according to the criteria that he suggested in a letter to me. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made himself absurd.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My right hon. Friend said that his proposition would settle the matter, but on reflection he must admit that, if there is a shabby compromise or a golden fudge, this issue will return time and again. This Parliament has a Labour majority of 160-odd. Some 400 Labour Members stood firm before, and if the third way is introduced, they will do so again. Let us get on with it and settle the matter.

Alun Michael: I do not expect that a statement from me will be sufficient to satisfy Labour Members; they will have to look at the legislation. I believe that they—that includes my hon. Friend—are reasonable and sensible people who will ask—*[Interruption.]* Well, Conservative Members may not agree, but I believe that to be true. I believe that my hon. Friend and other Labour Members will do me the favour of looking at the Bill and asking whether it deals with the issue of cruelty. I can assure them that it does, and that there is no fudge in it, be it golden fudge or dark fudge. My hon. Friend will have to visit those parts of the country where fudge is produced because he will not find it in my statement or in the Bill.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Nowhere in the admirable Burns report, nor in the excellently conducted hearings in Portcullis House—I pay tribute to the Minister for the way in which he chaired them—was any cruelty proved. It is therefore a mystery to us why the Bill should be predicated on such a basis. A total of 407,000 people marched peacefully in London to express their anxieties about the havoc wreaked on the countryside by this Government. I want the Minister to know that hunting will fight this provision, and hunting will be right.

Alun Michael: We treated with courtesy the people who marched through London a few weeks ago. They sent a variety of messages about the needs of the countryside, however, and there was a degree of muddle in that regard. Nevertheless, we responded to them with respect. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges the value of the Burns report. It provided not a conclusion on recommendations for legislation, but a strong basis of evidence, on which I have built through the evidence that I have taken.

On cruelty, the activity of hare coursing has no utility. The intention is to test the speed and agility of the dogs, not to protect livestock or anything like that. That is why it can be concluded that that activity cannot be allowed, as it does not pass the cruelty test.

I have looked carefully at all the evidence in connection with the hunting of deer. It does not satisfy either the utility or the cruelty test, and that is why it is banned. The proposed process will allow us to test whether cruelty occurs, and that is surely fair and reasonable. If the hon. Gentleman agrees that we should not do things that are cruel, he must be prepared to allow hunting to be tested against the evidence.

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): I thank my right hon. Friend for his efforts to find a way forward on this matter, and for the early opportunity that the House will have to decide how it should be resolved. The Bill will be the starting point, but will he explain whether it will contain a presumption against the use of dogs to cull foxes? If not, will not the Bill be just another version of the middle way proposal? A BBC online poll this morning showed that 75 per cent. of respondents were against that option.

Alun Michael: There is a significant difference between the Bill and the middle way proposal, which I could not accept because it licensed cruelty—that is, it would have allowed cruelty on the part of those licensed to undertake the activity. I do not believe that to be right.

The starting point is that people wishing to undertake an activity with dogs will first have to show utility—that there is a reason, purpose or outcome worth pursuing, against the tests that my hon. Friend will see in the Bill when it is published later today. Secondly, they will have to show that the activity is not cruel—that there is no other way of dealing with the mischief that is less likely to cause suffering. I think that that proposal gets the balance right, as it will be for the applicant to show that both those tests are met.

There is a third reason why the Bill is not another version of the middle way. Even if an activity is allowed, it will have to be undertaken in a way that is not cruel. An automatic condition of any registration is that any activity undertaken as a result of the registration will have to be undertaken in a way that is not cruel. That is a very important principle, and it is built into the Bill.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Does the Minister accept that there are particular issues associated with hunting in Wales? They have to do with the continued viability of upland farming, and with the difficulties that the regulation of hunting on foot—and especially its possible abolition by the back door—could cause rural communities. The hunting issue in Scotland is to be decided by the Scottish Assembly, and I am informed that hunting in Northern Ireland will be dealt with by the Northern Ireland Assembly. Will the Minister say why the Welsh Assembly is not looking at the matter?

In addition, will the independent tribunal be a national Welsh body or a national English body, or is the Minister suggesting that it will be a supranational body covering both England and Wales?

Alun Michael: The Welsh Assembly has had an opportunity to consider the matter and one of its Committees undertook some hearings before providing its views. I wrote to all members of the Assembly, as well to everyone in this House and another place, inviting them to provide evidence and their views on the matter before I considered the legislation that I would bring forward. If there are circumstances that justify activity in a particular area, as the hon. Gentleman has described, it will be for the registrar and the tribunal to

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be satisfied that the tests of utility and cruelty have been met. I can confirm that the registrar and tribunal will be national and will deal with the matter in England and Wales.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): My right hon. Friend served on the Standing Committee considering the Bill brought forward in 2000. He will therefore know that that Bill, had it reached the statute book, would have banned the hunting with dogs of foxes, deer, mink and hare. My constituents will not be able to understand why, if the Bill is to ban hunting with dogs of hare and deer, it cannot also ban the hunting of foxes? I want the decision to be taken not by tribunal but by the House of Commons.

Alun Michael: I have said that the previous legislation was designed in a different way, listing activities that could not be undertaken. I have sought to put in the Bill the basic principles of utility and cruelty that we debated at great length in Committee and on the Floor of the House on the previous occasion. The purpose is to eradicate cruelty. That is the mischief that we should be addressing, and the Bill will address it.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Is the Minister aware that the small minority on this side of the House who deplore hunting with hounds have been appalled at the way in which a Government who claim to be a Government of principle have used every device and trick for the past five years to prevent the House of Commons from coming to a decision on the matter. What is the point of having a democratic Parliament if Members are not allowed to come to a decision on an issue that they believe to be fundamental to a civilised society?

Alun Michael: I have made it clear that the first point about the Bill is that it deals with the principles. It starts from the point of principle. The hon. Gentleman is quite right that the Government pride themselves on applying principles. Secondly, it is for the House to take a decision. I have a responsibility to bring forward proposals to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the issue. I have sought to do that and I shall also seek to persuade the hon. Gentleman as well as other right hon. and hon. Members that I have got it right.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Is it not usually the case that he who tries to ride two horses with one golden thread falls through the middle and gets trampled by both sides? Will not the Bill be seen outside for what it really is—a sell-out on the main question of banning the hunting of foxes with dogs?

Alun Michael: The Bill will be seen in that way only if it is misrepresented, and I hope that it will not be misrepresented by anyone in the House. The Bill is based on principle rather than prejudice. It provides a framework that allows those principles to be applied in any particular circumstances. I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about cruelty. I invite him to look at the Bill once it is published and I hope that he will be satisfied that it deals with the problem of cruelty.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): The Minister has labelled thousands of my constituents as cruel, as they follow a hunt—the Devon and Somerset stag hounds or the Quantock stag hounds. He will not be thanked or respected for that. Thousands of my constituents will lose their liberty and many hundreds of them will lose their livelihood. Given the social and economic impact of the Minister's decision to ban stag hunting, what action will he take to ensure that those in my constituency are helped?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman needs to ask himself whether he considers it right for people to have the liberty to be cruel. Surely not. The House has previously said that that is not a liberty that it can support. I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at the evidence and at the Bill. He will see that it tests any activity against the two principles of whether there is good reason for undertaking the activity and whether cruelty is involved. It is against those two tests that I have looked at the evidence on deer hunting and stag hunting and reached a conclusion that I believe to be grounded firmly in the evidence.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to Britain's 2 million-plus coarse anglers who have steadfastly refused to be conned or hoodwinked by the hunt lobby and their supporters on the Opposition Benches into supporting the doomed cause of hunting with hounds? Will he confirm that not only are field sports such as angling and shooting safe with the Government but they are being enhanced and supported as never before?

Alun Michael: I am happy, as always, to support my hon. Friend in his passionate support for angling and the country sport of shooting.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I speak in a personal capacity and as joint chair of the all-party middle way group. Does the Minister accept that the rhetoric about a ban ignores the fact that the Scottish Parliament proved the impracticality of legislating for a ban? Does he agree that a regulatory solution would provide us with the best chance of balancing animal welfare considerations with civil liberties as long as people stick to the facts from the three-day hearing, where the Countryside Alliance, Countdown to a Ban and the middle way group found much common ground?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that more common ground than might have been expected emerged from the hearings. When people who feel passionately about different views get into a room together, a lot can be learned if they are intelligent and willing to listen to each other. We all learned a great deal from those hearings.

The most important thing about the proposals that I have announced is that they are based on principle, not on drawing a line arbitrarily. They are based on principle and on testing the evidence against those principles.

Tomlinson Inquiry

4.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): With permission, I would like to make a statement on the inquiry into A-level standards.

My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris), invited Mike Tomlinson to carry out an independent inquiry into the concerns raised in September by headteachers' representatives and some examiners about the grading of students' work in this year's AS and A2-level examinations.

I would like to begin by thanking Mike Tomlinson for the substantial work that he has done. We all owe him a debt of gratitude.

The initial inquiry investigated allegations about the setting of standards for A-level grades this year, in particular, ensuring that the conversion from marks to grades was determined according to proper standards and procedures. Mr. Tomlinson's report of 27 September identified weaknesses in the way that the exams had been assessed this year and recommended a process of regrading. The outcomes of the regrading process were announced to Parliament on 15 October.

Mr. Tomlinson's final report, which is published today, states in paragraph 2:

"I remain convinced that my interim report and the subsequent review of grade boundaries dealt effectively with the major concerns and allegations about manipulation of the grading process."

That is a strong statement which I wholeheartedly endorse, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley for setting in motion the important process that has given rise to that statement, which gives confidence.

In paragraph 3 of the report published today, Mr. Tomlinson goes on to say:

"Action by the QCA and the other regulatory bodies on my earlier recommendations, allied to further proposals made in this final report will, in my view, secure the standards and integrity of next year's examinations."

Again, I endorse that view and express my confidence in the commitment of Sir Anthony Greener and Ken Boston at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, working with my Department, to implement the necessary steps set out by Mr. Tomlinson.

I turn first to actions to secure the 2003 examinations. The QCA has already followed the recommendations given in Mr. Tomlinson's first report, working together with the examination boards, the regulatory authorities in Wales and Northern Ireland and the headteacher associations. As a further short-term measure to help restore confidence in the system, Mike Tomlinson has recommended that, for the January and summer 2003 examinations only, an appropriately qualified individual should observe and report publicly to the QCA board on the awarding process.

I agree with that recommendation and believe that Mr. Tomlinson is best qualified to fill that role. Therefore, after discussion with the QCA, I have invited Mr. Tomlinson to carry out that responsibility and I am pleased to say that he has accepted.

I have also accepted Mr. Tomlinson's other short-term recommendations, set out in paragraph 69 of his report, for further strengthening of the system for 2003. In addition, I have received from the QCA separate advice on the extra resources needed to deliver the 2003 exams securely. I can announce today that I am prepared to make available up to £6 million once detailed costing work has been completed by the QCA. That money will mainly be spent on steps to ensure that the necessary markers can be recruited.

Separately, the QCA has advised the Government that in order to ensure timely delivery of English results at both GCSE and AS/A2-level in summer 2003, the GCSE English literature examination should be moved prior to the 26 May bank holiday, to relieve pressure on markers. The Government have accepted that recommendation for this year only.

The second major part of Mr. Tomlinson's recommendations are his medium-term recommendations, to which I now turn. Mr. Tomlinson has gone about his task thoroughly and it follows extensive consultation. His proposals are designed to ensure maintenance of the A-level standard in future years.

Mr. Tomlinson's first recommendation is for the systematic reform of the administrative requirements for the AS and A2 examinations, in order to reduce the demands placed on schools and colleges by the awarding bodies' differing requirements and practices. I strongly agree with that recommendation, and I have asked the QCA to take that forward urgently with the awarding bodies.

Secondly, Mr. Tomlinson calls for the professionalisation of examining, to include high-quality training for examiners and examination officers, linked to career development. We welcome those suggestions and will take them forward jointly with the QCA.

Thirdly, Mr. Tomlinson recommends clarifying and making more transparent the relationships between my Department, the QCA and the awarding bodies, through a memorandum of understanding. I accept that recommendation, and can tell the House that work is in hand to draw up just such a memorandum. In addition, I will consider carefully the points made at paragraph 96 of his report, about the varied responsibilities of the QCA and how they can best be addressed.

Fourthly, Mr. Tomlinson's report calls for arrangements to ensure and reinforce confidence that standards over time are being safeguarded. He recommends that the QCA should establish an independent committee, whose role would be to review and, if necessary, advise publicly on whether standards are being maintained. The Government agree and will put that into effect.

Fifthly, Mr. Tomlinson recommends simplification to the rules governing resits and "cashing-in" of AS units. I accept that recommendation and I am asking the QCA to consider that urgently with the awarding bodies and with other partners.

Sixthly, the report recommends changes to the timetable for publication of A-level results, to give more time for marking and awarding. We will consult the QCA and other interests concerned, in particular university interests, colleges and schools, to see whether such a desirable change can be achieved.

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

Finally in the medium term, Mr. Tomlinson recommends increasing the use of information and communications technology in the administration and marking of public examinations and eventually in the examination process. We agree that this issue needs to be addressed, and I am asking the QCA to put forward fully costed options, which I will consider positively.

In the longer term, Mr. Tomlinson has identified two further issues for consideration. The first is the decoupling of AS and A2 examinations, to create two free-standing qualifications as part of the 14-to-19 policy developments. Mr. Tomlinson suggests that consideration should be given at the same time to other changes in the design of A-level assessment. We agree that these issues are important, and we will consider them as part of the 14-to-19 reforms in the next steps document on this matter to be published early in the new year.

Secondly, Mr. Tomlinson calls for further work on the practicality of introducing a post-qualifications admission system for entry to higher education. Together with the QCA, universities, colleges and schools, we will explore the practicality of moving to such a system.

The AS/A2 examination is a fundamentally sound system. It will become a better system as a result of Mr. Tomlinson's work. But, as he says,

"The standard has not been lowered if an increased proportion of students meet it as a consequence of improved teaching and hard work by students".

I invite hon. Members on both sides of the House to join me today in paying tribute to Mike Tomlinson's first class work in carrying through the issues that now need to be tackled, and I today commit the Government to carrying through the recommendations of his report.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I thank the Secretary of State for the early sight of his statement and I echo his thanks to Mike Tomlinson and his team for their work in preparing the two reports that he has produced.

This summer's A-level fiasco was the worst crisis in the history of public exams in this country. Tens of thousands of young people and their parents were left uncertain about the A-level marks awarded for a period of weeks. Those students and their parents owe a vote of thanks to the head teachers who insisted, against the assurances of those running the exam system, that there was indeed something fishy going on.

What today's announcement needs to mark is a fresh start for the exam system. The Tomlinson report and the Secretary of State's response will be judged against five criteria. Has the exam system been freed from the suspicion of political interference? Will exam standards be maintained over time? Will the marking system cope with the number of exams? Are young people being asked to take too many exams? Does the exam system work efficiently with the university admissions system? Today's report and the Secretary of State's response meet some of those tests, but not all of them; and will therefore, sadly, fail to give schools and their pupils the exam system that they deserve.

Some of the Tomlinson findings are sensible, and I am glad that the Secretary of State is acting on them. First, I welcome the announcement that he will set up an independent committee to advise on whether standards are being maintained year by year. We called for an independent inquiry into this subject back in August, and the Minister for School Standards was particularly diligent in repeatedly rejecting that idea. Today, the Secretary of State has rejected the Government's previous policy. That is a welcome U-turn, and we look forward to many more from him.

Secondly, I urge the right hon. Gentleman to be more positive in welcoming Tomlinson's desire to separate the AS and A2 exams, as a first step towards a serious review of exams post-GCSE and, indeed, including GCSE. Again, we have been calling for that review and a cut in the number of exams for some time, and the Government have so far rejected it. I do not expect the full damascene conversion yet, but an indication that he is turning towards the light would be welcome today.

Thirdly, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm whether running the current system effectively would take an additional 50,000 examiners? That was one of the figures mentioned at the press conference this morning. If so, does he acknowledge that radical surgery is required to keep the system running efficiently?

Fourthly, will the right hon. Gentleman indicate what his plans are on changing the timing of the exams or the university year? Does he recognise that taking and marking A-levels earlier in the school year would allow the university admissions process to be smoother, more considered and less stressful for all concerned?

Fifthly and most importantly, I urge the right hon. Gentleman to reject Tomlinson's view that no radical change is needed in the relationship between the QCA and the Government. A watchdog whose chairman can be summarily fired by a Minister is a watchdog with no real teeth. The suspicion that exam results are being manipulated for ministerial convenience is not only damaging for the exam system, but insulting to hundreds of thousands of young people who work hard on those exams.

The marks must be not only independent and fair; they must be seen to be independent and fair, so the QCA itself must be independent. Will the Secretary of State commit himself to that goal? He has a huge task to restore confidence in our exams. That will take more than a short-term fix. Everyone who will take A-levels in the next few years deserves a simpler, better and fairer system. The shambles of this summer must never be repeated.

Mr. Clarke: Well, I completely agree with one thing that the hon. Gentleman said: there is a need to mark a fresh start in this approach. Unfortunately, his statement simply did not do that and took a series of misleading and wrong paths. Let me deal with the points of substance.

The first and most important thing that we have to do—it was the core of Mr. Tomlinson's recommendations—is to establish stability in our examinations system. Stability is very important for the immediate future. Pupils, teachers and the parents of those starting or contemplating AS and A2 exams should know that we will retain AS and A2-levels for the

foreseeable future. Although we will continue to debate future improvements in the context of our Green Paper on education for 14 to 19-year-olds, including the issues that the hon. Gentleman raises, it is important for us to state that no change will be made without timely and effective consultation and consensus across the education system.

Our immediate priority—I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not share it—must be to rebuild confidence in the system and ensure that this year's problems are not repeated. I repeat that Mr. Tomlinson's report provides a very sound basis for ensuring that they are not.

Mr. Tomlinson has said that a period of about five years needs to elapse before we begin to make substantive changes in these areas, for precisely the reason that I have just given. It is therefore striking that the Opposition spokesman should call for immediate changes in the AS and A2 examination systems, immediate changes in timings in relation to the university year, immediate changes in the burden of school assessment, and immediate changes in terms of the process at issue with universities—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ashford says from a sedentary position that he did not say that, but his statement specifically called for precisely those things. That is a key point for him to identify.

The Leader of the Opposition said that A-levels were not worth the paper on which they were written. The Opposition education spokesman needs to make his party's position absolutely clear. A straight choice exists: join us in putting stability and confidence into our examination system; or pursue what he calls a radical review by tearing it all up, starting again, and demolishing the confidence that people up and down the country have, and should have, in our education system.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): May I begin by thanking the Secretary of State for an advance copy of his statement? I also join the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) in thanking Mike Tomlinson for his report; indeed, I thank him for both his reports. It is interesting that his recommendation in paragraph 69 was the first on which action was taken—I am sure that that was the swiftest action on a recommendation ever. It is welcome that Mike Tomlinson will do that job, too, over the next 18 months, and we are grateful to the Secretary of State for that.

There are many reasons for us to be grateful for the Tomlinson report. The administration of three different boards, in which Mike Tomlinson has clearly identified enormous room for errors, must be sorted out immediately—I hope that the Secretary of State did not have a long time scale in mind when he responded to the hon. Member for Ashford. I recommend that the Secretary of State look to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service to perform that role. All the exam boards have assured me that they do not want to be involved with the entry and administrative system, and giving that role to UCAS, for example, would be a sensible way forward.

I also urge the Secretary of State to introduce an individual tracking system for every student's work during the process, as one of the most frustrating elements this year was that no one could find out where they were within the system and how to deal with it. We welcome post-A-level entry to university, which is a sensible way forward. We also support the decoupling of AS and A2 examinations, and the ending of commercial conflicts of interest within the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, an element hidden in the report but a very important one. We recognise, too, that AS and A2 results should not be compared directly with the old A-levels. That was at the root of one of the problems.

We particularly welcome the call for an end to annual arguments about grade inflation, as paranoia rather than wrongdoing was at the root of this year's fiasco. Far from putting robust new structures in place, however, the report simply asks the Government, the QCA and the boards to hatch a way of working that suits them best. Schools, employers and universities will not be involved. What is the point of a memorandum of understanding between the Department for Education and Skills and the QCA when the Secretary of State retains the power to hire and fire the chief executive and to second members of his Department to senior QCA positions? Surely the Secretary of State should order the break-up of the QCA and establish an independent examination regulator, with that sole task, which would be directly accountable to Parliament and not to his Department.

Today's statement does not go far enough in preventing any repetition of this year's events. Changes made to grade boundaries should be published as a matter of course, not hidden, as they have been this year. Examiners from other boards should be present during the awarding process to make it less incestuous. Adjusting candidates' grades without reference to their scripts—which was identified as a problem by Nick Tate, of the then School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, in 1997—should be ruled out. Will the Secretary of State rule out that practice now?

Where in the statement is there any satisfaction for the thousands of students robbed of their legitimate grades this summer? The report says that any remaining concerns are being "dealt with". Peter Chapman, the head of the Knights Templar school, does not think that they are being dealt with, and Mike Tomlinson agrees. In a recent letter to the head teacher, Mr. Tomlinson says:

> "I am not at all surprised by your continuing pursuit of the above concerns . . . I have to be honest and say I cannot personally see anything that can be done".

That is an outrageous statement to make about examination grades for this year. Peter Chapman's psychology students are now preparing for their resits in January, but they have had their scripts back from the examination board without a single mark on them. There is nothing to show where they went wrong, and there is nothing in the statement that will sort that out.

Will the Secretary of House tell the House whether an AS grade from January 2003 will be half an A-level? Will it have that credibility when students take it, or does he expect another change to take place? Finally, can he put his hand on the Dispatch Box and tell the thousands of

[Mr. Phil Willis]

students who took their exams this summer that they all have the grades that they deserve and that they are accurate?

Mr. Clarke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his relatively constructive approach to the statement. I want to highlight the point that he made when he called for an end to annual arguments about grade inflation. He is absolutely right to do that, and I associate myself completely with his remarks. It is shameful that, summer after summer, the work of teachers and students in improving their education performance is demeaned by commentators in the press and in other areas. If the hon. Gentleman and I can make common cause on at least one thing, it is that we should try to deal with that problem in the future. He was right to say what he said.

On the specifics, I confirm that we regard getting a common administrative approach in the three examination boards as a top and immediate priority. I have committed myself to that and do so again now. I confirm that an individual tracking system is a worthwhile and positive idea. That is why I am asking the QCA to make recommendations to me about the communications and information technology that will be an important element of making such a suggestion happen.

I can say that we will consider the question of the post-A-level qualification and decoupling in the context of the inquiry of my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards into 14-to-19 education. We will see where we go. However, I want to make it clear that we are not proposing any immediate change in the balance between the examinations. That would be wrong and destabilising. However, if the hon. Gentleman asks me whether we are prepared to look at a different relationship in the future, the answer is yes, through the vehicle of my hon. Friend's report which will appear in a couple of months.

On the memorandum of understanding and the question of independence, all I can say is that the hon. Gentleman has a serious point, as does Mr. Tomlinson. Mr. Tomlinson's specific recommendation to deal with the immediate situation was that we should remove the uncertainties now, and that is why he recommended clarifying and making more transparent the relationships between my Department, the QCA and the awarding bodies through a memorandum of understanding. I am implementing what he recommended to get the answers right. However, as I pointed out in my statement, paragraph 96 of Mr. Tomlinson's report says:

> "I share the misgivings expressed in the Quinquennial Review about QCA's responsibilities for delivery of the key and basic skills qualifications and Key Stage tests, and recommend that these should be separated from QCA's other responsibilities and placed in the hands of a separate body. QCA should retain its regulatory oversight of these activities."

In making that recommendation, he highlighted precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman made. I can confirm from the Dispatch Box that the issue needs to be properly considered with all the organisations to see where we go.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's fundamental point—in fairness to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), he made it too—that it is exceptionally important to have a system that is seen to be independent and effective. The focus of Mr. Tomlinson's recommendations was quite correctly on putting the current situation in order by dealing with the problem in the best way that we can.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I could rewrite history, and the short answer is I cannot. However, I can try to ensure that we understand what happened and that we take the steps that will ensure that history does not repeat itself. We are doing that in accepting this report. It is the right way for us to go.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Does the Secretary of State agree that part of the difficulty last summer was the lack of understanding of the process by those involved and, perhaps more significantly, by the education media? Clarity must be established. What will the Department do to ensure that students, parents, schools and the media fully understand the process?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend, whose comments are perceptive. The Tomlinson report makes a series of recommendations on clarifying relationships so that confusions cannot recur. I announced my acceptance of the recommendations and confirm that it will be part of our responsibility to ensure that heads, and through them, parents, fully understand the processes. I hope that that will ensure that the misunderstandings will not take place again.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Secretary of State cannot deny that the fiasco happened under a Labour Government's watch of five years in office. It is not acceptable to blame everyone else.

The right hon. Gentleman says that he anticipates major changes in five years. What does he have to say to all those young people who will take A and AS-levels in the next three to four years? Is it that their exams are inadequate and that he intends to make substantial changes to them? If so, that will be very demotivating.

Mr. Clarke: I am not going to say that the exams over the next three or four years are not worth the paper they are written on, because it would not be true. Indeed, it is damaging to public and political debate that a key Opposition party takes that stance. It is also striking that the hon. Gentleman supports his Front-Bench spokesman who proposes major changes in the next two or three years and wants to rip up the current A and AS system. As I said, that is not the right approach. We need to get confidence and stability in the system that we have and to ensure that it works in the way that it can. That is what we will do. We will not go around trying out fancy ideas here, there and everywhere and rip up the system in the way that the Conservatives advocate.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about securing a supply of examiners and providing them with career development. Does he recognise, however, that many will have to be recruited from serving teachers? As part of his review, will he consider ways in which acting as an examiner can

be a key part of a teacher's career development and appropriately rewarded as such? Will he discuss that with the teacher unions?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why Mr. Tomlinson's recommendations about professionalisation—not a nice word, I know—is the right way to go. I can confirm that we will deal with the matter as she suggests. I can also confirm that the extra resources will be designed to ensure that we get a more professional system that works in the best way possible. Marking an assessment should be an important part of a teacher's experience and should help to enable them to teach in various ways. The more we can help that to happen, the better it will be.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Secretary of State will recall that Mr. Tomlinson's initial report said that the examining boards were not able to aggregate AS and A2-level results in a way that set an acceptable and commonly understood standard, which was one of the problems. What does he intend to do about that? Judging from his answer to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), he is proposing to keep 40 per cent. of the demands on students, which will represent 50 per cent. of the marks at AS-level. How do Mr. Tomlinson or the Secretary of State propose to set a standard against which subsequent results can be judged?

Mr. Clarke: As I think I said, the QCA has acted on Mr. Tomlinson's initial report. For example, it sent out exemplar material on precisely how to do that. I am surprised that the discussion has come to this. The choice is simple: do we try to make the existing AS and A2-level system work for children who go through schools in the next few years and give them the confidence that it works; or do we try to rebalance the system fundamentally and change the system yet again? It is clear from all the representations that I receive from teachers and others that there has been too much change and they want a period of stability. That is Mr. Tomlinson's recommendation and I think it is the right way to proceed. If the Opposition want to make all the changes in the next year or so, they should come out and say so, but I am not sure many educationists would agree with them.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I welcome the Government's positive response to the recommendations in the report, particularly the review of the QCA's varied responsibilities. However, are not the difficulties that we have experienced over the past few months largely due to the fact that we still do not have a properly criterion-referenced marking system, so we face the annual review of grade boundaries? In addition, is it not the case that our young people, particularly in the 14-to-19 phase, are massively over-examined and that we still place too much emphasis on external assessment? Does Mr. Tomlinson's report say anything about that, and do the Government have a view on those points?

Mr. Clarke: We cannot get to the position of having marking systems that are 100 per cent. criterion-referenced, although we can move in that direction. In fact, that is what Mr. Tomlinson recommends and what we need to do. There are serious issues about ensuring not only that the administration of the different boards is consistent but that we have a common approach in the areas mentioned by my hon. Friend, and those are matters for the future.

Mr. Tomlinson does have points to make about over-examination, and as I said in my statement, he raises the serious question of whether we have got right the balance between assessment and learning, and I take that seriously. To be blunt, if Mr. Tomlinson, a former chief inspector of schools, and Ken Boston, the chief executive of the QCA, are saying that there are issues to be addressed, we would be very foolish to take no account of that. However, the right way to do so is through the review of 14-to-19 education being conducted by the Minister for School Standards, which will involve consultation throughout the system. Throwing out the baby with the bathwater would be a mistake, but we have to look at the situation in the round and take account of points such as those expressed by my hon. Friend and of professional opinion.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Does the Secretary of State understand that those of us who are parents of students who had the misfortune to be caught up in the Government's fiasco this summer with A2 and AS-levels genuinely believe that the qualifications that our sons and daughters received are not worth the paper they are written on because they significantly underestimate their achievements? Will the right hon. Gentleman now answer the question that he tried to duck when it was asked by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough? Does he believe that all those students got the grades that they deserved? If not, will he take the one remedy that he has at his disposal and organise a full remarking of those exams?

Mr. Clarke: This is absolutely extraordinary. I repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, although I know that he did not accept my answer: I do not believe that it is possible to rewrite history. We have to follow the line set out by the hon. Member for Ashford and make a fresh start. I am genuinely surprised that Opposition Members seem to want to assert, as the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) did in his question, that A-levels and AS-levels are not worth the paper they are written on. That is simply not true, and it is not an acceptable way to proceed. I find it extraordinary that Conservative Member after Conservative Member continues to reinforce the statement of the Leader of the Opposition. Parents and teachers throughout the country—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The right hon. Gentleman should not dwell too heavily on the policies of the Opposition; he is answering for the policies of the Government.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): The Education and Skills Select Committee has been considering this issue, and the three exam boards explained to us in some detail that they arrive at their gradings using different processes. Will consideration be given to the best way of ensuring that there is greater transparency in the awarding of grades, because we should not jump to the conclusion that two exam boards got it right and one got it wrong?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is entirely right to raise that point. We need to take precisely the considered approach that she suggests, making sure that the exam boards are working in sync. The implication of today's statement is that the QCA is working, with our support, to try to achieve precisely the result that my hon. Friend requests.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I wonder if I may try to elicit a response from the Minister, who seems to be under the impression that following a statement he does not have to answer our questions. This is a very straightforward one. Who was responsible this summer for what most parents, most teachers and most pupils affected was a great cock-up?

Mr. Clarke: Mr. Tomlinson was extremely clear about that, and I shall repeat his analysis. He said that three main factors contributed to the situation—first, the perceived pressure on exam boards from the QCA; secondly, the lack of guidance on the level of attainment expected for a particular grade in an individual paper; and thirdly, the lack of common understanding of the standard required to ensure that the overall A-level standard was maintained. That is a balanced judgment, and I accept it.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Considering the contents of the Tomlinson inquiry and the previous Tomlinson report on the same subject, and bearing in mind Tomlinson's recommendation that the QCA should report directly to the Secretary of State's Department, could he explain why Sir William Stubbs was sacked?

Mr. Clarke: I have nothing further to add to what has been said previously. It is public knowledge that Sir William has taken, or is considering, legal action, so the matter will be resolved by the usual processes.

BILL PRESENTED

HUNTING

Secretary Margaret Beckett, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Mr. Secretary Hain and Mr. Alun Michael, presented a Bill to make provision about hunting wild mammals with dogs; to prohibit hare coursing; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 10].

Orders of the Day

Communications Bill

[Relevant documents: The Report from the Joint Committee on the Draft Communications Bill, Session 2001–02, HL 169-I and HC 876-I, and the Government Response thereto, Cm 5646.]

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I must announce to the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), and that there is a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches in the debate.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that the Government have set a new precedent today? Perhaps it was a Modernisation Committee proposal that we were unaware had been introduced. Can you confirm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in future when a Bill has its First Reading, the House can always expect a Government statement, such as we had today? I think that this is probably the first time that that has ever happened.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair can make no such guarantee, but no doubt Ministers will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

5.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

After an almost unprecedented period of scrutiny and debate, we are now proud to be able to present the Communications Bill to the House. I say we, because the Bill is very much the result of cross-departmental collaboration with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, and the Department of Trade and Industry.

I shall take the House through the Bill's main points and principles. To begin at the beginning, the communications industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of the UK economy, and has been growing at 10 per cent. a year for the past decade. The infrastructure of the future needs fast, efficient and affordable communication—telecommunications, the internet and broadcasting. It requires the best competitive environment, effective regulation and continued public and private investment in the technologies of the future. The communications industries are a major driver of our economy, and provide jobs for hundreds of thousands of British workers—the jobs of the future, not the past.

However, communications is about much more than economics. The Bill deals with the means by which our society speaks to itself and, as it were, hears the echo. It is the means by which we talk to the world. It is a shaper of our culture, our identity and our values. For the Government, therefore, the Bill is not simply a device to regulate or deregulate an industry; it plays a vital role in every one of our wider aspirations for Britain. It will

give consumers choice—the variety that they demand and deserve—and will give citizens the information that they need. It will free the industry of unnecessary interference, give it freedom to grow and diversify, allow it an opportunity to change as the world of communications changes, and to gain access to new sources of investment, as well as new ideas and challenges. It prepares us for a digital era.

The Bill will preserve what has always been our proudest boast: that we have the best free broadcast media in the world. It will give public service broadcasting a new lease of life. I am sure that all hon. Members share the aims that I have outlined. Like the Bill, those aims are ambitious.

I shall take hon. Members briefly through the history of the development of our proposals.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Have I understood correctly that the Bill will allow, for example, an American-owned corporation to buy ITV, while no reciprocal right exists for a British-owned corporation to buy an American company? If so, how have we got into that extraordinary position?

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is a close, long-time follower of such issues. The answer is yes, the Bill would allow an American company to own ITV or our other commercial public service broadcasters. However, it would subject any American, Japanese or Australian owner to a tough content regime that is intended to maintain the public service nature of our public service broadcasting. My hon. Friend also asked about reciprocity. We are opening negotiations to secure reciprocal agreements with the Americans, but as I have said on several occasions, we do not perceive reciprocity as a precondition of lifting the current restriction on foreign ownership of our terrestrial television channels.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Is the Secretary of State saying that she is comfortable with the prospect of, for example, Disney or Microsoft owning and operating our ITV 3 channel?

Tessa Jowell: Given circumstances in which any Italian, French, Swedish or German media company could own our media, it would be inconsistent to preclude from the possibility of ownership American, Australian, Japanese or other markets that could provide our media with badly needed investment.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is in his place. He, with the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, published the White Paper "A New Future for Communications" in December 2000. It established a vision for the future of the telecommunications, broadcasting and radio spectrum in the United Kingdom. It had several aims, which included giving the converging communications industries a modern regulatory framework, combining stability with competition, and promoting innovation, skills and enterprise.

In November last year we consulted on the proposals for the reform of media ownership rules that had not been included in the White Paper. We consulted in a framework on ways of promoting competition through deregulation while recognising that competition alone is not enough to safeguard the nature of the media in the UK. We consulted on methods of protecting plurality and diversity, removing outdated and inconsistent rules and providing greater flexibility and investment. Furthermore, the paving Bill for establishing the single regulator, Ofcom, received Royal Assent in March and became the Office of Communications Act 2002.

In May we published the draft Communications Bill for further public consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny by a Committee of both Houses of Parliament. Lord Puttnam, who chaired the Committee, and the other members made a tremendous contribution to improving the draft Bill. That process established the value of pre-legislative scrutiny, which enabled contributions to be made to the development of major policy proposals as well as the provision of detailed drafting comments.

In that context, I would like to thank the hon. Members for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) and for North Devon (Nick Harvey), and my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White), for East Lothian (Anne Picking) and for Selby (Mr. Grogan) for their contributions to the work of the Committee.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the Secretary of State tell the House what explains the differential treatment of electronic networks and services in part 2 of the Bill from that of broadcasters in part 3? Will she also explain why the Bill fails to bring the BBC fully within the auspices of Ofcom, so that it could be fined for any breaches of its existing obligations to observe due impartiality in matters of political and industrial controversy and in relation to public policy?

Tessa Jowell: I know that the relationship between the BBC and the regulator will be a major focus of today's debate—

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): You bet!

Tessa Jowell: I am sure that there are plenty of "You bets" on both sides of the House on that matter. I shall come to that matter later, if the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will forgive me.

Mr. Bercow: Don't forget.

Tessa Jowell: I certainly will not forget. In relation to the hon. Gentleman's first question on the differential treatment, we do not intend to regulate the internet, but—as he will understand more fully once he has heard more of what I have to say—we intend broadcasting to be subject to a tough content regulatory regime.

Lord Puttnam's Committee reported in August and the Government responded in October. We accepted more than 120 of its 148 recommendations, including—to pick up on the point raised by the hon. Member for Buckingham—the recommendation that Ofcom should be able to fine the BBC for breaches of tier 1 and tier 2 obligations. The Committee's conclusions also led to our redrafting aspects of the Bill to clarify Ofcom's duty

[Tessa Jowell]

to increase the size of the Ofcom board and to clarify the nature of self-regulation. I believe that the process of consultation with Parliament, the wider industry and the public has greatly improved the Bill. As a result, we now have a different Bill—in a number of respects—from the one published in draft in May.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I believe that this is the first Government Bill that the Secretary of State responsible has been unable to sign off as being compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998. Will the right hon. Lady assure us that all its clauses will be fine, and will not be struck down in the courts after we have enacted the Bill?

Tessa Jowell: I will come to a full explanation of why the Bill is, in one particular respect, not compatible with the European convention on human rights, and set out for the House the way in which I intend to deal with that.

I shall run quickly through the new provisions in the Bill. It now includes provisions for a new newspaper merger regime that strikes the right balance between deregulation and the protection of essential public interests. On local radio ownership, to allow greater consolidation, we have moved to a minimum of two plus one local radio owners from the three plus one in the draft Bill. As a result of the reorganisation of the spectrum on the multiplexes following the relicensing by the Independent Television Commission, we have also been able to remove the restriction on religious bodies holding national digital radio service licences. I know that there has been a tremendous amount of correspondence with hon. Members on both sides of the House about this. We always said that the restriction was created because of spectrum scarcity, and, now that there is more available spectrum, we have lifted that restriction.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I am pleased to hear of the changes on local radio ownership, but will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Bill remains proof against the continuing attacks of the large radio industry on the ownership, content and diversity measures, particularly clause 302 and schedule 14?

Tessa Jowell: Yes. I am pleased that my hon. Friend has raised that point, which, again, is a concern to the House. We are determined that deregulation of ownership, which we believe is right to promote investment, should not in any way compromise standards, the discipline of adhering to licence conditions or what is defined in the Bill as localness—the quintessential nature of local radio. Ofcom will have powers to check, or dipstick, in areas where radio consolidation has taken place to ensure that the local character of local radio has been preserved.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I have written to my right hon. Friend on this point. She has said that provision will be made for faith organisations to go on the airwaves, but what about those organisations that do not have faith, such as the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society, which are denied access to Thought for the Day on the "Today" programme? Will they be included, or is the provision just for religious organisations and their fellow travellers?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which I am willing to consider further. I hope that it is aired in Committee, and if necessary, I shall offer further definition in the light of his intervention.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Will my right hon. Friend explain what the Bill will do to encourage investment in digital radio? For example, will it permit licence roll-overs?

Tessa Jowell: One of the Bill's objectives is to promote the increase in digital radio, and one way to achieve that is through Government action. A year ago I approved seven new BBC digital radio stations. My hon. Friend will be aware that the price of digital radio equipment, which was very high, is beginning to fall. Take-up of digital radio is still low, but it will be driven by the fact that there will be stations worth listening to that are available only through digital. They will be the drivers for digital radio take-up, just as such stations are the drivers for digital television take-up.

I must make progress on the Bill's content now, if I may. In the light of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee's report we clarified Ofcom's general duties. We strengthened the independence of the consumer panel and gave it powers to set up its own committee. We also limited its sphere of interest to companies with fewer than 10 employees.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Tessa Jowell: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to make progress. There will be another point in my speech at which he will want to intervene, I am sure.

We have worked to get the provisions for television licensable content right, limiting regulation to broadcasting services. That underlines the potential for self-regulation.

Also, in relation to the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee's concerns about the capacity of the independent production sector, I asked the ITC to undertake a review to establish the facts about the market and its likely growth, and to make an assessment of issues that might adversely affect its long-term development.

That was prompted by the Committee's concern about the timetable for—but not the principle of—the lifting of the restriction on foreign ownership. We have now received the ITC report, and copies of the summary have been made available to Members. I give notice that we may wish in due course to amend the Bill further after considering the ITC's proposals in more detail.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The right hon. Lady helpfully explained the scrutiny process relating to independent television production, but why did not the Committee, and why does not the Bill, examine the thorny question of independent radio production quotas? The right hon. Lady will know that the BBC has set itself an internal requirement to produce a minimum

10 per cent. quota. Why is that not enshrined in the Bill? If the principle is all right for television, why is it not all right for radio?

Tessa Jowell: That is a fair point, which we will consider in the context of the programme supply review. We do not, however, want to be too restrictive. We do not want to impose new obligations on radio that might constrain its growth. That is the framework within which a proposition that I know to be in currency will be considered.

In practice, use of the BBC licence fee as venture capital for the nation's creativity means ensuring a healthy market in programme supply and a vibrant, creative independent sector. I was pleased that the ITC report was welcomed by, among others, Lord Puttnam and the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television. That welcome is well deserved, reflecting the enormous amount of work that the ITC has done. It makes an extremely strong case for the integral role that an independent market will play in the future of broadcasting, especially given the changes in media ownership and the proposals to maintain production quotas. As I have said, we are considering the report carefully, and will amend the Bill further if necessary.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Content regulation is censorship by another name. What guarantee can the Secretary of State offer that her actions will not give rise to a very interventionist system that would perpetuate the tyranny of the politically correct? What we want, and what all freedom-lovers want, is a diversity of views to be heard on the airwaves.

Tessa Jowell: That is an interesting point. We are avowedly not returning to what might arguably be described as the pre-ITC censorship regime, when the regulator decided which programmes should be shown. We are placing that responsibility on the broadcaster, which is where it should be.

Let me say something about political advertising—a point that was touched on by the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne). I have been unable to make a statement of compatibility with the Human Rights Act 1998 in respect of one provision in the Bill. This is the first time since the Act came into force that the Government have made such a statement at the outset of a Bill's passage. I consulted the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) earlier, gave him notice of the fact, and gave both Opposition spokespersons briefing.

Although there will of course be an opportunity for this matter to be debated fully in Committee, I wanted to explain the position to the whole House. The decision to proceed with a Bill containing a provision of this kind was obviously exceptional, and was made only after careful deliberation and a full examination of both the legal arguments and the policy alternatives.

For many years, successive Governments have maintained a complete ban on advertising of a political nature on television or radio. The Government's intention in this case is to continue with the current ban—a ban that was supported by the Neill committee in its 1998 report on funding of political parties—and to define more precisely what is meant by "political", so that Ofcom may continue to use the broad reading of the word that existing regulators use. In that regard, I refer hon. Members to clause 309.

However, a potential complication exists in the form of a judgment by the European Court of Human Rights against Switzerland, which maintained an apparently similar ban. That point was also noted by the Joint Committee on Human Rights in examining the draft Bill, and I should like to place on the record my thanks to it for its helpful comments on the draft Bill in its 19th report. In response to the ECHR's judgment and to the Joint Committee's concerns, we looked hard at the current ban to see whether some minor changes would make it more certain that it was human rights compatible. Unfortunately, any such change would still allow substantial political advertising, and I hope that there is cross-party agreement that that would not be a desirable outcome. By denying powerful interests the chance to skew political debate, the current ban safeguards the public and democratic debate, and protects the impartiality of broadcasters.

Having examined all the facts, and following extensive legal advice, I have concluded that very strong arguments could be advanced in favour of the ban contained in this Bill being compliant with the ECHR.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I have every sympathy with the point that the Secretary of State makes about wishing to maintain the ban on political advertising on television and radio. Can she tell us whether there are any current court cases concerning this issue—either in the UK under the Human Rights Act 1998, or continuing through the European Court of Human Rights process—or is the Swiss judgment the only one on the books?

Tessa Jowell: The Swiss case is the only one that I am aware of at this point.

Mr. Wyatt: Could you put the evidence in the Library so that we can all read it, and can you explain whether you can get through broadband—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but by now he should be using the appropriate parliamentary language. He is addressing the Chair, not the Minister, by using the second person.

Mr. Wyatt: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Political advertising can be carried out through broadband technology; how will the legislation affect that?

Tessa Jowell: On the second point, as I said in response to an intervention a few minutes ago, we are not seeking to regulate the internet. The ban applies to licensed broadcasting—that is the distinction. On my hon. Friend's very fair request, I will certainly ensure that an explanatory note is placed in the Library for Members' information.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I want to follow up the point made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan). My understanding is that the current restriction on religious broadcasters owning licences is being challenged under

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

the European Court of Human Rights. The Bill will not wholly remove that restriction, so perhaps the Secretary of State might like to look into that matter further.

Tessa Jowell: I shall confirm my previous answer for the hon. Gentleman's benefit: I am not aware of other current challenges, but in preparing a note for the Library, I shall ensure that our intelligence on this matter is complete.

The Government apply testing standards to the consideration of the compatibility of their legislation with the convention and, given the existence of the Swiss precedent, I must ask the House to consider this Bill with a section 19(l)(b) of the Human Rights Act 1998 statement attached to it. That does not mean that we believe the Bill to be incompatible with the ECHR, and we would mount a robust defence if it were legally challenged. Of course, if that defence subsequently failed before the domestic courts, we would need to reconsider our position. Beyond that, we take our international obligations extremely seriously and we would seek to amend the ban in accordance with any judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg that ruled against the UK legislation. As things stand, however, the Government believe that it is right to ask the House to continue the ban on political advertising.

I turn now to the substance of the Bill, which essentially has four themes: giving functions to Ofcom, implementing four European communications directives, ensuring the most effective management of the radio spectrum, and putting in place a framework for broadcasting and media.

Part 1 of the Bill contains details of the functions that will be transferred or assigned to Ofcom, bringing together the functions currently exercised by the five regulators—the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the Independent Television Commission, the Director General of Telecommunications, the Radiocommunications Agency, and the Radio Authority.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): My right hon. Friend had an excellent record of involvement in disability matters before she came to the House. Is she aware that many organisations, including Mencap, are worried that Ofcom's duties do not include conducting research into whether people with disabilities are marginalised or embraced by the electronic revolution?

Tessa Jowell: I assure my right hon. Friend that the Bill contains strong safeguards for the interests of disabled people. He is right to point out that the consumer panel's scope and terms of reference give ample opportunity for the sort of consultation that he has described.

Part 1 of the Bill sets out the general duties of Ofcom and the establishment of the content board and the consumer panel. It also sets out more clearly how self-regulation fits in the new framework. We are giving a clear signal to the industry that, where self-regulation is effective, Ofcom can remove or reduce its regulations.

I believe that the functions in Part I give Ofcom the opportunity to be much more than the sum of its parts. It is obvious, however, that the new organisation that is Ofcom can be built not by words on a page but by the people who will run it. I am delighted that Lord Currie and his board are making good progress in tackling the enormous management task of forming the new organisation. Our aim remains, subject to the will of both Houses, to have Ofcom fully operational by the end of 2003.

Part 2 of the Bill implements the Government's policy on spectrum management and four European directives concerned with electronic communications. It also deals with a number of other matters relating to electronic communications, such as the persistent misuse of electronic communications networks and services, and the regulation of premium-rate services.

The implementation of the four directives will remove the need for 400 telecommunications licences. They will be replaced with a system of general authorisation and specific obligations to protect consumers and guarantee competition. That is a major deregulatory step. As many hon. Members are aware, the directives mean the UK cannot maintain telecommunications licences beyond 24 July next year.

Although we can implement part of our proposals in respect of electronic communications by making regulations under the European Communities Act 1972, the limitation in that Act means that such regulation would be adequate only for an interim period. The Government hope, therefore, that in the interests of consumers and the industry, Members of this House and another place will consider the Bill in such a way that it may be able to secure Royal Assent before the summer recess next year.

Finally, part 2 also sets out the framework for spectrum management in the future.

Part 3 covers television and radio services. This is where we outline our policy on the protection of content standards and the remit for public service broadcasters. Part 3 also covers Ofcom's relationship with the BBC, and I am aware of the degree of contention that still surrounds that issue.

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Tessa Jowell: I should like to make some progress, if I may.

The Bill will extend the public service broadcasting remit to the BBC as well as commercial public service broadcasters. It is very important that the House understand clearly how this works. Except for the regulation of accuracy and impartiality, which will remain the responsibility of the governors, Ofcom will regulate the BBC under regulatory tiers 1 and 2 and will also have the power to fine the BBC for any breaches under tiers one or two. Under tier 3, the BBC will be required to publish an annual statement of programme policy, as will the other public service broadcasters, report on performance against policy and consider Ofcom's guidance. Ofcom will also report on the fulfilment of the public service broadcasting remit, including the performance of the BBC, at least every five years.

Michael Fabricant *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: The BBC will be subject to general competition law and to the full force of such law should

it abuse its position. The BBC is a charter body; it has a special relationship with Parliament through the licence fee. The Government's position is that that relationship with Parliament should be preserved.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. I understand her point about regulation under tier 3. However, does she accept that justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done? Does she understand that when a complaint is made against the BBC under the conditions of tier 3—programme content, in other words—and the governors decide that the complaint is not valid, many people outside Parliament will say that, even if the governors are correct, the BBC is its own judge and jury? For that reason, justice will not be seen to be done, and for that reason it will be wrong.

Tessa Jowell: That is why I welcome the moves made by the chairman of the governors, in recognition of much of the criticism similar to that described by the hon. Gentleman, to increase transparency and distinguish between the governors' executive and regulatory role.

I say to the House, the BBC and the other public service broadcasters that most of us on the Labour Benches—I hope—believe that the proposition strikes the right balance. The onus is very much on the BBC governors to show that they are able to discharge that rigorous and independent role that the House clearly wishes to see.

Mr. MacDonald: I warmly welcome the provisions in part 3 that deal with minority language broadcasting, especially the setting up of a Gaelic media service, which is an important breakthrough. Will the Secretary of State clarify whether the new service will be able to deliver content throughout the whole UK, not only in Scotland, provided of course that she finds a cost-effective and sensible way of doing so?

Tessa Jowell: Those are exactly the type of proposals that will be examined in the review of Gaelic broadcasting that is currently under way—*[Interruption.]* I hear what Opposition Front-Bench Members are saying and I want to make clear how much importance the Government attach to the position and the secure future of Gaelic broadcasting. We believe that the provisions in the Bill set that future on a much more secure footing than has been the case in the past.

Mr. Lansley: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend is a member of the Committee.

Tessa Jowell: Very well, I give way.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. I was beginning to think that I would be left out.

The right hon. Lady referred in flattering terms to the work of the Joint Scrutiny Committee, but one of our most important recommendations was that the many duties laid on Ofcom should not be treated equally but that primacy should be given to the duty of furthering the interests of consumers through competition and furthering the interests of citizens. However, the Secretary of State has chosen not to follow the Committee's recommendations in that respect. Will she tell the House why?

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. In fact, we took seriously the Committee's preference for the term "consumer" rather than "customer". We tried to amend references to "customer" to "consumer" throughout the Bill because that recognises the nature of the transactions that will form one element of consumerism that the measure will regulate. Later in my speech, I shall deal with the broader reference to Ofcom's competition powers.

There is no hierarchy in Ofcom's responsibilities. The definition of general duties used in the Bill was developed in direct response to the Scrutiny Committee's view that those duties should be expressed coherently rather than in the way that they had been listed previously. My colleagues and I accepted that.

To return to the point that I was making before I took that stream of interventions, it is fair to recognise that the BBC has been open to more scrutiny since the licence fee settlement in February 2000. The governors have introduced a package of reforms relating to transparency, fair trading and accountability. I have already welcomed the reforms announced by the chairman of the governors earlier this year. Much will be governed by amendments to the agreement between the BBC and the Secretary of State and we shall lay the relevant extract of the draft agreement before the Committee that will consider the Bill.

Part 3 also covers the Government's approach to the carriage of public service broadcasters on cable and satellite. For satellite, the measure rolls forward the current system, which is policed by Oftel and is based on EC provisions that conditional access system providers must give public service broadcasters access to their systems on a basis that is fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory. In addition, there will be a new fallback power for the Secretary of State to compel public service broadcasters to offer their services to platform providers.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Tessa Jowell: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bryant: I had not expected such generosity from my right hon. Friend—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I meant that my right hon. Friend had already been extremely generous in taking interventions.

My right hon. Friend has wisely included the backstop power to which she referred. Is she wholly confident that it will be sufficient unto the day and that it will ensure that vertical integration in the industry does not stymie competition and open access for all broadcasters?

Tessa Jowell: Yes. We have given these issues very careful consideration and believe that the conclusion on the face of the Bill is right.

[Tessa Jowell]

Finally, this part of the Bill also contains our much-discussed policy on media ownership. It removes the restriction that prevents foreign ownership of United Kingdom broadcasters, removes the rules on Channel Five ownership, in recognition of its currently small audience share and limited reach, and liberalises the rules on local and national radio ownership.

It is important to understand that our proposals on media ownership are driven by three basic principles. The first is that British media need new sources of investment and the Government's job is to remove the unnecessary obstacles to that investment. The second is that it does not matter whether the investment is a dollar, a euro or a yen as long as the content of our media remains of high quality, and the policing of that content by Ofcom will ensure that we end up with the best of both worlds: their money and our standards. I do not accept that relaxation of the ownership rules will lead to dumping of poor quality foreign programmes on the public. Ofcom will not let it, and the public will not watch it.

Thirdly, ownership rules must reflect the reality of a global marketplace. So we seek to remedy the situation where, for example, Vivendi Universal, a huge foreign company with significant United States-based operations, can, as a French company, buy anything that it wants, whereas similarly global firms like AOL/Time Warner or Viacom are barred.

The outcome of this approach should be better programming.

Part 4 is concerned with TV licensing—

Mr. Mullin *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: I shall make progress.

Part 4 consolidates the existing provisions, enabling them to keep pace with developments in receiver technology.

Finally, part 5 gives Ofcom tough competition powers to act concurrently with the Office of Fair Trading. Ofcom will be able to use general competition powers, but we are also retaining, very importantly, sector-specific competition rules for broadcasting—a vital part of protecting markets that do not deliver key policy objectives purely by leaving them to competition alone. Ofcom will have flexibility to use sector-specific powers, but it will not use them where it would be more appropriate for it to use general competition powers.

Part 5 also reforms the newspaper merger regime contained in the Fair Trading Act 1973, to bring it in line with the Enterprise Act 2002.

In conclusion, the Bill is the product of almost unprecedented consultation and has been greatly improved by that. I therefore repeat my thanks to the industry, to the Joint Committee, to Lord Puttnam and to the many others in the House and beyond who have made this a productive consultation process.

When we embarked on developing the legislation, we said that we wanted the most dynamic communications industry in the world. The Bill will make that possible. We said that we wanted the best TV and radio in the world. The Bill will safeguard that. We said that we had to protect the consumer and ensure that the media that they consume are free and fair. The Bill will ensure that. We said that we knew the difference between deregulation and laissez-faire. The Bill proves that. We said that we had the highest aspirations for the British communications sector, and we said that we wanted it to flourish and improve. The Bill will deliver that; I commend it to the House.

5.54 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): On behalf of the Opposition, I make it clear that we welcome and support the Bill, although, as the House would expect, we have reservations about some of its provisions, and in respect of some parts we shall press the Government to go further.

The Bill is designed to achieve two main purposes. The first purpose—to create a single regulator for the communications and media industries—was a commitment in the last Conservative manifesto, so I am pleased that it will now come about, even if it is not a Conservative Government who are enacting it.

The second purpose is to revise and liberalise the rules governing the ownership of the media. It is more than six years since we last considered this issue, during the proceedings on the Broadcasting Act 1996. As a member of the Standing Committee, I argued that the rules would still be drawn too tightly and that change was happening so quickly that the danger was that the law would become obsolete and over-restrictive almost before the ink was dry. I am pleased, therefore, that the rules are to be liberalised again, enabling us to move further towards the media being subject to the competition rules that apply in every other industry.

Michael Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: It is very early in my speech, but I give way.

Michael Fabricant: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the principled stand that he took, which stopped him being on the Front Bench at the time. Is he convinced, however, that the Bill has the flexible architecture that will enable it to keep pace with technological advances over the next five or eight years?

Mr. Whittingdale: We shall need to explore that important point in Committee, but the Bill is undoubtedly a step in the right direction. Whether it goes far enough is a genuine point of concern that we will have to consider.

The new regulator, Ofcom, was extensively debated during its paving Bill in the last Session. Disappointment was expressed at the fact that so much of the debate concentrated on its role in respect of the regulation of broadcasting and so little focused on its telecommunications role. With more channels becoming available, the need for intervention and regulation of broadcasting steadily declines, but competition in telecommunications is less extensive and the need to open the market and to regulate it remains fairly strong. Ofcom will undoubtedly be an enormously powerful body, whose remit will extend across a huge

sector of our economy, so it must be subject to the necessary checks and balances. We think that, in some areas, those may need to be strengthened.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the reins must be loosened, if only to ensure that broadband is promoted throughout the country and that we move into the new technology more quickly and cheaply?

Mr. Whittingdale: I strongly agree about the importance of broadband and I shall come to it after I have dealt with Ofcom's competition role, which is equally important.

Concern has been expressed that Ofcom may not have the necessary resources and expertise to take over the function of competition regulation, which in some cases is now exercised by the OFT. That, I hope, is another issue that we shall consider.

Some have suggested that in addition to a separate content and consumer board there should be an economic board, in recognition of the importance of the competition responsibilities that Ofcom will have. I understand that the Government have rejected that idea, on the grounds that the economic function will be fundamental to everything that Ofcom does; but there remains a concern that businesses, whether they be suppliers or users of communications services, will lack a guaranteed mechanism to ensure that their voice is properly heard.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on one of the problems that have been brought to my attention? The growth of access radio is to be commended, but many small commercial stations rely entirely on advertising revenue. If access radio tries to tap into that source of funds, many stations may be driven out of business.

Mr. Whittingdale: In principle I, like the Government, support the idea of access radio, but the hon. Gentleman raises a legitimate concern that has been expressed to me by one of my local Essex commercial stations, which is doing an extremely good job. It is entitled to be worried that competitors may be established and enjoy unfair advantages over it. That is another issue that we shall need to consider.

The Bill includes a number of safeguards to ensure that Ofcom's regulation will indeed be light touch, but we believe that they need to be strengthened in some places. In particular, it needs to be made explicit that Ofcom must operate in line with the principles that have been set out by the Better Regulation Task Force. There may also be a case for establishing a mechanism by which the House can scrutinise the activities of Ofcom and go beyond the excellent job that I have no doubt the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport will do under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

Mr. Redwood: Although I am sure that the Secretary of State is quite sincere when she says that she wants us to have the most successful media and telecommunications industry in the world, is my hon. Friend worried, as I am, that her right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is busily demolishing the telecommunications industry with massive tax impositions, which have left it cruelly short of cash to finance the very expansion that Labour Members want? Is that not a great paradox? Do not we need to get the Chancellor out of the way if we are to have any hope of success?

Mr. Whittingdale: It is undoubtedly a paradox and, sadly, not just telecommunications businesses are struggling under the enormous burden of increased taxation under this Government.

Ofcom will take over the telecommunications responsibilities of Oftel, the first utility regulator to be established. It is disappointing that less progress has been made in achieving a competitive market in telecommunications than in some other markets, such as energy. Sometimes it has seemed as though Oftel has spent more time intervening in those parts of the market where strong competition already exists than in those where it does not. In particular, it is arguable that we now have an aggressively competitive market in mobile telephony with four, soon to become five, operators.

Those operators already have significant debts following the 3G—third generation—auction and face the challenge of financing and installing the infrastructure necessary for them to make a return on their investment. The Better Regulation Task Force suggested that mobile telephony might now be sufficiently competitive that it can be regulated by competition law alone, yet Oftel has decided to extended price caps and continues to seek to regulate specific tariffs.

John Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for not giving way. I am very conscious of the number of hon. Members who wish to speak.

Oftel has continued to regulate mobile telephony, but it has been less successful in creating a competitive market in fixed-line telecommunications, in which BT remains the dominant supplier. The most recent attempt to open up the market was supposed to involve local loop unbundling, but the difficulties encountered by companies seeking to negotiate with BT led a number to abandon the attempt altogether, and the number of local loops that have been unbundled remains pitifully small. I believe that, out of about 28 million local loops, well under 1,000 have been unbundled.

A balance must be struck between promoting competition in the short term and encouraging investment in infrastructure development in the longer term. In all such debates, the vital importance of increasing access to broadband must be a priority, and Britain is lagging far behind in that respect. Although the number of households with broadband access has now passed 1 million, we are still way behind our competitors.

BT's latest price cuts have undoubtedly encouraged demand, as has its huge advertising campaign, although it must be said that the campaign has merely rubbed salt into the wound of the third of the population who

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cannot access ADSL—advanced digital subscriber line—or cable broadband services. In rural areas, less than 5 per cent. of people have access to those services.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments on rural areas. Many parts of Wales beyond the M4 do not have access to broadband services—indeed, many parts of Scotland and England do not enjoy access to broadband—so does he accept that, in that regard at least, we are very reliant on the BT network? It has been the only provider of services in rural areas. Surely it would be better to build on that network in co-operation with Ofcom, perhaps by putting a duty on Ofcom to ensure access to broadband services, rather than leaving that to the market, which is not delivering.

Mr. Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it seems that BT is the only player in the game in terms of extending services. According to BT, people in rural areas may have to wait between 10 and 20 years before they are given access to such services, which is unacceptable. We will have to consider that issue because there is a real danger that this country will have a two-tier economy and that, once again, rural Britain will be disadvantaged. Ofcom will have to address that issue.

Mr. Bryant: BT says that competition law prevents it from rolling out broadband services not just to rural areas but to many semi-rural areas and that it is unable to subsidise the roll-out to individual exchanges. Does the hon. Gentleman believe BT?

Mr. Whittingdale: I am tempted to say, "They would, wouldn't they?" I would want to look at rather more independent evidence than that provided by BT. Nevertheless, I accept that there may be a conflict between the short-term objective of promoting competition and the long-term objective of achieving investment in broadband services, and we will need to consider that issue.

I suspect that the Bill's provisions on radio spectrum pricing will not receive as much attention as its other parts. We support the modernisation of spectrum management through the introduction of spectrum trading because it is likely to lead to more efficient allocation, but the proposed introduction of recognised spectrum access has raised concerns that it is in effect a tax on satellite services. Those who are affected argue that it is unfair, that it is unduly restrictive and that it may deter the switch to digital. We also wish to scrutinise those important issues, and I hope that we will have the results of the Trade and Industry Committee's inquiry on that issue before we do so.

Let me now turn to the area about which I expect there to be most debate, not least because nothing interests the media more than themselves. In the past 10 years, the range and choice of media in this country have been transformed. The old argument that spectrum scarcity limits the number of outlets is no longer applicable, so the case for the Government taking an active role in controlling who owns and what appears on television and radio has become more and more unsustainable. I therefore unreservedly welcome the measures to liberalise the rules that restrict the ownership and regulation of our media companies.

There has already been extensive debate about the Government's decision to do away with the current prohibition on non-European companies acquiring British media companies. Although I would much prefer a similarly liberal regime to exist in countries such as America, that in itself is no reason for us to maintain a restrictive regime in this country. The suggestion that we have nothing to learn from America about television programming is no longer credible. Today, many of the most innovative and stimulating television programmes are American-made; nor can it be argued that the British commercial television sector is so well run that it must be protected from overseas management. I therefore congratulate the Government on their decision to stand firm and to resist the protectionists on Lord Puttnam's committee.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend recall the considerable furore in the House when Central Television was acquired by Carlton? There was much concern that Central Television would not provide good local regional programmes and news coverage. Was he reassured by the fact that the licensing conditions ensured that good programming continued? Does that not demonstrate that, in fact, no matter who owns ITV or other commercial broadcasters in this country, licensing agreements will ensure that programme standards are maintained?

Mr. Whittingdale: I am becoming slightly concerned about the number of times that I agree with the Secretary of State, but I think she said that there is a difference between the regulation of content and that of ownership. I think that that is the point that my hon. Friend is making, and I have to say that I agree with it.

We also welcome the lifting of the restrictions that have prevented the creation of a consolidated ITV company. The merger of Granada and Carlton has to be considered by the Competition Commission, but in principle it may create a stronger company that is more capable of competing internationally in a multi-channel world. However, the Government still lack the courage of their convictions in other respects and are intending to maintain restrictions beyond those required under competition law.

In particular, we believe that the continuation of ownership limits on ITN are unnecessary and may hold back its development. Even though the limit on individual ownership will be raised to 40 per cent., the effect of a Granada-Carlton merger will leave the new company still unable to increase its stake and, unlike most television companies in other countries, unable to own its news provider.

That is a retrograde step, because, under the old regime, it was at least theoretically possible for ITN to be wholly owned by the ITV companies. The Government claim that they are concerned to protect ITN's editorial independence. What ITN needs, however, is investment to be able to compete with Sky News and the BBC. Retaining a cap on ownership effectively prevents ITN from growing as a business and providing a strong third force in news provision.

The Government have also made welcome moves to relax the existing restrictions on the involvement of religious bodies or individuals in broadcasting. The lifting of the ban on religious bodies holding national digital sound programme service licences is long overdue. However, it is still intended that there should be a complete ban on religious organisations holding national analogue radio and television licences and multiplex licences. In addition, although the rules preventing a religious person from applying for a licence allow Ofcom to make a determination, it remains the case that those holding religious office in a local church or religious charity are discriminated against. Of course, there may be cases in which it is inappropriate for a religious body to be granted a licence or for an individual involved in a religious organisation to hold one. It is discriminatory and offensive to many involved in religious organisations, however, that they should still be singled out under the legislation and subjected to a more restrictive and arbitrary regime.

In the case of cross-media ownership, the Government have decided to lift the restriction on a newspaper proprietor controlling more than 20 per cent. of the national newspaper market owning Channel Five. At the same time, however, they argue that to allow ownership of channel 3 would represent an unacceptable concentration of influence. When the last Broadcasting Bill was introduced in 1996, I argued that the 20 per cent. limit was arbitrary and unfair and that its effect was to punish a newspaper group for its success—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that Labour Members remember that; I remember it well, too. I am therefore slightly astonished by the Labour party's attitude today. In 1996, the Labour party's then spokesman, the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), who is now a Minister, said that

"the Government have concocted a 20 per cent. rule for cross-media holdings. That is unnecessary and wrong."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 21 May 1996; c. 412.]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms)—I look forward to hearing him wind up this debate—was also a member of the Committee. He made an impassioned speech in favour of the amendment that I, along with other hon. Members, had tabled:

"How can it be right that an organisation with a 19.5 per cent. market share can own a whole television station, whereas one with a 20.5 per cent. share can own only 20 per cent.?"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 21 May 1996; c. 427.]

I was delighted at the time that the amendment was supported by both hon. Gentlemen and their colleagues on the Labour Benches. The House will therefore understand my puzzlement that the Government now propose to retain the very limit that they voted against six years ago.

Let me turn to the provisions affecting newspaper ownership. The Government have frequently trumpeted their belief in press freedom, which we would all echo. In the UK, statutory regulation of the publishing industry has always been viewed as unnecessary and dangerous, with any benefits being far outweighed by the loss of freedom that it might entail. The Government have on many occasions made clear their support for the current system of press self-regulation as administered by the Press Complaints Commission. Publishers are subject to no special legal regime above and beyond the stringent general laws of defamation, obscenity, breach of confidence, copyright, court reporting and so on. That reflects the belief, as guaranteed by the Human Rights Act 1998, that freedom of expression and opinion are rights that must be strictly protected in a free and democratic society.

A real concern exists, however, that the Bill, far from protecting press freedom, will do precisely the opposite. It may be the law of unintended consequences, or it may be something far more cynical. At the moment, the press is—for very good reason, of which we are all aware—not responsible to any of the statutory bodies that will make up Ofcom. Ofcom will be an amalgamation of state regulators that deal with electronic communications, and they have no knowledge or experience of the newspaper industry. Under the Bill, however, it is intended that Ofcom be given a say in "public interest matters" affecting newspapers as well as considerations of "plurality" in newspaper transfer issues.

The Secretary of State already possesses exceptional powers in this area. Giving an additional responsibility to Ofcom is unnecessary and potentially dangerous. These are issues on which Ofcom lacks expertise, in which its role is already performed by the Office of Fair Trading and which may have the consequence of introducing statutory regulation of newspapers through the back door. Unforeseen consequence or not, that must not be allowed to occur. If the Government really value press freedom, the Bill must make that crystal clear. There can be no room for doubt, obfuscation or clarification by the courts. It is too important a matter to leave to chance.

The Bill contains welcome measures to strengthen the requirements on broadcasters to ensure that their programmes are accessible to the deaf and the visually impaired. In some cases, we believe that more can be done, particularly in terms of publicising the availability of subtitling and promoting design that is easily used by disabled people and those with sight problems. We also look forward to amendments being tabled by the Government to strengthen the rights of independent producers. The ITC has produced a report on the programme supply market that has been widely welcomed by the industry. It is now for the Government to act on it.

Finally, I come to the glaring omission in the Bill. The creation of a single independent regulator for our broadcast media is fatally flawed as long as the biggest and most powerful broadcaster is not fully within its remit. In recent months, the BBC has become steadily more commercial and has strayed further and further from its public service remit. Its commercial activities, undertaken by BBC Worldwide, now compete directly with private companies through television channels such as UK History, through its publications, and even through its provision of educational software. At the same time, through the licence fee, it competes with the commercial sector for film rights, and finances channels such as News 24 and BBC 3, which appear to be carbon copies of existing commercial stations. All complaints about the BBC's activities, however, must be made to and adjudicated by the BBC. It is indefensible that when

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every other broadcaster is subject to independent scrutiny and regulation, the BBC should be exempt from it.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: No, I must finish.

Bringing the BBC fully within the scope of Ofcom is supported by the whole commercial sector. It is supported by the BBC's former chairman, Lord Hussey, and by Lord Bragg. It is extraordinary that, on this point, the Government appear to be deaf to all reason, and, instead, have listened only to the seductive voice of the BBC.

This is generally a good Bill, and we do not intend to oppose it. Even though it has already been subjected to much scrutiny, its size, scope and importance mean that it is essential that it should receive proper detailed consideration in Committee, which we intend to ensure.

6.18 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I begin by reminding the House of the interests that I have declared in the Register of Members' Interests.

We have travelled a long road—almost two years to the day—since the White Paper was published that set this process in motion. Much has happened in terms of consultative processes, pre-legislative scrutiny and a draft Bill being published in advance. That process of consultation has been immensely valuable in producing this Bill. I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the way in which they have approached the Bill, and I hope that that will act as a model for future detailed legislation of this kind.

I also want to welcome the broad thrust of the Bill. It seeks to achieve three major things. First, it seeks to converge the regulators of broadcasting and telecommunications in a way that matches the convergence of the technologies governing the way in which we receive material as viewers, listeners and consumers. Secondly, it seeks to bring in a lighter touch of regulation generally. Out go the number crunching, the minute counting and the detailed specific regulation that act as a barrier to creativity in our broadcasting environment. In come sensible self-regulation and co-regulation that will give a certain degree of trust to our public service broadcasters but with reserve powers for the regulator to intervene if that is necessary. That is a sensible approach. Thirdly, throughout the Bill, there is the intention to safeguard the values of public service broadcasting and of high-quality broadcasting, which are essential if we are to have a good broadcasting environment into the future.

The Bill seeks to get right the balance between the competition that will promote choice and the protection of public service and quality broadcasting for the viewer and the listener. I believe that it gets that balance broadly right.

I also want to welcome two recent decisions by the Government. The first is the decision on local commercial radio ownership. It has made absolute sense to move from the draft Bill's three-plus-one formula to the two-plus-one formula now before us. I welcome that primarily because it will allow greater investment in local programme making, local events and local news coverage in local radio stations around the country.

Secondly, the Government's decision to embark on the programme supply review, which has now been published, is also extremely welcome. The recommendations of the review are remarkably radical. They present the possibility that the contractual relationship between independent producers and broadcasters could change much to the independent producers' benefit. That could ensure that the strong ecology of a mixture of independent and broadcaster-led material can benefit the viewing public into the future. I hope that the Government will introduce proposals during the debates on the Bill that will enable the recommendations of the supply review to be implemented.

However, there are several issues where I hope that the Government can go a little further than they have in the Bill. The first of those issues was referred to by the Opposition spokesman when he completed his remarks. I refer to the relationship between Ofcom and the BBC. Although the Opposition spokesman was technically wrong in what he said about the handling of complaints by the BBC and Ofcom, he had a fundamental point. The regulations of tiers 1and 2 in relation to the BBC will be very much in the hands and under the purview of Ofcom, but the regulatory backstop powers, which Ofcom has for all the other public service broadcasters under tier 3, will remain in the hands of the BBC's board of governors.

The Government will probably argue—indeed, they have argued—that the Secretary of State has reserve powers in relation to the BBC. For example, if the board of governors goes completely off the regulatory rails and fails to fulfil the public service remit that Parliament has placed on the BBC, the Secretary of State can always step in and can, ultimately, sack the board of governors. However, that is a nuclear-button option that would never be exercised. I therefore suggest that it would not only be in the interests of fairness between the different public service broadcasters, but in the interests of the BBC to place a backstop power in the hands of Ofcom to intervene if the governors fail in their broad duty to fulfil the remit. By all means, let us leave the governors in charge of their day-to-day responsibility to fulfil the remit and to manage the BBC as an organisation, and let us give the BBC the self-regulatory powers that the Bill gives to all other public service broadcasters in tier 3, but let us reserve a power for the independent regulator, Ofcom—rather than the Secretary of State—to intervene.

The overall review of broadcasting is flagged up in clause 256. It contains the provision for the once-in-every-five-years exercise that Ofcom will undertake to consider the whole public service broadcasting landscape and the trends, difficulties and balances between the different public service broadcasters that emerge. The review is one of the most important things that Ofcom will do. The original Bill said that the review should take place every three years, but this Bill says that it is up to Ofcom to decide when to carry it out but that it should take place at least once every five years. Whether it is three years or five years, the interval

between the reviews that Ofcom will undertake is too long. I hope that the Committee will examine that point in greater detail as the Bill receives further scrutiny.

The developing problem of piracy of moving image material is extremely worrying. Piracy and counterfeiting are already crucifying the music industry. They pose a danger to television and film in almost equal measure. Ofcom cannot have a power to intervene directly to prevent piracy, but it can have the duty to bring together all parts of the industry to agree common standards that will provide the best possible barrier against piracy in future. I hope that that point will also be considered as the Bill goes through its proceedings in the House.

As those debates take place, I hope that the Government will take some of these points on board. My right hon. and hon. Friends deserve the thanks of the House for introducing the Bill in the way and in the condition that they have. It will not take very much for them to make it even better.

6.27 pm

Nick Harvey (North Devon): We also welcome the Bill and will support its Second Reading. We very much hope that it will form the basis for the regulation of a new generation of communication technologies. Therefore, it is vital that we get the regulations absolutely right.

I applaud the Government for their attitude towards the consultation that they have allowed on the Bill. I served on the scrutiny Committee, and that process was entered into by Members of both Houses and from all political parties with a positive mindset. The Committee was deftly chaired by Lord Puttnam. The Government's acceptance of many of the Committee's suggestions has been helpful. We approach the Bill's passage through Parliament with a number of the major issues resolved between the parties.Of course, I wish that the Government had gone further towards meeting one or two of the Committee's other recommendations, and I will refer to them.

The underlying principle should be to retain a serious broadcasting and production industry in the UK and to create the conditions by which creativity and freedom of expression can flourish. We must therefore guarantee plurality, with a range of providers in the public service and the private commercial sector. The choice is not simply between public service broadcasters and other channels.

We must also guarantee access. The new regime will have to ensure that not only is there a choice between providers but that consumers have the ability to access all the services and make a choice between them. That means making sure that consumers are not left behind by technological advances.

We need to guarantee diversity in broadcasting and telecommunications. To achieve that, all consumers must be able to exercise choice. We also have to maintain quality and standards in broadcasting and all material produced.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): My hon. Friend talks of maintaining production capacity and standards. That is most under threat in children's broadcasting. The production of quality children's drama is increasingly under attack by commercial forces, such as cartoons that are produced in the far east. Is there anything in the Bill to reverse that process?

Nick Harvey: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I intend to deal with material from abroad. I welcome the new BBC services in that sector and hope that they will provide a counterbalance to those forces.

It is important that Ofcom have a strong requirement to consider the interests of citizens and not only the consumer of services. We need sector-specific regulations on top of general competition regulations because the communication sector is special and unique. Broadcasting in particular is not just a commodity to be traded like any other. Although such regulation is implicit in the Bill, we need to be more explicit to ensure that we promote and protect the interests of citizens. Much of that work should take place in the content board.

Pete Wishart: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the fact that no creators are on the content board of Ofcom is an omission? Does he think that the board would be enhanced by having someone who is involved in the creative side of the industry at the heart of the decision-making process?

Nick Harvey: It is important that the content board have a wide membership that brings together as much expertise as possible. The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point.

The principal duty of Ofcom should be to further the interests of consumers and citizens. We support the creation of Ofcom offices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and agree that the accounts of the activity of each office should be published. We would also welcome regional and national councils advising the content board. Ofcom would also be well advised to have an advisory panel of business interests to give it an idea of the likely impact of its decisions.

We must recognise the unique role of Britain's public service broadcasters and the significance of those broadcasters to our evolving broadcasting ecology. We are happy that the Bill creates the possibility of a merger between Carlton and Granada. There was a time when that would not have been welcome, but in a fast-changing world market it is important that we have a strong ITV that is able to compete. There is no sense in maintaining artificial competition now that they are both up against such strong competitors both in the United Kingdom and, more particularly, from abroad.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) said about ITN. It makes little sense to sustain the restrictions on ITN ownership. I would go one stage further and make ITV take full responsibility for ITN if they merge to ensure that it is driven to be a serious competitor for BBC news and Sky news. I fear that the current arrangements are beginning to undermine ITN and will continue to do so.

I also agree with what the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said about the review period. It was originally meant to be every three years and the scrutiny Committee suggested that it should be every two years. I am rather despondent that

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the Bill sets out that it should be at least once every five years. It needs to be more frequent than that if it is to make a meaningful contribution.

Mr. Bercow: If there are alleged breaches by the BBC of its duty to observe due impartiality and the board of governors refuses to act, does the hon. Gentleman agree with the suggestion by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that there should be a back-stop power in such circumstances for Ofcom to exercise? If so, does he agree that a level of public opinion or protest could be a suitable catalyst for the exercise of such a power?

Nick Harvey: I agree that there should be a back-stop power, but it would be more appropriate, at least for now, for that power to reside with the Secretary of State and not with Ofcom. As Ofcom is a predominantly economic regulator and secondarily a content regulator, it has not evolved or matured enough for it to have ultimate responsibility for the BBC, which is what the Conservatives propose. The Government have got the balance just about right. We will soon have a detailed debate on the future of the BBC when we come to charter renewal. By that stage, Ofcom will be up and running and will have had a chance to prove itself. Then and only then should we debate what the hon. Gentleman's colleagues propose.

The scrutiny Committee had little time to absorb the 35 pages of clauses produced in the early summer on "must offer" and "must carry". The omission of those from the Bill has put some public service broadcasters into a bit of a spin. I do not advocate that the 35 pages should be reinstated, but we have not heard enough from the Government on why they came and then so swiftly went. Perhaps the Minister can tell us why they have been swept aside and why the Government are so confident that the fairly minimalist provisions now in the Bill will suffice. Irrespective of what form the Bill takes when it completes its parliamentary passage, we need to be sure that viewers across all platforms have access to all public service broadcasters. How that is achieved, from the consumers point of view at least, is a subsidiary issue. We do not want to lose sight of that.

If Ofcom is ultimately to arbitrate and referee negotiations between platform providers and public service broadcasters on terms that are fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory, we have to send either both parties into those negotiations with a pistol to their heads, or neither. We cannot have an imbalance. If there is to be a "must offer", logic dictates that there needs to be a "must carry", and vice versa. Both sides need to be locked in. Ofcom must have back-stop powers come what may to ensure that agreement is reached. We must consider those issues in Committee. I accept that the European directive as implemented in delegated legislation has the makings of a "must carry" provision, but we might want to probe that in more detail.

I, too, welcome the ITC's review of the programme supply market and congratulate the Secretary of State on asking it to set that up so promptly after the scrutiny Committee suggested it in its report. A vibrant and successful independent programme-making sector is important to the future of British broadcasting. Original UK production is part of the vitality of our broadcasting industry. It is especially important in the regions. A high proportion of independent production and a fair distribution of intellectual property rights need to be facilitated if independent production is to survive and thrive, as I am sure we all hope it will.

I welcome the provisions for access radio. Some of the experiments in access radio are proving successful and could nurture a great deal of radio talent for the future. It is important that, as we proceed, adequate spectrum is made available for access radio, and some of that may, for example, come from BBC sub-bands.

We have heard the suggestions for radio ownership rules. It is important that the regulator is able to determine a meaningful requirement of localness, which has not always been implemented with great vigour in the past. The Bill will need to be particularly tight in that area if we are to protect local radio and its listeners, so I welcome Ofcom's duty to impose localness conditions.

As for the revolution in media ownership—that is what this is—that the Government are heralding, that was not part of the White Paper. It emerged in the early summer before the scrutiny Committee started its work and only as we reached the draft Bill stage. Nothing that is suggested is implacably wicked or wrong in principle, but we already have two new Acts, the Competition Act 1998 and the Enterprise Act 2002, and we are now introducing this Bill, which we presume will be enacted next year. There will also be a complete upheaval in the apparatus of regulation, as five bodies make way and a new one is set up.

I should have thought that with three Acts needing to bed down, to prove themselves and to be probed, and a new regulator that may take time to work properly and to prove its worth, the Government are taking an enormous gamble by launching into complete upheaval of our ownership rules. To my mind, it would have made sense to allow the legislation to prove itself, and to allow Ofcom to prove itself, and then during a periodic review of the market to return to the question of ownership rules. However, the Government seem confident that it will work. The Secretary of State said in her speech that Ofcom will not permit some of the practices about which people have expressed worry, and I can only hope that her confidence will prove to be well founded.

Mr. Mullin: On the question of wickedness, is it the hon. Gentleman's understanding that removing the cross-media ownership rules from Channel Five would enable a newspaper proprietor who already owns, say, four national newspapers and one television channel to purchase Channel Five and use it to subvert ITV and Channel 4, in the same way as he subverted much of the rest of Fleet street? That would be fairly wicked, would it not?

Nick Harvey: It certainly would, and I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's point. It has to be said that the broadcasting sector is regulated a great deal more tightly than the newspaper sector, but the hon. Gentleman certainly raises an interesting point, and it will cause hon. Members to stop and think.

Mr. Mullin: I am relatively new to this conversation, but I would like to know whether the hon. Gentleman's understanding of the decision to remove the cross-media ownership rules from Channel Five is the same as mine.

Nick Harvey: Yes, it is, but the hon. Gentleman may want to think about some of the general competition rules that might apply. Although the Bill makes sector-specific points, he may be reassured by the fact that general competition rules might prevent that degree of cross-media ownership. Who knows, however? We are stepping into new realms. I should have thought that if the proprietor that the hon. Gentleman may have in mind were to get control of Channel Five, which I believe is being opened up because it has very low viewing figures, those figures might quickly increase, and the market might look very different shortly thereafter.

On radio ownership rules, I note that the Government have moved from three plus one to two plus one. I welcome the definition of a "well developed commercial radio market", but as I said, it is important that localness can be ensured and that Ofcom sets about that serious task.

I agreed with the general thrust of the comments made by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford about religious ownership. The Government's proposals are pragmatic and sensible, but they leave in primary legislation the prohibition on religious ownership, which seems peculiar. I believe that the position will be challenged and that the Government will have to revisit the matter. I do not understand why religious organisations should be banned from even applying for a licence, although I can well see that when it comes to allocating licences, there may be strong arguments.

Mr. Bryant: In that case, would the hon. Gentleman also remove the restriction on political parties having broadcasting licences?

Nick Harvey: There is a big difference between the two, and more people would see the sense in the political ban than would see the sense in the religious ban. However, as the Secretary of State implied, the days of the political ban may be numbered.

On telecommunications, which is clearly an important part of the Bill, we are now in a period of rapid technological progress, which is to be welcomed. Nevertheless, the role of the regulator in that market will be vital. It is important that Ofcom use the various tools that the Bill puts at its disposal, such as the provisions on significant market power and on privileged suppliers. We welcome also the universal service conditions, and we hope that they will be used progressively to ratchet up the requirement on telecoms providers to make sure that broadband becomes increasingly available in rural areas. It will be a serious blow to constituencies such as mine and those of many of my right hon. and hon. Friends if there is two-track progress on that and rural areas are left out. It is important that that not be allowed to happen and that Ofcom use the powers at its disposal.

The Government should consider whether there should be more scope for self-regulation in advertising. I welcome the provision of the consumer panel but I regret that it will not be more independent. The Government were wrong to turn down the idea of the Secretary of State appointing the panel. It will not work as well as it could if it is a creature of the regulator.

There are various issues concerning disabled consumers of communications, who are not given the priority in the Bill that they should receive. It is interesting that although the Government have included provisions, they are only modest; for example, the requirement for 10 per cent. of audio description in any given week. Would not it make sense to give Ofcom a power, or indeed to impose on it a duty, to increase some of those proportions over time? That would not have to be done at an unrealistic speed. Simply to include requirements in the Bill and then wait for years until another Bill is introduced seems to indicate a rather relaxed attitude.

In conclusion, we welcome the Bill, and we hope that some of the problems can be ironed out in Committee. The Bill undoubtedly provides a framework that could be effective in regulating these crucial industries for many years to come.

6.49 pm

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Like everyone who has spoken so far, I welcome the Bill. It must be the first Bill to receive so much scrutiny before hitting the Floor of the House, and I suspect, and hope, that it will be a model for future legislation.

There is certainly a logic in creating one regulatory authority. The media are constantly and quickly changing, and we have different means of conveying news, gathering information and providing entertainment.

That is a far cry from the original vision of Lord Reith when the BBC was created. In fact, he would not recognise broadcasting provision today. In an ever-changing world with overlapping media and a convergence of different types of media, it is sensible that a light-touch regulatory authority should look at the principles of regulation, rather than the detail. Inevitably, anything that we discuss in the House today and over the coming weeks in Committee may be out of date by the time it receives Royal Assent.

I was pleased that the Secretary of State reaffirmed in her opening speech that public service broadcasting would be given a new lease of life by the Bill, as I support it strongly. Because we have a tradition of such broadcasting in the UK, we have a high standard of broadcasting which is the envy of the world. When we talk about public service broadcasting, everyone assumes that we are talking about the BBC but of course we are not—we are talking about the ITV channels, Channel 4 and Channel Five. I now have access to a range of channels through satellite—I finally gave in and got it last summer—but it is to terrestrial channels that I turn for most of my viewing, simply because most of the others offer repeats of stuff that I have already seen. Most innovative, exciting and new work is produced by the public service broadcasters.

In my own area of Aberdeen, the regional identity that is an important component of public service broadcasting is delivered not by the BBC, but by Grampian TV and Northsound Radio.

Pete Wishart: Does the hon. Lady share my disappointment that there is no representative from

[Pete Wishart]

Scotland on the Ofcom board, although we previously had a place on the Independent Television Commission? Does she not think that our strong regional identity in Scotland may be lost because we do not have that position any more?

Miss Begg: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman lives, but to have a place specifically for someone from Scotland on a board of nine would be overgenerous. The Scots get everywhere. I cannot believe that nine board members serving a national body there will not include at least one Scot. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is an exception, because she has a place in Cabinet, but the hon. Gentleman's proposal is equivalent to saying that we want a special seat for a Scot. If anything, the problem is usually the reverse—people from the English regions are always complaining that they do not get a say in anything because the dominant voices are from Scotland—*[Interruption.]* Indeed, and Wales as well. There will be nine people on the board, and I hope that they will include Scots who can reflect Scotland's views.

As I was saying, it is important that the content rules of public service broadcasting include the promotion and protection of local and regional content. In my own area of Aberdeen, that regional identity is catered for most capably by Grampian TV and Northsound radio. However, I am concerned that there may be a loss of that regional identity. While I accept that it may be desirable for Granada and Carlton TV to merge, and understand the wish for a strong ITV and perhaps a single ITV channel competing with the BBC, I am concerned that Grampian's specific regional identity may be lost. It is important that the content rules deal with that—it is not just about a pan-Scottish identity but about narrower identities within Scotland.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Is that not a classic example of the Secretary of State having to examine her reassurance that it is not ownership but regulation that matters? In the Scottish Media Group's takeover of Grampian, the ITC had to work hard to apply the spirit as well as the letter of the regulations.

Miss Begg: Indeed, it did so successfully. Now that the Scottish Media Group has put *The Herald* up for sale, there are concerns that it and *The Scotsman* will be owned by the same people. There are therefore anxieties about the possible narrowing of media ownership, as well as worries about the opening of media ownership to people from non-European Community countries. In Scotland, the worry is not that more people will own more media outlets but that those outlets will be in the hands of fewer people. The Bill's proposed liberalisation, which would allow foreign ownership of media outlets, may, notwithstanding the concerns that many of us have about some individuals involved, result in a broader range of media owners in Scotland.

The Bill deals not just with television but with radio. I have given Grampian and Northsound a few plugs today—I commend both of them on their good sense in deciding to locate new headquarters in my constituency. Very often, local commercial radio stations cater for local identity. They have a good community spirit and are active in the community. While the UK overall may be frightened that too much output comes from London, people in the north and Scotland are frightened that too much comes from the central belt, so it is important that we make provision for regional differences.

Time is moving on, so I shall make one more point on the "must carry, must offer" controversy. I shall not go into what money should change hands if that provision comes into force, but it is crucial that both "must offer" and "must carry" are included in the Bill. When the analogue signal is switched off, the only platform from which some people, particularly in rural areas, will be able to receive a signal is satellite. It is unlikely that everyone in this country will be able to receive a digital signal from the usual transmitter system, so they will have no choice but to access digital television through satellite platforms. If that is the case, it is incumbent on the satellite platforms to ensure that they carry all the public service broadcasting channels. People currently have choice in certain areas but, crucially, that may not be so in future. I therefore hope that the Government will ensure that there are backstop powers in the Bill.

The Bill is important, as I have said. It has had a lengthy gestation, and hope that all the discussion that preceded today's debate will result in a better Bill rather than, as one wag said to me last night, a longer Bill made even longer. I commend it to the House.

6.58 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): In one sense, I had hoped that the Bill would be slightly longer, as it would have been nice if it had been a consolidated Bill. It is a bit like the Maastricht treaty—you read the ruddy Bill but cannot understand it because it keeps referring to earlier legislation, in this case, the Broadcasting Act 1996.

Mr. Bryant: Is "ruddy" a parliamentary word?

Michael Fabricant: I will not drawn by the hon. Gentleman towards the Maastricht treaty, or I might be very much out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Like other hon. Members, I welcome the Bill, which is an important measure that has been, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) said, a long time coming. It reflects the change in technology. There is convergence not only in technology but in the law.

I do not agree with all the hon. Members who spoke about religion. I agree with the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant). I am personally uncomfortable about the idea that broadcasters who represent specific religions might have access nationally to analogue radio. However, I believe that there will be national coverage on digital radio; the Secretary of State did not make that clear.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) and, apparently, like the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), the former Secretary of State, who has taken the road not to Damascus but to Islington, South and Finsbury, I believe that there is a huge anomaly in the treatment of the BBC. That is

different from what the Secretary of State said earlier and from what the right hon. Gentleman said when he was Secretary of State.

In an intervention, I said that when the BBC does not uphold a complaint against it about programme content, even if the corporation is right, justice must be seen to be done. It is not right for the BBC, or anyone, to act as their own judge and jury, yet the BBC is acting in precisely that way. However, I welcome the fact that the BBC will be covered by tiers 1 and 2. Tier 3 is the control on public service broadcasters, which include not only the BBC but channel 3, Channel Five and Channel 4. It translates into greater transparency, but ultimately the governors of the BBC will act as judge and jury on their performance. That must be wrong.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I suspect that it will be debated at length in Committee. Nevertheless, does he accept that the BBC has a backstop: the House of Commons, to which the BBC is accountable? Is he genuinely suggesting that a regulator is necessarily better for democratic accountability than hon. Members and Ministers?

Michael Fabricant: Yes, on a day-to-day basis. As the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, an intervention by the Secretary of State to sack the board of governors would be the nuclear option. The BBC is ultimately responsible to Parliament because it has a royal charter whose contents are determined by Parliament. However, I emphasise that intervention by Parliament is the nuclear option. Ofcom, not the board of governors, should have day-to-day control.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Fabricant: One last time.

Mr. Bryant: Is it not important that, in law, the Secretary of State cannot sack the governors? Secretaries of State in every other country in Europe can sack the governors of public service broadcasters. Here, they are appointed by the Queen in Council, and it is important to maintain the BBC's independence by ensuring that its governors cannot be removed by politicians.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I simply echoed the point of the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury.

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Fabricant: I shall break my own rule and give way.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) should be that the Queen acts on the advice of the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister.

Michael Fabricant: I am eternally grateful, but now I shall move on or I shall run out of time. I emphasise that the BBC is its own judge and jury, and that is wrong. I suspect that, more often than not, the BBC makes the right decisions about complaints against it.

Again on the BBC, a frequency imperialism pertains. That point was made time and again in the 1980s, when I worked in the broadcasting industry. Nowadays, the Radio Authority makes it clear that access radio, which the Bill and the Secretary of State encourage, is impeded by the BBC, which continues to sit on frequencies that prevent access radio from using the FM band. I hope that Ministers will deal with that problem when we consider the Bill in more detail in Committee. If I am chosen to serve on the Committee, I shall table amendments to ensure that there is an option to move the BBC from time to time when it squats on frequencies and prevents access to independent broadcasters. The independent production sector is acknowledged as being important to the United Kingdom, and generates not only pounds through payments from sales to television broadcasters in the United Kingdom, but dollars and perhaps even euros from the sale of programmes overseas.

There should be quotas for radio as well as television. The BBC, especially Jenny Abramsky, has resisted that, but I do not understand the reason. The BBC has an internal quota of 10 per cent. and currently runs about 13 per cent. of analogue radio channels. I therefore believe that 10 per cent. is a reasonable quota. If the Government claim that a quota is too rigid, why does that argument not apply to television? There should be comparability. If television will have a quota, there should be a quota for radio too. It should be achievable, and I acknowledge that there is more live broadcasting on radio than on television. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I say to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) that I am capable of keeping order and I do not need his assistance.

Michael Fabricant: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Radio needs a quota that is different from the one for television because of radio's higher live broadcasting content.

Let us consider the technical aspects of the Bill and the telecommunications perspective. Several hon. Members rightly said that that should not be ignored. When I served on the Committee that considered the Office of Communications Act 2002, several hon. Members, especially the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White), often the made the point that we concentrate too much on television and radio and not often enough on broadband.

Several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Rhondda, whom I like to plug because he serves on the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, said that not only rural but also urban areas suffer from lack of access to broadband. My hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford also made the same point. I put in a plea for Burntwood in my constituency. It has a larger population than Lichfield but no access to asymmetric digital subscriber line—ADSL.

The Bill is also gold-plating some European Union directives. A rather depressing example is its provision for a directive to control apparatus that BT and other telephone operators use. The reason for that is often

[Michael Fabricant]

given as the position in Kingston-upon-Hull, where telephones are hard-wired in. However, that represents a small proportion of telephone systems in the United Kingdom. We all know that the majority of telephones in this country are plug-in. They can be bought from Dixons, Comet or the John Lewis Partnership, which I am always keen to promote. There is therefore no problem with competition. There is no reason at all to have provisions in the Bill to protect the consumer against BT or anyone else who controls this sort of equipment.

I want to draw to the House's attention the concerns expressed by Channel 4, which has raised an important point. Although it welcomes the fact that ownership of television may change—we are almost certain to see consolidation in independent television, because of the huge losses of advertising revenue; they are down by 13 per cent. on last year—Channel 4 and other broadcasters are concerned that such consolidation would give a particularly powerful position to channel 3, if TV sales came under the control of one organisation, in terms of controlling the advertising market. That would be to the detriment of Channel 4, Channel Five and other broadcasters. Channel 4 has made it clear that it does not oppose the ownership changes, but it believes that Ofcom should have the necessary powers and expertise to maintain an open and competitive advertising sales market. That is absolutely right.

With those caveats, I welcome the Bill. It represents a move towards the future, and its architecture is sufficiently open for the Bill to be flexible enough to encompass further technological changes when they occur. It is important, however, that the Bill should be scrutinised properly in Committee.

7.11 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I should like to add my voice to the chorus of approval for both the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Trade and Industry with regard to the way in which they have conducted themselves in bringing the Bill to the Floor of the House.

I commend to the House a speech that I heard at the Edinburgh television festival in 1994—in fact, it was the McTaggart lecture—by a young man called Gregory Dyke. In it, he said that the BBC should be free of all political interference. That is probably why I am one of those on the Government side of the House who support the idea that the BBC should be completely regulated by Ofcom. We persuaded the Secretary of State for Health that we should be allowed a free vote on aspects of the Adoption and Children Bill last Session, and I wonder whether it would be possible to have a free vote on whether the BBC should be so regulated. It would then be the House's decision. There is a feeling abroad that the BBC will ultimately come into Ofcom, but it will do so only when it has its charter renewal and an improved licence fee. Those two elements really should be inside Ofcom's remit, not outside it.

One or two hon. Members have mentioned ITN. The hon. Members for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) and for North Devon (Nick Harvey) made the very good point that ITN is quite fragile. I believe that it needs some care and attention, and it needs it now, not tomorrow. Will the Secretary of State convene a meeting—similar to the meetings relating to the merger of Granada and Carlton—with the ITN board to see whether there is a better way of dealing with ITN, rather than having to wait?

I am a big fan of community radio and television, and I am nervous that it is not clear who is to fund the proposals for the extension of those services. I would like to see powers in the Bill to provide for perhaps 1 per cent. of the licence fee being allocated to community television and radio. After all, if they are not a public service, I do not know what is. If that proposal is unacceptable, perhaps 1 to 5 per cent. of the licence fee could be given over five years, so that we could build up a reservoir of money for community radio and television people to bid for.

This is quite a complicated issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) said that he was worried about commercial radio losing out to those services in terms of advertising, but we could keep them in trust so that they did not have to advertise. That would be a way of funding something at the edge of radio and television—and, indeed, broadband. I commend that proposal to the Minister and look forward to his response.

I disagree with my noble Friend Lord Puttnam about overseas investment. I welcome such investment, but two provisions ought to come with it. First, Ofcom should regulate for a higher percentage of local programming. If, for example, Disney were to buy Channel Five, or Murdoch wanted to make inroads into Granada, we could then insist, under the Ofcom regulations, that 80 per cent. of all production took place in this country. I like the way in which the French look after their media, and we must do the same.

I would also like to see a much higher independent production figure. The figure of 25 per cent. was set in 1981. It was supposed to be a floor, but we treated it as a ceiling. That figure of 25 per cent. is the only reason why the independent production market cannot develop and grow bigger. I would like to see a floor of 40 per cent. built in over five years, as the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) suggested for radio—an idea that I also support. It should not involve 10 per cent. now and 10 per cent. tomorrow, however, but 25 per cent. over five years. I would like to see a burgeoning of radio production.

In the creative businesses that I know so well, creativity always lies in smallness, not in largeness. That is where our people's brilliance is.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that that production quota of 25 per cent. is often confined to the London area, and not scattered across the nation as a whole? Does he also accept that it is important to start spreading it?

Mr. Wyatt: I well remember the regional director of the BBC getting on the train at Euston, finishing up in Manchester for the week, and coming back on Friday. I agree entirely that there should be some regional perspective in the production quota, too.

Something that has struck a raw nerve with me is a matter over which Ofcom has reserved powers in relation to the public interest, which I would like to see

toughened. The provisions are too prescriptive at the moment, and I would like to see a law protecting minors from spamming. For hon. Members who are not sure what spamming is, I shall explain. Last year 8 per cent. of all e-mails contained pornography or child pornography. This year that number has increased to 38 per cent., and it is rising daily. That is totally unacceptable, and the Ofcom rules on it are too weak. We are not addressing the issue, and I want to see a much tougher power for Ofcom included in the Bill. We must tell the internet service providers that they must either accept a charter given to them by Ofcom, or be charged a licence fee. They would choose a charter pretty quickly. If they were not prepared to, Ofcom should be allowed to require the installation of screening software to ensure that all ISPs screen for pornography, especially child pornography, which is appalling and disgusting.

Hon. Members have mentioned broadband. The sad thing is that we have lost that thing called universality. We had it for television; we built the transmitters. We had it for electricity; we built the national grid. We need to charge Ofcom with introducing regulations to find the funding for rural communities—the 35 per cent. who do not have and never will get broadband. That funding may have to come from part of the licence fee or from a levy on advertising, but there must be a way of coming up with an intelligent solution so that the rural and semi-rural communities are not downgraded. That is something that Ofcom must do.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman is making some extremely important points. May I take him back to his point about pornographic spam—if that is what we should call it? We agree that it is undesirable, but how does he intend it to be regulated?

Mr. Wyatt: I am not an advertising man, but there are several outstanding pieces of software on the market that I could name. I have seen them working, and they are between 95 and 98 per cent. successful. We will never be able to screen out such spam completely, but we should insist that screening software be installed. Furthermore, we can test that software, so there is a solution to this problem.

I shall return to my starting point—the BBC. It is currently streaming video on a channel, and I would love to know whether it has permission to do so. Is it a television channel, a broadcast channel or a broadband channel? I think that it is a broadcast channel, and that it does not have permission. Who regulates that channel? I would like that question cleared up. This is one of the fundamental reasons why we must put the BBC inside Ofcom. I commend the Bill to the House.

7.19 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Like everyone else in the House, I welcome the Bill, which was brought about by a number of pressures, including the need to comply with European directives. Although there is some gold plating, I am still in favour of the Bill and what it brings before us tonight.

I have served in the House for a number of years, and I have been a member of Committees that scrutinised Bills that created "Ofthis", "Ofthat" and "Of-the-other"—I have not regretted scrutinising any of those Bills, particularly the one on "Of-the other". The particular matters that came before us encountered resistance from the Labour party, but as time has gone on, all those bodies have been welcomed and have come to be regarded as good things. They have gone from strength to strength.

Greater scrutiny of such Bills would have been valuable on occasion, however, and the Government have a poor record of timetabling legislation without allowing adequate time for proper examination. I have in mind the Enterprise Act 2002; not only clauses but rafts of clauses went undebated because of the timetable motion, yet still became law. We must hope that they work properly.

John Robertson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the pre-legislative scrutiny will make the Bill successful? As it has already been considered, it will also be easier to amend in Committee.

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman not only gives me another minute or two, but brings me to my next point. I commend the pre-legislative scrutiny, which has been immensely valuable, and the Government are to be congratulated on introducing the process—not only for this Bill but, I sincerely hope, for others. If the pre-legislative scrutiny had not taken place, I shudder to think how many clauses of this 543-page Bill would have gone undebated.

Even so, the Bill could be further improved by spending more time in Committee, so the programme motion disappoints me. Again, there is insufficient time for us to do the legislation justice, so if my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), who is leading for the Opposition, wishes to object on that point he will find me in the Lobby beside him, supporting more time for scrutinising the Bill. Indeed, as we have broad and general agreement, I hope that Ministers will not be too upset, and officials will not feel that their virility has been tested, if they agree to the odd amendment to improve the Bill.

Integrating the work of the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority to achieve a coherent, common and consistent policy on licensing broadcasters, maintaining standards and considering complaints is a desirable objective. Making it all work smoothly and seamlessly is a major undertaking in itself. Of course there will be difficulties over the details of the role and procedures that Ofcom will adopt, the extent of its powers to regulate, access to services, and the composition of the authority. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) will be very interested in its membership.

Despite all the support for Ofcom, it is nevertheless important to say at this point that fundamental issues are at stake. I am not sure how the Bill will clarify the position of the BBC. Obviously, many Members in the House are not clear about that either. Even the previous Secretary of State has seen the light, and I hope that Ministers can bring themselves to support the idea of Ofcom covering the BBC.

Under clause 3, Ofcom has a general duty

"to further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition".

[Mr. Page]

By almost any definition, there are sections of the television and broadcasting market in which the BBC has a strong, entrenched position, but, as the satellite and broadcasting groups rightly point out, the BBC will fall outside Ofcom's remit. Independent companies operating in the terrestrial cable and satellite market as well as the radio sector will be subject to the full impact of regulation, but the dominant player will lie beyond Ofcom's reach.

I made a careful note of the Secretary of State's opening remarks. She said that there was to be full rigour of competition law, covering, as it will, the BBC. Fine, but what does that mean? Will the penalties imposed by Ofcom and the Office of Fair Trading be the same? Will the speed of implementation be the same for both? Will the legal defences available to businesses against both bodies be the same? Will a judgment by one body on significant market power be accepted by the other? What will be done to prevent a business from facing two rulings, which may be conflicting, from two bodies?

If the Minister's answer to those questions is, "It will all be seamless and it will all be the same," I shall argue, "Why shouldn't the BBC come under the control of Ofcom?" I support the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), because there should be a free vote on the issue. It should not be a matter for party discipline and Whips. This is a moral issue, just like foxhunting or something like that. That may seem a bridge too far, Madam Deputy Speaker, but there we are.

May I flag up another concern? Members on both sides of the House are fully aware of the importance of broadband services, and our foreign competitors are aware of it as well. Deutsche Telecom, with German federal Government support, has 90 per cent. of that country covered, France has invested the equivalent of $25 per head and Japan a massive $90. We are on $5. According to BT, coverage is some 66 per cent., but it will be another five years before 90 per cent. of our population have access to broadband services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield plugged a place in his constituency, so I shall plug one in mine. The town of Chorleywood is full of keen internet and broadband users, but they are still waiting for connections so that they can start to use the service. Some rural areas will never have—

Pete Wishart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Page: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I shall not, because I have given way already, and the time limit is such that I shall be cut off in my prime if I do.

Some rural areas will not have cover because current legislation and the Bill prevent cross-subsidy. Sooner or later, one of two situations will arise: either the Government will have to put their hand in the taxpayer's pocket to fund non-commercial areas, or such areas as Cornwall will have to remain a communications desert. I disagree strongly with the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey. Why should companies that have paid a fortune for licences be forced to pay more to cover areas that it is commercially impossible to cover? We disagree fundamentally there. The Government have made enough money out of all this without getting further help.

The Government made a serious mistake in the bidding process, as they were interested only in the numbers that bidders were prepared to gamble. The Chancellor and his chief economic adviser were willing to take the money, but they failed to consider how the various broadband services were to be rolled out and funded. Conservative Members vehemently opposed the bidding war that the Government created, and we pointed out that implementation of those services would be slow. We are seeing the consequences at this very moment, and the Government are to blame, as they were very greedy up-front. Now they are unable and unprepared to put their hand in their pocket to ensure that everybody in this country gets broadband services.

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Page: I know that the hon. Gentleman does not like hearing this, but the Government are not prepared to ensure that everybody gets the broadband services that they deserve and that other EU countries are to provide.

Conservative Members can thoroughly endorse the promotion of competition. The Bill will give a new regulatory body a duty to promote that aim, and I hope that it will be successful—but, both inside and outside the House, we shall still need to assure ourselves that that aim and the means suggested for accomplishing it are fully compatible.

7.29 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): Having listened to the excellent speeches made so far, I want to raise two points. They may not be hugely original, and others may raise them later, but I shall raise them none the less.

My first point relates chiefly to newspapers. Clause 359 repeals sections 57 to 62 of the Fair Trading Act 1973, and places the newspaper industry under the merger control regime set out in the Enterprise Act 2002. Clauses 361 to 375 specify the rules under which the Government can intervene when there is concern about a monopoly or an abundance of ownership in a particular part of the market, not just in the United Kingdom as a whole but, according to my reading, in parts of it. I am not sure whether that would apply to, say, Scotland or Wales—perhaps others will be able to interpret it better—but there has certainly been a lot of debate in Scotland over the last few weeks because of the potential sale of *The Herald* to the proprietor of another Scottish newspaper.

I suspect that most Members with an interest in Scottish affairs want as diverse a market as possible in Scotland. In fact, the subject was discussed in Westminster Hall earlier today. I do not know what will happen about *The Herald*. It will be a commercial judgment for the directors of the Scottish Media Group, who have a legal obligation to ensure that they secure the best possible return for the shareholder. They can take account of various factors, such as the wellbeing

and welfare of staff, but those are pretty marginal issues. By and large, they are constrained by the size of the bids that come in.

Having said that most people want as diverse a market as possible, I should add that what are often described as London newspapers during Scottish debates are, in fact, United Kingdom newspapers. All are sold in Scotland, many in "editorialised" form. I would like to see more people in Scotland reading *The Guardian*, and I would like *The Guardian* to make more effort to sell itself in Scotland, but there it is. Whatever rationale underpins the decision of the Scottish Media Group directors, it seems entirely possible that ownership of *The Herald* and *The Scotsman* will remain in separate hands; but I think it worth saying, for future reference, that that should best happen through the market rather than through political intervention.

Pete Wishart: Does the hon. Gentleman share my fear that, if the Bill is passed in its current form, the takeover will be more permissible and most likely?

Mr. Joyce: I am not sure that that follows. What I am saying is that, wherever possible, the market should dictate such developments. Moreover—this has been discussed at length, at least in Scotland—there should be scope for consolidation of media ownership. The Scottish Media Group is a strong regionally based group which is divesting itself of *The Herald*, and I think it should be able to consolidate. I think that the Bill allows about the right amount of regulation.

I suspect that the market will take care of things on this occasion, but it is possible that in due course—in five years, perhaps; who knows how long—the problem will rear its head again in Scotland. At present it is widely recognised that, despite considerable investment by the owners of *The Scotsman*, the paper has not performed as well in the markets as *The Herald*. Views vary; I think *The Scotsman* is a perfectly good newspaper. *The Herald* has certainly performed well, although its journalists would say that it had received less investment because it was part of a larger media group that some feel has erred in the direction of television interests.

Those points are open to debate, but in Scotland there seems to be a substantial market for one newspaper and only half a market for the other, and I am not certain that market conditions will change over the years. The markets will probably sort this out to the reasonable satisfaction of most MPs and members of the public, but we may well need to return to it, and I hope that in that event it will be dealt with not through political intervention but through the market's delivery of the right solution.

My second point relates to impartiality. An important principle of broadcasting in the United Kingdom has always been the fair, accurate and impartial delivery of news, and I expect that most Members support that principle. So far, the only argument against impartiality—well, there may be others, but it is the only one of which I am aware—has been advanced by Rupert Murdoch and one or two others who believe that the markets should be allowed to deliver television news in the same way as they deliver it in newspapers. In other words, they believe that the expression of editorial opinion should be permitted, and that it should be slanted in relation to choice. People would watch this or that news programme according to its slant, just as they might buy newspapers according to their slant.

That argument has been more or less defeated until now, and has constituted the main challenge to impartiality. However, a report by Professor Ian Hargreaves, on behalf of the ITC—which is about to make way for Ofcom—raises an important point. News providers, if they can be called that, such as al-Jazeera broadcast from outside the UK through satellite channels. They represent a minority interest in the UK at present, but cynics might argue that they do not attempt to be impartial; they attempt to target a specific market, which is what proponents of the anti-impartiality argument have argued should happen in the UK.

I suspect that the fact that it does happen, and that such channels are available in the UK, may put pressure on the Government. It may not be necessary to take account of the possibility in Committee, but if a market develops for impartial services broadcast from abroad it may have a substantial bearing on the whole issue of impartiality.

The issue arises in particular in regard to the attitudes of members of black and ethnic-minority communities. While the UK public as a whole support impartiality as a principle, that does not apply to the same extent to those who are not white. A market could arise for foreign services that could not be delivered from the UK—foreign services conveying far more extreme messages. This may seem far fetched, but although some people say that channels such as al-Jazeera are rubbish, high-quality journalists work for them and capable people run them. They target their markets in a very slanted and cynical way.

I want to put down a marker for the future. The impartiality issue raised by Professor Hargreaves will need to be revisited. I feel, however, that the Bill has the right touch in terms of its regulation and the way in which it allows the markets to do their own thing, but to step in when it may be necessary. That, I think, is just about the right balance.

7.39 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I should begin by pointing out my entry in the Register of Members' Interests. I am a consultant to Carlton Communications, for which I worked for seven and a half years before coming to this place. What I say is coloured by my experiences in working for Carlton, and I make no apologies for that. It is a heavily regulated industry, and I hope that it will be useful to talk about my experience in it.

I welcome the Bill. The television and media industries need to be treated much more like other industries. Regulation has held those industries back, and that fact flows from a fundamental point that we cannot get away from. We have five terrestrial channels, three of which are state-owned. One of the other two, ITV, still has huge regulatory burdens, and the commercial sector in this country is, if anything, still too small.

I am concerned about the size of the Bill. Everyone talks about deregulation, but it is something of a monster. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield

[Mr. David Cameron]

(Michael Fabricant) said, it will be a source of disappointment to the industry that the legislation actually adds to, rather than supersedes, the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996. I remember how difficult it was when working at Carlton to take decisions such as whether to invest in a cable company or in radio, or to change the schedule, when all the time one had to refer to two—now, it is three—enormous documents. That can be quite debilitating. We ought to encourage television and media companies to invest where there is value.

It is also a truism to say—but it needs to be said—that if people do not like something on television they will not watch it. The Minister should have that message burned into her desk, along with the answer to this question: why do television companies make great programmes? They do so not because of who sits on the Content Board, the contents of a Bill, or what a Minister says, but because people in the industry go to work every day wanting to make great programmes, because schedulers want the strongest schedule, and because airtime sales wants to sell advertising. That is why we can watch programmes such as "Dr. Zhivago" on ITV, and "Walking With Dinosaurs" and "Daniel Deronda" on the BBC.

I want to deal with the question of what was wrong with previous legislation, given that, once the Bill is enacted, we will have had three such Acts in the past 12 years. The 1990 Act was deregulatory, but it prevented terrestrial television companies from expanding. They should have been allowed into cable and satellite, but they were not. The 1996 Act was better, but digital terrestrial television, which I was involved with at Carlton, was hopelessly over-regulated. There were very complex rules about how many digital channels one could own. In the end, that was used by Sky as an excuse—and legitimately so—to say, "We can't sell you our channels to put on your platform because of these very complicated rules." The lesson that we must learn is not that there has been too much deregulation, but that there has not been enough.

I want to mention four elements of the Bill, the first of which concerns the changes relating to ownership, which are overdue and welcome. My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield said that consolidation should not harm regionalism, and I believe that he is right. Individual ITV licences, the board and programme policy statements still exist. However, we should note that television companies make regional programmes not just because they are told to by regulators, but because they work. That is one of the great strengths of television in this country. Such programmes are not always purely regional; they include programmes made in a region that are included in the national schedule. One thinks of "Peak Practice", which is made in the midlands, of "Heartbeat", which is made in Yorkshire, and of "Taggart", which is made in Scotland. The star of "Taggart" died five years ago, yet it continues on peak time ITV because it is such a terrific programme.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): It is? What is "Taggart"?

Mr. Cameron: My hon. Friend tries to distract me from a sedentary position.

There are scare stories about foreign ownership. The main such story that we read is that, if a US company takes over Channel Five or ITV, we will suddenly be flooded with cheap programmes from America that will be dumped on to our market. That is nonsense. The figures and the schedules show that domestic production beats imports every time. Mercifully, the days of the BBC showing "Dallas" or "Dynasty" at peak time have gone, because everybody in television knows that domestic production—home-made programmes—is what wins. If ITV or the BBC wanted to buy reams of American programmes and dump them into the schedule, they could do so now. One simply goes to one of these well-upholstered television festivals in Los Angeles or Cannes, and buys them. However, I do not believe that that would happen.

On reading commentators on such matters, one sometimes gets the feeling that, if only the BBC or ITV had had the foresight to buy "The West Wing" or "Friends", all their problems would be over. That is nonsense. Much better to have programmes such as "The Bill", "Coronation Street" or "EastEnders", because it is domestic production that delivers the audience. The scare story about foreign ownership is simply not right. Deregulating ownership is a good thing—it will allow investment to flow, exactly as the Secretary of State described.

My second point concerns ITN, to which Members on both sides of the House have referred. The case has not been made for ownership restrictions on ITN. Every major television channel in the world owns its own news supplier. ABC owns ABC News, and NBC owns NBC News. Why would having outside shareholders suddenly make such a news supplier stronger? If that were the case, we should tell the BBC, "You cannot own BBC News—it must have outside shareholders." As the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) said, there would be a real benefit in having strong shareholders who care about ITN. In fact, there is a very good example of that. ITN's 24-hour news channel is now owned exclusively by the two ITV companies, because the other ITN shareholders did not want to continue to fund a loss-making channel. That is good evidence that having strong shareholders who get behind the news supplier is a very good thing. I hope that we can change the Bill in that respect.

My third point concerns content regulation. Everyone talks about this big Bill as having a light touch, but I wonder about that. Some have even expressed the concern that it is not tough enough, and that there should be more regulations, but I am not sure that I agree. As I said, television companies do not make great programmes because of the content of a Bill, or what a regulator says. The Bill still provides for statements of programme policy, based on existing licences, that every television company will have to produce. Clause 256 includes a very full description of what public service broadcasting actually means in the multi-channel world. According to clause 259, one cannot change a programme policy statement without permission from Ofcom. It could be argued that, in a multi-channel world with many competing channels, the Bill constitutes active regulation, rather than a light touch.

I turn to my fourth and final point. There is no point in criticising a Bill for being too long unless one can think of something to remove from it, and I suggest removing the part concerning the consumer panel. What are consumer panels for? The creation of a giant bureaucracy is being suggested. They just might be suitable for telecoms—for which we have had such panels in the past—but please do not extend them to television. As I said, if people do not like what is on television, they switch off or switch over. The "off" button is often the best regulator that there is.

This is a good Bill, but it still imposes too much control. If we set the media industry free, we will be able to watch it grow. The Secretary of State's name appears very frequently in the Bill, and I hope that, during its passage, the ministerial team will consider what further regulations they can get rid of, what powers they can cede, and what controls they can give up. If they do that, they will produce a very good Bill, and the industry will be thankful.

7.48 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I welcome the Bill, and the Government are to be congratulated on the way in which it has been handled. The pre-legislative scrutiny and the extent to which the recommendations were accepted provided a model for such matters, and in the light of that I hope that proceedings in Committee will not be unnecessarily long. Although the Bill is very big, many of the arguments have already been rehearsed, so repeating them might be unduly tedious.

Most of today's debate has, understandably, been content-driven. That is primarily because this issue is of concern to the chattering classes; indeed, we have all been subjected to lobbying on a massive scale in that regard. Some have expressed concern about the role of the BBC, and I echo the sentiments of the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), who pointed out that we will be able to address the charter issue in a couple of years' time.

I hope that the charter will be dealt with in the same way as the Bill. We need a sensible debate. It would be appropriate to revisit the matter if shortcomings are found in the BBC's structure, but not before.

However, I want to make a nod in the direction of the telecommunications sector. Understandably, and for the reasons that I have given, we have tended to lose sight of the importance of that sector, and especially of the role of the regulator in challenging BT's power and strength.

I am not an opponent of BT, but it is understandable that it should protect its position. Some of its financial calls have caused it difficulties, but by the same token it is making a remarkable recovery. It retains great power and influence, and dominates the market. Its fixed infrastructure has the capacity to exclude potential players. It has the strength to embrace and adopt technological change in ways that can influence market development. For those reasons, regulation is necessary for some time to come.

Initially, it was suggested that regulation might be like Lenin's concept of the state—that the need for it would wither away. However, very much like Lenin's state, regulation has persisted for a considerable period, although it is probably regarded more benignly than the governance of the former Soviet Union.

It is clear that Oftel, in what might be called its dying days, has been quite effective and has addressed a number of issues. The package produced in August that provided protection for the poorest 80 per cent. of customers has been very useful. I am Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, and we have had our moments with Oftel. Occasionally, we have felt that its director general, David Edmonds, has not properly understood the nature of competition. For example, he has said that four mobile phone companies are somehow competitive, even though they each account for some 18 to 22 per cent. of the market, or a little more. Also, he sometimes seemed to ignore the concept of complex monopoly, which occurs when players of roughly similar size behave in exactly the same way—albeit independently—and come to fairly convenient conclusions about their market situation.

Regulation must have a continuing role. It must not restrict progress or be too prescriptive, but it should promote the market and at the same time protect consumers. Some consumers remain vulnerable. For example, they buy the wrong mobile system with the wrong pricing arrangements. Young people do not always appreciate the costs involved, and anyone who has had teenage children going through the mobile phase will have been presented with bills or demands for additional pocket money because mobile cards have become exhausted more quickly than anticipated. Such considerations must be borne in mind.

It has been suggested of late that the regulator has been captured by BT. Some have felt that, when we were talking about unbundling the local loop, Oftel's director general was unduly understanding of BT. Instead of going in with a bludgeon, he wanted to continue talking. As a result, we lost valuable time, and the unbundling process has never recovered. We started seriously on the process too late in the day. By the time the process really got under way, the telecoms bubble had burst—fortunately, one might say. The director general took the view that it was better to negotiate than to act by diktat. I think that it is sometimes better to go in hard and quickly than to try to achieve something through protracted negotiation.

However, I want to take Ministers to task about the proposed consumer panel. In our brief regulatory experience, there have been several examples of how a so-called consumer council has become largely a creature of the regulator. Under the old electricity regulatory system, the relevant body depended on the regulator for secretarial assistance; it had little independence and few resources. I would like to think that that will not be repeated, and that the regulatory process adopted by Ofcom will have integrity and independence. I hope that the consumer panel will represent the Secretary of State, and that there will be a clear separation of powers.

It is fair to say that Energywatch, the body responsible for protecting energy consumers, has, after a rather slow start, become an extremely effective voice in defence of some of the poorest and most disadvantaged people in our society who depend on gas and electricity supplies. Its strength lies in its physical, financial and political independence from Ofgem. I think that that model, which exists already in the Government's regulatory system, is worth consideration.

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

On the whole, the Bill is worth while and ambitious. I have not gone into its effects on media such as television and the like; I shall leave that to others. However, in the past couple of years, the telecoms sector has been effective and robust. We should ensure that the new set-up is not concerned only with market power and how that is controlled. We should also give proper consideration to the needs of consumers. With a bit of tweaking and care and attention, the Bill will provide a more independent and effective way to deal with such matters.

That is my only misgiving about the Bill, but it is relatively minor and not too serious. I wish the Bill well, and I also wish success to those who serve on the Standing Committee.

7.57 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Communications Bill because it fails to ensure the representation of Wales and Scotland on the Office of Communications (OFCOM); does not address the needs of people with disabilities adequately; does not regulate sufficiently cross-media ownership; does not protect against a monopoly of ownership; fails to ensure access for all to digital broadcasting and broadband communications; and further weakens democratic scrutiny and regulation of industries which are vital to citizenship.

I am pleased to speak to the reasoned amendment tabled in my name and in that of colleagues from the Scottish National party. We oppose giving the Bill a Second Reading on principle, but I acknowledge the value of the pre-legislative scrutiny procedure through which the Bill has gone. The Bill has been improved by that process and I welcome that, even though my party cannot support the Bill at this stage.

We have two principal concerns about the Bill. First, we consider that it still enables the broadcasting and IT industries to serve the needs of business more than the needs of the public. I am glad that the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) recognised the need for regulation in the sector, although we believe that the Bill does not go far enough. Secondly, we oppose the lack of Scottish and Welsh representation in the proposed Ofcom set-up. The regulator thereby lacks democratic representation.

We believe that the proposed regulatory system is centralist in its approach to Scotland and Wales, and to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. Before devolution, Wales and Scotland were represented at the highest level on the Radio Authority, the ITC, the BBC and the telecommunications advisory committee. Under Ofcom, Wales and Scotland will be represented only on the advisory bodies—the content body and the consumer panel.

That is further forward than where we were a year ago when it was not guaranteed that even that would happen. However, it is ironic that we have less representation now, post-devolution—albeit on a non-devolved issue—than we had pre-devolution. There is a democratic deficit for the people of Wales and Scotland. All we have left is a seat on the BBC Wales board of governors.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Ofcom will have a board of nine; it will then appoint a contents board and a consumer panel. The Bill states that it will set those up with a representative from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; Ofcom will then set up offices in each country. Given that there is a board of nine, that there is direct contact in each country and that broadcasting is a UK-retained issue, surely that set-up will be much better than the current one.

Mr. Thomas: I cannot agree with the hon. Lady that the situation will be better than at present. At least we currently have representation on the ITC and the Radio Authority, but we will not have representation on Ofcom.

In the Committee considering the Office of Communications Bill, I moved an amendment to provide that the board should consist not of nine members but 15, which would have allowed representation from all areas of the United Kingdom. That was one way forward.

The hon. Lady says that Ofcom will appoint a consumer panel and a content panel. That is even worse—a body with no democratic representation from Wales or Scotland appoints bodies to look after Wales and Scotland. The decision-making and advisory powers will be delegated to Ofcom. Nothing in the Bill says that, in making those appointments, Ofcom has to negotiate, discuss or even take advice from the Scottish Parliament or the National Assembly for Wales. That is a scandal in terms of the relationship between Westminster and other democratic bodies. The Labour-Liberal Democrat Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales and the Cabinet and Executive of the Scottish Parliament both asked for this level of representation in the Bill. That is a problem.

There is an alternative way forward. If we are not to get direct representation, we can consider representative bodies for Wales and Scotland. I have advocated an overall Wales or Scotland advisory committee to advise Ofcom. It is vital that Ofcom make an annual report to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales on its activities in broadcasting and IT within Wales. Again, that is not provided for in the Bill. The other suggestion is to have a separate consumer panel for Wales and Scotland.

Miss Begg: I am sure that Ofcom will reflect all the constituent parts and regions of the UK. What would be the purpose of a separate report to the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly when they can read the national report that covers everybody? The relevant section will be in the report for them to read.

Mr. Thomas: I do not know what the situation is like in Scotland, but when I want to find out what is happening about Wales I have to read the footnotes of UK reports.

Wales has a Welsh language broadcasting channel, which has not been mentioned tonight. S4C is the fourth channel in Wales, and we need to know what Ofcom is doing to support Welsh language broadcasting in Wales as well as digital English language broadcasting in Wales. That is a specific requirement that my party would like to see.

Pete Wishart: Does not my hon. Friend find it incredible that Scottish Members are arguing for a

solution to a situation that will be worse than the present one? Even Jack McConnell, the First Minister, was brave enough to make representations to ensure that we had a place on the Ofcom board. Surely Labour Members would agree to our having a place at Ofcom's top table.

Mr. Thomas: My hon. Friend has made my point for me. I shall certainly not go any further down that road.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that at a time when the S4C budget has been slashed there should be no representation on this body?

Mr. Thomas: I do share my hon. Friend's concern and will mention the S4C budget in a moment.

Issues of broadband and IT infrastructure are also of vital interest to Wales. Access to digital broadcasting and broadband is different in Wales because its population—and that of Scotland—is unevenly distributed. There is physical geography to take into account, such as the problems of mountains. That means that the television spectrum is much fuller. We need many more transmitters to achieve transmission throughout Wales. In that context, broadband is lagging behind. Wales is at the bottom of UK broadband connectivity. I do not know where Scotland is, but I think that it is in the same position.

We are told that broadband access will be achieved at the south pole by 2011 but not in rural Wales or Scotland. I met BT yesterday to discuss issues in my constituency. I have one exchange in my constituency that can take ADSL, and that is only because of public subsidy—in other words, the project has been funded by Europe. We must move more quickly on these matters. I would like the Government to look again at the 95 per cent. threshold for the switch-off from an analogue to a digital signal and bear in mind that although that figure could be reached at a UK level, about 70 per cent. of the population of Wales and 70 per cent. of the population of Scotland might not have access to digital transmissions. Members representing seats in both countries would have a problem if their constituents were to opt to turn off their signal when there was no access to digital transmissions.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thomas: I regret that I cannot now; I have taken several interventions.

The other aspect of the Bill that is worthy of mention is the public service commitment within Ofcom. There is a series of regional quotas, and I use the word "regional" advisedly. However, I remind the House that "regional" in Wales, as in Scotland, is national. In Wales, HTV is a national television channel, and it sees itself as such, particularly post-devolution. I welcome that.

The Bill states that the channel 3 programmes made in the United Kingdom outside the M25 area—a very patronising way to look at things—constitute what appears to Ofcom to be a suitable range. Once again, a body that has no Welsh or Scottish representation decides what sort of regional production is suitable for Wales and Scotland. That is not good enough. We would like the Bill to be amended to take into account the need to protect and encourage radio and television programming from Wales but also to Wales, and in both the languages of Wales.

That brings me to S4C and the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). S4C celebrates its 20th anniversary this year; it has been one of the great success stories of broadcasting in Wales. It has created a whole creative industry in Wales, not only in Cardiff but in the west, towards Swansea and towards the north. This rolling-out of a creative industry has encouraged other industries into the area. The final scene of the recently released Bond film, for example, was shot in my constituency, and I look forward to seeing that beach in the film.

The Bill says that S4C will continue to need to provide a substantial amount of Welsh language programming. There is no definition of "substantial", and we need to know what it means in this context. Eighty or 90 per cent. will mean nothing if we do not have funding to enable S4C to meet the digital challenge. S4C recently approached the Department for Culture, Media and Sport with a £3.5 million bid. That sounds like a lot of money, but, given the threat to language programming, it is not. The money would have enabled S4C to deliver a wider range of digital programmes. It is the only public service broadcaster that has not received a penny for digital programmes. The BBC has been able to negotiate a significant rise in its licence fee to pay for digital programmes, some of which—on the net, for example—are available in Welsh, curiously enough, thus apparently taking away some of the audience for S4C. That is an interesting perspective and we will need to explore it further. I want the Government to take on board the recommendation and acknowledgement in the Joint Committee's report that S4C's funding should be looked at again in the light of the digital revolution.

We are concerned that the situation outlined by Labour Members regarding cross-media ownership will arise, leading to a lack of accountability in Wales. We shall see not a plethora of owners, but the centralisation of ownership in the hands of a few companies or individuals.

We do not consider that regulation will necessarily be burdensome. In our view, it can protect the public interest. Parliament is giving up control over citizenship and over regulation of the broadcasting industry to a regulator. I accept that in principle, but we must be sure that the regulator will take fully democratic principles into account. Until that is achieved in the measure and until the Bill recognises the different circumstances that apply to the broadcasting and communications industries in Wales and Scotland, we shall continue to oppose some of its principles.

8.10 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I want to declare an interest, as recorded in the Register of Members' Interests. I worked for BT for 31 years. I am a member of Connect—the union for professionals in communications—and my researcher is funded by

[John Robertson]

Connect. I am also the chair of the all-party group on telecommunications, so it is probably safe to say that I have more than a passing interest in this subject.

I prepared a long speech, but as the debate has progressed, many points have been raised on which questions need to be answered. Unfortunately, as many of those issues were raised by Opposition Members who have since left the Chamber I cannot put my questions to them, so I shall make my points to the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms).

It is crucial that Ofcom follow the mandate stipulated in the Bill and that we be confident that the House can monitor that effectively. It is also important that we and the Secretary of State examine how Ofcom does its job. The Select Committees on Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and on Trade and Industry have considered the Bill, but we should think about setting up a new Select Committee to deal primarily with Ofcom.

Ofcom is composed of five bodies that cover everything relating to communications and broadcasting and is likely to be one of the most important bodies set up by the Government. It will probably be more important than anything done in this field during the 18 years of the previous Conservative Government.

The existing structure has not resulted in detailed or regular assessment. The current regulatory bodies do not work. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), who said how well Oftel had worked. I remember the problems that we experienced with Atlantic Telecom when, as was pointed out in a previous speech, Oftel was as much good as a chocolate fireguard. I hope that Ofcom will deal much better with problems in broadcasting than Oftel did with problems in telecommunications. Many of my constituents found that their businesses were going down the tube because telephone numbers listed in "Yellow Pages" and other publications no longer existed.

The Joint Committee which undertook pre-legislative scrutiny did an excellent job and its members are to be commended for their work. However, they missed one point in relation to clause 24, which deals with training. Training and education for staff in the broadcasting industry will be covered by Ofcom, but the same provision does not seem to apply to the telecommunications side of the business, where no scrutiny is provided for.

In effect, that means that in times of plenty when business is booming, a company such as BT, for which I used to work, could supply all the new companies that spring up. Those companies could cherry-pick all the good workers and experts. But what happens if there are no companies to provide training? What will happen if there is no one to train people in the new technology that is being developed?

A recent study produced some startling figures. According to the European Information Technology Observatory, the number of unfilled vacancies in the ICT and e-business sectors in the European Union is expected to rise from 2.23 million in 2001 to 3.67 million in 2003—a 65 per cent. increase in the number of people who will be unable do the job. We have to deal with that problem.

New technology is not something that people can just pick up. We have to train people in it; we have to train them to maintain it. The Bill needs to be better balanced. It seems to suggest that we must provide education and training for broadcasting but that people can do as they please on the telecommunications side. We need to ensure that people in both sectors are trained.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) said that we needed to examine the regulation of mobiles and mobile companies. He pointed out that as such companies had experienced great growth, they should be regulated. However, those companies amassed customers and grew so fast precisely because they were not subject to strong regulation.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) pointed out that there was no broadband in his country—nor is there in mine or in many parts of England. Part of the problem is that the regulator prevented companies such as BT from getting out into the marketplace.

These companies were so busy looking over their shoulder to see what the regulator was saying that they missed the boat, and two years down the line they had an excellent product but could not market it because everyone had forgotten what the product was. We have reached the stage now where people in places such as the rural areas of Scotland and Wales, and for that matter England, cannot get broadband because the company cannot afford to put staff out there. If we had started back when there was a boom, we might all have broadband; even if we did not, we would certainly have better companies than we do today.

Mr. Mole: Does my hon. Friend accept, in the context of the argument about the rolling out of broadband to rural areas, that we need to bear in mind the fact that there are fundamental physical limitations to the reach of technologies such as ADSL, based on the competence of existing technology; that it is only with the creation of new technology such as the delivery of broadband by satellite that some of these areas can be reached; and that we shall have these problems again when we have high data rate digital subscriber line and very high data rate digital subscriber line?

John Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend; he is absolutely right. I am sure that people in Wales and Scotland can identify with that. They will have to pay thousands of pounds for something for which other people will be able to pay hundreds or less. We must lighten the regulator's grip and allow companies to grow.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) mentioned Deutsche Telecom. Earlier in the year, I visited Deutsche Telecom in Munich to look at its ADSL and I was surprised when I discovered how quickly the company was growing. It has been growing because its regulator does not impose strong commitments on it. The company saw a niche in the market. It cut its prices. It went and did it, and only then asked the regulator whether it was okay. The company did not think about what the regulator was going to say,

put forward a business case, took months to go to the regulator, then suddenly found out that the regulator now agreed to what it was proposing.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Is it not true that one of the reasons why Deutsche Telecom did that was that it knew that it had to divest itself of its cable companies, and to stifle competition it put broadband into the areas when it was going to have to divest itself of those companies?

John Robertson: My hon. Friend is correct, but we are now lagging behind with broadband. We must get broadband out there, and if we are to bring the UK up to the standard of some of our competitors, we need to get out there now.

Another thing was missing from the Bill. One group that was never mentioned as a stakeholder was employees. Employees work at the sharp end. They know about their companies. Yes, they may look after their own interests when negotiating with management, but they know more about the business than the management force do, and they should have been regarded as stakeholders and allowed to participate in the advisory bodies, because they can probably contribute more than most. Not only do they have knowledge of the companies for which they work, but they are customers, so they have a very firm grounding. Those are the people who are missing: the people who do the work, who have the knowledge about how the product works. I know many very good managers who know how to run companies, but they know absolutely nothing about their product. I believe that in the case of BT and the selling of broadband to the country, that has been the main problem: the people who knew most about broadband were not the ones who were marketing it, and we all know what has happened.

I feel passionately about this subject, and if I am fortunate enough to be asked to serve on the Committee, I shall take great pleasure in doing so. There are lots of other aspects of the Bill that I should like to discuss with the relevant Ministers, which probably ensures that I shall not be asked to be a Committee member. I believe that communication is the No. 1 thing in this country; we all need to communicate. One of the best things that we can do to make that possible is to give it to the people and ensure that they know how to use it and can get access to it.

8.22 pm

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I have listened with great interest to the debate. On the broad principles there is a fairly strong welcome for the Bill on both sides of the House, with considerable reservations, which have been expressed. Having served on the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport when we held an inquiry before the draft legislation was produced, I found that, as I learned more, my understanding actually lessened. The communications industry has definitely proved to be a challenge to me. However, I commend the Government for the way in which they have taken this process forward. It has proved beyond doubt that taking the time to produce draft legislation and providing the opportunity for scrutiny produces far better Bills. This Bill is immeasurably better than the one that we started with some time ago.

It also became clear from what we saw in our Committee that prescriptive legislation of the type that we have had in the past is out of date almost the moment it arrives on the statute book, so the Bill had to try to set down principles and a mechanism that would last for some time into the future. I believe that broadly, with one or two reservations, the Bill achieves that.

I should like to address three specific concerns. They are all relatively Scottish, but they could just as easily be expressed for Wales or, indeed, many of the rural regions of England. My first point relates to the way in which the Bill sets out to represent the nations and regions. I wish to say at the outset that, when our Select Committee considered the issue, I was predisposed, although with an open mind, to think that, in all probability, Ofcom's main board should include representation from Scotland and Wales.

Having heard the evidence, however, especially that given to the Select Committee by the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, I reached the view that it was far more sensible for Ofcom's main board to do the job of regulating the industry and not to set out at that point to deal with the more complex issues of sectional, national or regional representation. Having reached that view, however, my concern is that the consumer and content panels will not necessarily fulfil the role that I would expect them to play.

Scotland—this goes for Wales, too—has a very diverse and different architecture from that of England. For example, one of my constituents, Miss Hutt, who lives in a croft near the village of Dunbeath, recently applied to BT for a telephone. Having initially been quoted about £74, she was quoted just under £12,000 when the survey was done. Bearing in mind that the nearest telephone line was 400 m away and that she lives 500 m from the main A9, that was somewhat expensive. The price was reduced to £3,000, when she agreed to dig the trench and lay the cable herself, but £3,000 for a telephone is still rather worrying. Therefore, it is particularly important that the consumer panel should have sufficient teeth and that the provisions that relate to it should be strengthened.

The Bill simply states that Scotland and Wales should have one representative on the consumer panel and one representative each on the content panel. If that is all there is, it is a pretty weak force to look after the contents and the consumers. I must say that, having accepted totally the fact that the Ofcom's main board should not include such representation, I should like to see much stronger representation on the consumer panel by including in the Bill an advisory council for Scotland and one for Wales. Ofcom has the power to ask for that, but it does not have a duty to provide it at the moment, and that is one change that I should like to see.

The second point, to which other hon. Members have referred, is the analogue switch-off. My constituency—all 3,000 and several hundred square miles of it—contains areas throughout much of Sutherland's north-west coast that barely receive analogue broadcasts. One gets used to watching television through a figurative or literal snow. When the switch-off takes place, those people will be deprived of any signal. It is highly unlikely that they will receive a digital signal, so Ofcom should be given a strong steer towards ensuring that, when the analogue switch-off occurs and we go to digital only,

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constituents such as mine who live in remote rural areas will not find themselves entirely deprived of terrestrial television and forced to rely on satellite services. I hope that we will consider that issue in Committee.

The third issue that I should like to address is the broadband roll-out. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have stressed the importance of broadband services. I should like to refer particularly to the highlands.

We were fortunate to have considerable Government investment, through the Highlands and Islands development board and its successor body, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, in integrated services digital network, which was the great technology of a decade ago. As a result, we have a considerable number of high-tech companies, which rely on communications to be able to make money. By not enabling broadband, those companies, which require high-quality communications, are not merely denied a competitive advantage but put at a huge competitive disadvantage. There is a company in Wick that is going to relocate to India if broadband is not introduced within two years. That is the scale of the competition. Once companies decide to move, they do not just move out of the north of Scotland or Scotland as a whole; they move out of the United Kingdom altogether.

I therefore make the same point to the Minister as I made to the Secretary of State in the Select Committee. Given the amount of public money that has been invested in fibre optic cable running up near to the A9 and in the implementation of ISDN, and given the companies that depend on that, the Government must take the lead in the broadband roll-out. If they do not, we will end up losing out on the investment that has already been made. With those principal reservations, I warmly welcome the Bill and look forward to its passage through the House.

8.31 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): This is a unique Bill. It is unique in its size—it is enormous—unique in that it has received such a broad welcome across the country, and unique in that almost all Front-Bench spokesmen, apart from the nitpicking nationalists, have given it a broad welcome today. It is unique, too, because it produces broad acceptance but also many problems, reservations, cavils, quibbles and difficulties, which have been well aired tonight. I propose to add my contribution to that.

I must start by saying that I am a bit suspicious of the Bill. I am suspicious because I am conservative about change—that is why I am a member of the Labour party—and because I do not want change in structures that have given us the least worst television in the world, with a system of regulation that has stopped the descent to lowest common denominators and with different sources of funding. In the end, if pigs are fed from the same trough, they produce the same manure. We have managed to avoid that in British television.

It would not be too much to say that there was a golden age in British television—largely a period in which I worked in it, having worked for the BBC, ITV and Sky, and having run a local radio station, which is a fairly unique experience—which was ended by the Conservative legislation of 1990. That legislation was sold to us on much the same grounds as those on which this Bill is being sold to us. We were told that we must give television the scale to take on the world. Now we are being told that we must bring in the world to take it over, because it is not investing enough. We were told that we must have light-touch regulation, which has led gradually to the dumbing down and the relegation of current affairs, news and politics to late night slots that would normally be filled by sex or romantic interludes. Television is now largely about building—DIY—botox and bellies, given the endless cooking programmes.

I am therefore suspicious about dumbing down, which I do not want to be furthered by the Bill. I am also suspicious about the briefing given to Labour Back Benchers, which describes the Bill as

> "creating the most dynamic, competitive communications industry in the world—opening up competition, removing unnecessary burdens on business and streamlining the regulatory environment . . . ensuring universal access to a choice of diverse services of the highest quality that viewers, listeners and customers expect—we will not compromise on quality."

All that—and "Blind Date" too—will be quite an achievement.

The Bill will not be the beginning of the reign of virtue, however, as it will be the beginning of a period of great turmoil. First, all the different regulators, each of which have their own agendas, which they will want to maintain, will be shoved in one box and will have to learn to work together by new rules. A period of difficulty from 2003 onwards will follow. Then there will be the skirmishing for takeovers as we settle into the new organisations.

We also face the problem—we are dealing with it today and I hope that we will deal with it in Committee—that results from the fact that the devil is in the Bill's detail. I shall say something about some of the problems that I envisage, because we must state our basic view and describe what we want from the Bill. That will guide its implementation.

I seem to be a lone voice when I say that the BBC should be subject as little as possible to the new regulatory framework. The BBC is a unique institution. It is a public corporation that has its own procedures and methods of dealing with complaints. At the moment, there is a good deal of jealousy of the BBC, partly because Greg Dyke is a driving, dynamic and competitive head of the BBC, and partly because it has much more money than ITV. People are envious. Far too much of that money has gone into creating new digital channels that no one watches rather than into producing programmes. More than £100 million has been wasted so far on News 24, which is only just coming into its own. The BBC suffers from premature digital ejaculation and the money should be devoted to making programmes. However, that is a matter not for the regulator but for the licence and charter renewal that is ahead of us. These matters can be taken care of then.

ITV has had a hard time. I suppose that it is inevitable that there will be one ITV company. Perhaps that will not be too bad, as long as it is Granada, which has a passionate concern about programmes and about regional activity, and not Carlton, which has a passionate concern about money. However, when ITV is one company, it is important that we maintain regional production, the regional framework, regional centres of excellence in television, such as that in Yorkshire, and the regional clusters of independent producers that are found around each existing company. Such clusters are also found around the BBC, which is putting a lot more into the regions.

We want dynamic production on a big scale that takes place outside the M25. It is nice that "outside the M25" is now a legislative concept, but it could have been called civilisation actually. We need production outside the M25 and ITV is the main framework to which it should be attached. We must keep up the pressure for that. It will be more difficult to maintain a regional service if ITV becomes only one company. The regional service has been ITV's strength and provided its roots, and it brings it much benefit. The service also brings the regions many benefits in terms of employment, economic stimulus and all the activities that go with it. Pressure will have to be kept up to maintain that service.To do that, it must be possible to turf out a provider—even if it is one company—because that would provide a check over quality. It must be possible for a rival contender to exist and there should be a review that examines whether a provider is performing properly.

On ITV, I echo the general view that it is insane that ITV is not allowed to control ITN. ITN is the only news organisation that does not have its own news channel, but it should be able to control one. ITV was good and adequately funded when the individual companies controlled it. We should return to that situation.

We should maintain the protected status of Channel Five. I know that people say that it is not particularly important as it is only a small channel. They argue that not much could happen if it were bought by Murdoch or an overseas company. However, let us consider what happened to *The Sun*. It was only a small and non-competitive newspaper that did not serve much purpose. Murdoch took it over and what happened then? It is entirely possible that, if Channel Five buys an audience with sport and has money pumped into it, it might become a major problem for ITV.

I am trying to scoot through the issues quickly, but I want to say something about foreign ownership. European Union rules require us to allow European bidders, but it is not a level playing field. It would be difficult for a British company to take over television production or radio stations in France. Let us consider the problems that Murdoch faced with Kirch, for example.

I agree that if we are to allow European competition, we must also allow American competition, but why not leave that to the discretion of the regulator? It should decide whether there is a level playing field, by which I mean that a foreign takeover can be allowed here if we can take over interests in the country concerned. The process needs to be phased in when the regulator decides the time is right to avoid an immediate turmoil of takeovers.

Although I have other points to make, I finish by stressing that the Bill is important because we need to maintain British production, British quality, British regional services and British strength in television.

8.40 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I served on the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee and, like other hon. Members who sat on it, pay tribute to the noble Lord Puttnam for the way in which he skilfully handled his chairmanship and brought us to a consensus on most issues. I might touch briefly on those aspects on which we were not of one mind.

In the Committee's defence, I must tell the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) that we considered employment and training. He will note from paragraph 53 of the report that we felt constrained by the annex to the authorisation directive which does not permit a general condition of authorisation to be extended to employment and training in telecommunications. I say that to emphasise the detail with which we conducted our scrutiny.

The Bill's principles will not encounter substantial opposition on Second Reading, with the exception of the Scottish and Welsh nationalists. It is important, however, that we discuss the first-order issues, not the second-order issues, before the Bill goes into Standing Committee. We need to consider what the Bill's principles are and what we are trying to achieve. If we are clear about that, it will help us tremendously when we consider the detail of this long and complicated Bill.

It is interesting that light-touch regulation was at the forefront of the Secretary of State's presentation of the Bill when it was produced in draft form earlier in the year, because that is the dog that did not bark this evening, and rightly so. It is not a matter of the quantity of regulation that is imposed on any given industry, but a matter of the character of the regulation and what results it has. I am afraid that we do not get good regulation simply by having a lot of regulation that is accountable and transparent. We need to protect the necessary public interest. We also need the minimum amount of regulation so that we permit competition to succeed to the greatest possible extent.

Although other hon. Members have mentioned broadband, I do not want to be diverted into a discussion on that. Indeed, the Bill is not intended to be a strategy for the roll-out of broadband. However, it is clear that whatever one might think about the relationship between Oftel and BT, it was only when BT cut prices that the extension of roll-out of broadband began. That may have happened in circumstances that did not lead to competition, but it demonstrates forcefully that ex-ante regulation—in this case in the form of 37 directions and determinations in the two years leading up to the time when prices were cut for wholesale broadband—does not deliver competitive outcomes and probably does not deliver the best outcome in terms of consumer benefits.

Two themes run through the legislation, from telecommunications to broadcasting. It is important not to consider those sectors in isolation. The two themes are the necessity of increasing competition in communications markets if we are to succeed

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internationally to a greater extent, and the protection of the interests of consumers and citizens. Those two things could easily have been at the forefront of the Bill in response to the scrutiny Committee's recommendations. We thought it necessary to further the interests of consumers wherever possible through competition, and to balance that with the interests of citizens. Those two interests expressly arise in relation to plurality and the media.

The Government have chosen not to accept that recommendation. I hope that they will reconsider their decision, even at this late stage. It is a matter not just of clarifying duties, but of setting a hierarchy of duties. It is not simply a matter of handing over duties to Ofcom and telling it to decide how best to strike the balance in all circumstances; it is a matter of indicating Parliament's intention concerning those duties.

If we legislate without giving primacy to issues such as competition in telecommunications, we will take a backward step. The Office of Telecommunications, in using its powers under the Telecommunications Act 1984, did not, until earlier this year, give primacy to competition. It is important to carry that primacy through into the way in which Ofcom does its job, just as competition has been important to the way in which Ofgem works and is increasingly built into the structure of our utilities regulation.

There are other instances in which the Bill would be better if we thought strictly in terms of competition and citizenship. On media ownership, the Government have confused themselves because many of those who come to them, including many with vested interests, have said that they want certainty. They want some media ownership rules to rolled back and the burden of regulation to be reduced.

There is something to be said for certainty; cross-media ownership rules, in particular, give some certainty, but it is only temporary. We know from many past experiences that the circumstances that give rise to such rules are likely to be rapidly overtaken, requiring further legislation. Whatever we think about those rules now will be undermined by the markets, sometimes very rapidly, so we should concentrate on competition. How can we future-proof the Bill? How can we make it endure in a form that drives towards competitive markets in areas including broadcasting and the media and at the same time protects the interests of the citizen? We cannot do that until we tackle the question of plurality, and of how the citizenship interest in plurality is to be protected.

On the newspapers, it seems to me evident how we should approach that question. We have not had cross-media ownership rules for newspapers. We have effectively allowed the market to determine ownership within normal competition rules, which are now to be strengthened. Within that structure, we have established, and will re-establish in the Bill, special tests intended to govern plurality. Why is that not equally true for other forms of media ownership? Why do we not give equal protection to the rights of citizens?

The Government should consider that, because we would establish a better long-term structure for the Bill if we swept away more of the media ownership rules. The members of the scrutiny Committee were not of one mind on that, and I think that we should have gone further. However, we did agree that we wanted plurality. The Committee did not say that it wanted to restrict foreign ownership or to have tighter cross-media ownership rules. To paraphrase St. Augustine, it said, "Make me competitive, O Lord, but not yet"; we need however to include in the Bill a competition structure to take us into the future.

I turn now to another area where competition may be important, the BBC, and some of my hon. Friends may have an opportunity to amplify this point. On the face of it, one would say that the BBC is not subject to competition, but it is subject to competition rules, and some Members who have contributed to the debate have asked how that works. In theory, if the BBC uses its licence fee money to buy public service broadcasting in a form that has anti-competitive affects, it can be subject to competition rules, and Ofcom should clearly apply those rules if necessary.

The BBC is not, however, subject to competition in the use of the licence fee. We need to think forward to 2006 and charter renewal, and we need to include in the Bill a structure that will be sensitive to all the changes that may come with charter renewal, even up to and including the possibility of separating the BBC, as a provider of public service broadcasting, from the governors, as the custodians of the licence fee. As the Secretary of State said, the licence fee is venture capital for the nation's creativity. The nation's creativity is not confined to the BBC alone—that is beyond the scope of the BBC—so BBC governors, who control the licence fee, should be able achieve such a separation.

In conclusion, competition to deliver consumer benefits and protecting citizens' rights should be two threads that run right through the Bill. We can relate many issues to those goals with success.

8.50 pm

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): I do not mind admitting to being technically challenged by some aspects of this rather lengthy Bill. None the less, I join other hon. Members in welcoming it, and the pre-legislative scrutiny associated with it.

First, I strongly welcome clause 256, which sets out the detail of the public service remit for TV broadcasting in the United Kingdom, including provision for education, entertainment, news, current affairs, children's interests and so on. In the modern world there are specialised channels for all those areas of interest, but it is important to have a balanced menu on our main TV channels. I particularly welcome the requirement to cover matters of international significance or interest.

I have seen a worrying report from 3WE, a coalition of development agencies and international organisations, which demonstrates the dramatic reduction in such programmes in recent years. For example, the production of non-news factual programmes on international issues on our main channels fell from 1,037 hours in 1990 to 728 hours in 1999. Indeed, factual programmes on the developing world fell by 50 per cent. in the same period. That trend is ironic, given that globalisation emphasises every day the growing importance of the need for everyone to understand international issues, whether those involve

Iraq, Afghanistan, or the plight of the 14 million people in southern Africa who face famine. If we want people to understand and engage with those issues, it is essential that television provide them with the necessary background information and analysis. It is less than a week since my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer spoke in the Chamber of his ambition to double global spending on development. A similar increase in the coverage of international affairs on our television screens would be encouraging.

Secondly, I warmly welcome clause 254, which covers access radio. I was delighted when, in March 2001, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson), who was then a Minister, came to my constituency to announce the access radio pilot. Wythenshawe FM is now one of 16 pilot radio stations under the access scheme. Jason Kenyon, the station manager, leads a team of four staff and 70 volunteers, including schoolchildren, pensioners and many other people in the community. The station is now broadcasting seven days a week, from 7 o'clock in the morning to midnight. It is important to emphasise that access radio is not just about programmes for local audiences, but is also about engaging local people and securing their participation in the planning and presentation of programmes, as well as listening to them.

Wythenshawe FM is already producing some interesting programmes. For example, "Family Action Benchill", a local voluntary organisation, has just started a series of programmes to highlight the problem of domestic violence. Chief Inspector Peter Aaronson from the local police force has a regular weekly slot in which he answers questions and updates people on the ways in which local police are trying to fight crime in the area. No radio station is complete without traffic and travel news. In Wythenshawe they are especially necessary because we have a complex road system and two motorways. Funds do not run to having an "eye in the sky", so on Wythenshawe FM it is "Bradley on the bridge". Bradley is the 12-year-old son of a volunteer presenter, Simon Delaney; he makes regular visits to the bridge over the M56 and rings back on his mobile phone to give an update on the traffic flow.

I pay tribute to Wythenshawe FM's parent organisation, Radio Regen, which is based in Manchester. As the name suggests, for that organisation access radio is about regeneration and giving people confidence and skills. It therefore provides a great deal of training, not only in radio production but in marketing and business skills.

There are three significant challenges for access radio. The first is the need to emphasise the local dimension. Clause 302 gives Ofcom a duty to safeguard the local content and character of local sound broadcasting. The debate has made it clear that some people are not so enthusiastic about local content and character. It is vital that the Government and Ofcom resist any attempts to dilute that important dimension of the Bill and the accompanying guidance.

Secondly, frequencies have been discussed. There is limited wavelength capacity, and it is vital that access radio get its fair share. The hon. Members for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and for North Devon (Nick Harvey) said that the BBC could help, and I agree. If, for example, Radio 2 broadcasts in Manchester on 89.9, why can the BBC not release 90.7 for local access radio in the city? It is not good enough to say that that might interfere with Radio 2 in, say, Southampton. It should be technically possible to implement my suggestion, and I encourage the BBC, Ofcom and access radio to get together to try to find a way forward.

Thirdly, let us consider funding. I welcome the power in the Bill that enables Ofcom to give grants to access radio. Some people argue for wider funding streams for community media. In addition, access radio will get money for training and it will want to draw in funds from sponsorship.

I understand the dangers and difficulties of over-commercialisation for access radio. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) mentioned the possible destabilising effect on local commercial stations. However, if Manchester airport wanted to sponsor a programme on Wythenshawe FM about attracting people to work at the airport, who could lose? Local people would get jobs, the airport would be happy, and another funding stream would be available for Wythenshawe FM. Such sponsorship can only be good.

I am delighted by the progress of access radio pilots, especially that of Wythenshawe FM. I look forward to the rest of the Bill's passage through the House.

8.57 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I shall continue with the theme of access radio. There is an anomaly in my area of Somerset that the Bill does not tackle. Our local BBC station, Somerset Sound, is on medium wave; we have no FM frequency in Somerset for the BBC. That is bizarre, because long before I became a Member of Parliament, my predecessor Lord King tried to get an FM channel. If communications are to move into the 21st century, we should be able to get FM frequencies on all BBC stations throughout the United Kingdom. It is anomalous that Somerset cannot get it. We have no chance of doing so, because we have been given a new AM frequency to keep us off the FM band.

Access radio could cause many problems in my constituency. We have two small radio stations. One is based in an area that covers only 10,000 people, and the other in an area that covers approximately 30,000. The Radio Authority's licences serve most communities of fewer than 300,000 people, a third of communities with fewer than 200,000 people and a fifth of communities with fewer than 100,000 people. That gives hon. Members some idea of the small size of the radio stations in my area. If, under the Bill, there can be three stations in an area, the number would have to be subdivided twice in Exmoor. We would end up with approximately 3,500 people per station. That is blatantly ridiculous.

By and large the stations work from hand to mouth, because we have no large business community to bring in an enormous amount of revenue. If that is the case in the longer term, we need to create either more business—that would bring problems—or a bigger area. We would then hit another anomaly.

We are in part of a national park. The national parks are happy to allow people in, but anyone who tries to put up a radio transmitter will not be allowed to do so. We therefore have a radio station that has been given a

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licence by the Radio Authority but can only hit about one third of its total area. It is meant to cover most of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook), but it cannot do so because of that anomaly.

I hope that the Government will look at the Bill to see whether national parks could be asked—not compelled—to be more, shall we say, congenial towards the placing of radio transmitters, so that local radio can be accessed across the large areas that cannot receive it at the moment. We receive a wonderful programme from Wales—I cannot understand anything it says—but we cannot get our local FM station. Perhaps we need a Welshman on the board—but perhaps that would not really help us on Exmoor. If we had a station that we could listen to, it would be helpful.

Bridgwater, at the other end of my constituency, with 30,000 people, has just got its own radio station: BCR FM—Bridgwater Community Radio Ltd., or whatever it is called. It is just starting out, and its representatives are very worried about access radio. Both its presenters came to see me and told me what they were forecasting, and hoped to achieve, for the next five years. They are earning below the minimum wage to try to keep the station on the air. They are happy to do that; it is what they set out to do, and they are achieving it.

If we were to set up another station, sponsored by the BBC, the licence payer, individual businesses, newspapers or a bigger channel such as Carlton West Country, which covers my area, that would unfairly penalise a local radio station such as BCR, which could not compete. That would put an enormous number of businesses out of business, and I strongly believe that that would be unfair. If the Radio Authority grants a licence to a radio station, that licence is there to be utilised by that company. If it is then effectively taken away by giving another two radio stations, including a BBC channel on medium wave, to an area that cannot sustain them, the system will be impossible to sustain from start to finish. There are some large anomalies in Bills such as this, but if we do not consider them in the context of the highlands and islands, for example, or rural Somerset, we shall probably miss out.

As for broadband, I asked BT for a map of my constituency showing the exchanges that were switched on. I found one exchange, which covers Bridgwater—my biggest town—but then I looked further across the map. I have a big constituency; it stretches for 57 miles. BT cannot physically switch some of the exchanges on to broadband because they are so archaic. I asked BT how much it would cost, and was told: "A quarter of a million a shot." I asked how many people would have to sign up, and was told about 500. When I asked whether BT was sure about that, I was told, "No, it's about 700, but we need 500 who will definitely sign up before we switch you on. Oh, and by the way, we won't do it anyway, because you're too far up the line."

The whole idea is that we are trying to encourage business to come into Exmoor—we heard earlier about a potential change in legislation in that regard—yet we cannot get broadband. Would the national park allow satellite dishes to be installed to pick up broadband via satellite? I doubt it. Would it be happy for us to go and dig everything up, as we always do in Britain—we seem to be great at digging up roads? No, it would not like that. Again, therefore, there is an anomaly concerning how we should bring broadband into an area of high rural dependency.

Minehead, my other town, has 10,000 people, quite a lot of small businesses—and I mean small—and a busy tourist trade. It has the biggest Butlin's in the country. I spoke to representatives of a company in the town, and they would love to have broadband. *[Interruption.]* I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) is going to intervene on me to talk about Butlin's in a minute. Broadband cannot be installed at Butlin's because BT cannot enable the exchange. Butlin's has said that it would like to do something about that, but it cannot, because BT will not let it. BT has said, very kindly and magnanimously, that it will compile a report on how long the operation would take in my constituency, and how many potential consumers it would require before it was able to switch on the supply. I am still waiting for that report.

I broadly welcome the Bill, but if it is to be acceptable across the whole country it must be fair, to start with. If we introduce a Bill that does not provide a level playing field from the start, we will never catch up, because when it is implemented, certain areas will not be able to go on to the next stage—in relation to new FM channels, or whatever—because they did not get adequate provision in the first place.

I know that the BBC would love to have an FM channel, but it cannot get one at the moment, although we do not know why. I have asked the BBC up here, but I have never had an answer. Perhaps the Minister will slip in an amendment on that—I do not know—but it would be nice to be able to go down that road. If we do not provide that ability, we shall cut off another section of our community.

There is definitely a place for access radio, but that place is in larger conurbations, not small rural areas. If we lose what we have we shall not get it back. We cannot sustain too many radio stations simply because we do not have the revenue or the support—unless those come from the public purse, which would probably mean shutting down the smaller ones in the first place. I support the Bill, but I hope that those little anomalies are studied carefully. If they are, I am sure that they will be resolved long before the legislation reaches the statute book.

9.5 pm

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Thank you for calling me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker; I am surprised to be called at long last.

Like many of my colleagues, I am interested in communications and how we feed information to and get it from our constituents. What politician is not fascinated by the political media? However, I am also interested because I have lived through a time in which communication has evolved from print and radio to live satellite broadcasting from the other side of the world. I remember my mother hauling me away from the radio when I was a small child, as I had to do my homework. I contrast that experience with standing in Glasgow airport lounge and watching live on television the second plane as it flew into the twin towers. So much has happened in that short period, and the changes in communication are enormous.

Those of us with an interest in the Bill have just about disappeared under a mountain of paper, which is interesting as it is about electronics and modern communications. Although our preparations for the debate involved receiving a huge amount of paper, I shall make only a few general remarks before concentrating on this country's music business, which I think is important, although it has not had much coverage.

I am delighted that the Department has taken on board a great deal of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's inquiry and the Joint Committee's deliberations. Ministers have shown their ability to listen, and I am sure that they will continue to do so as the Bill progresses through the House. The pre-legislative scrutiny has set a good example for all other Bills.

On regulation of the BBC, the Bill has achieved the right balance. I put on record my support for the BBC: it is not perfect, but the standards that it sets are a benchmark for high quality broadcasting throughout the world. We underestimate at our peril the importance of news and information provided by the BBC to people all over the world. While it might be good sport for some to knock the BBC, I believe that we should cherish it. We should criticise it when necessary, but we should also value it as one of the best examples of broadcasting in the world. The Secretary of State made the right decision in putting the BBC within Ofcom's remit under tiers 1 and 2 only.

May I speak about the importance of television and radio to the music industry? I am a member of the all-party music group, but I am just beginning to come to terms with and understand the scale of the industry in this country. It is a huge contributor to Britain's economy. Most people are aware of what they see on television—the few people who make a fortune from the music business—but that is far from a true picture, and behind it all a huge number of people, such as the creators of music and the producers, do not earn a fortune. They work hard in an industry that is of great benefit to the country.

That benefit is not translated into huge financial rewards for the thousands of people behind the cultural and economic success of an industry that has been a world leader for the past four decades.

The success of individuals and companies depends very much on opportunities for the creation of music, and also for the broadcasting of music by both national and regional radio and television. The success of Britain's broadcasting industry is inextricably linked to its relationship with the British music industry. It is worrying, therefore, that many local radio stations play the same music all day every day. Modern music must be given a hearing, but not to the exclusion of everything else.

Under the current proposals, Ofcom has a general duty to protect the local content and character of the news and programmes on local radio and television, and I think that that should be extended to music. At present the Bill contains no local requirement relating to music. BBC Scotland and Radio Clyde 1 and 2 are superb examples of local radio stations, and I am sure that many of my colleagues can cite other examples. The newer local stations, however, tend to transmit the same kind of music, mostly pop.

I enjoy all kinds of music. I enjoy listening to pop music as much as anyone else. But I fear that in creating more local radio stations, we may fail to encourage the promotion of local creative talent and respond to local tastes. I hope the Minister will confirm that the award of licences, and licence review, will depend on licensees meeting a requirement to broadcast music that caters for a range of tastes and interests and matches local audience needs. How would such a requirement be monitored, and how would it be enforced?

Pete Wishart: I find myself in the curious position of agreeing with almost every word that the hon. Lady is saying. Does she agree that the best way of achieving what she wants would be to include a "creator" on the content panel—someone involved in the music industry, who would know what it represents, what it is worth and what it contributes?

Rosemary McKenna: Indeed. I recently met Feargal Sharkey. Let me explain, for the benefit of those who do not know, that he was a great entertainer and is a creator of music. He is a member of the Radio Authority, by appointment, and makes a great contribution. Such expertise should indeed be represented on the panel.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. I think the Dept has done a wonderful job in terms of pre-legislative scrutiny, and I look forward to participating in the Bill's later stages.

9.13 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Rosemary McKenna). I am not convinced that the Bill is perfect, however: that is one reason why it must have a Committee stage. It needs fine-tuning. Issues have already been raised that demonstrate the need for detailed examination.

I intervened earlier on the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt). The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said that the M25 should take us out into civilization. There seems to be an unwillingness to think beyond the M25, and to conceive of creative genius elsewhere.

The Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television has made that point. It is looking for encouragement for creative producers throughout the United Kingdom. I also welcomed the suggestions made by the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey about curbing pornography on the internet.

The Northern Ireland Advisory Committee on Telecommunications is concerned about these matters. Interestingly, to judge by their comments, certain Members from Wales and Scotland—and others—do not seem to think that there is another, remote part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is the only part with a land frontier, which adds to the difficulties. Both the Committee and I sympathise with the concept of having one representative for the three regions, rather than one for each region, in order to provide an understanding of what is going on. Given that representation on the Committee has increased from six to nine, that would not pose a tremendous challenge. The three regions represent 16 per cent. of the United Kingdom, population and it should be possible to find

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

one person with the calibre and expertise to represent those regions, as well as dealing with such issues for the nation as a whole.

So far as Northern Ireland and certain other parts of the United Kingdom are concerned, some regulation is needed, because not every region is equally far advanced in terms of competitive communications. It is therefore necessary to provide some regulation; otherwise, the fear is that Northern Ireland will be left behind if it is not effectively and properly funded through regional representation. I welcome the suggestion that the consumer panel and the content board should include representatives from the regions, so that they might make a contribution.

Ours is a relatively small region. However, in dealing with some of the problems, and in listening to discussions on broadband, I have been fascinated to discover that, although we have a good fibre-optic network, we have not yet completed the linking of such communications. I have heard it said that the challenge of broadband can still be met through smaller groupings, and some people are already advancing broadband in rural areas and small communities. As has been pointed out, the tragedy is that, in some areas, even British Telecom has not established the modern communications that would help the development of broadband.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the relevant expertise exists, if the Government really intend that every part of the United Kingdom should have access to broadband, they should make some financial commitment to bring about such access?

Rev. Martin Smyth: I think the people of Northern Ireland would be happier if the Secretary of State, rather than Ofcom, dealt with that issue, because they are frightened by what has happened in the past.

John Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Martin Smyth: I am sorry but I cannot. I would love to give way to the hon. Gentleman because I have appreciated his practical contributions, but with the limited time at my disposal I want to move from Northern Ireland and the general discussion to an issue that has yet to be covered properly in this debate.

I remind the House that, before publication of this Bill, the Northern Ireland Assembly voted unanimously to call on the Government to permit the broadcasting of Christian radio, including Christian music. Such music cannot be broadcast throughout the nation, because of the restrictions that have been imposed. The general public in Northern Ireland support such a move, and many Members of this House have received letters on the matter. I believe that, on one occasion, 16,000 such letters were sent to Downing street.

I welcome many aspects of the Bill relating to the development of the communications sector, but clause 335 is difficult to understand. The hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) said that he finds it difficult to understand Welsh, but I am sure that there are those who find it difficult to understand the English in clause 335. It is hardly written in simple English.

Clause 335 lifts some restrictions, for example on local and national digital programme services, but it contains religious disqualifications, as set out in part 2 of schedule 2 of the 1990 Act. They are applied, for example, to local and national digital radio and television multiplexes.

Many issues could be raised in the debate, but I am concerned with the effect on organisations and companies with religious affiliations. Christian broadcasting companies in the industry have suffered from being classified as disqualified persons, and have been prevented from developing and competing in the market place. Although one might not support such organisations, or not like religion at all, or not choose to watch or listen to items that might be produced, that is no reason for disqualification. There are many channels to which I never listen, but I would not deny their right to apply to broadcast.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Bill still leaves officers of religious bodies and convicted criminals the only people unable to operate a licence? Will not the Bill mean that the UK remains the only country in Europe to suffer that discrimination in respect of religious broadcasters?

Rev. Martin Smyth: I do agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is fascinating that we permit doubtful programmes to be broadcast and thus corrupt the nation, yet are more worried about programmes that might help the nation. Interestingly, the Government have approached faith bodies to help them deal with communities, yet are not prepared to allow those bodies to broadcast.

Earlier, the Secretary of State said that clause 309, relating to advertising, was not compatible with section 19(1)(b) of the Human Rights Act 1998. However, I wonder whether she had overlooked outstanding application 11072/02 before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg when she said that she was unaware of any impediment other than a political one. When the Minister winds up, will he state clearly whether, in the light of that outstanding application, clause 335 is compatible with the European convention?

The Puttnam committee noted that a case had been lodged at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. My information is that the court has given the application the case number to which I have referred already, in the name of the Centre for Justice and Liberty *v.* the United Kingdom. The Government should be aware of that from consultations and documents.

Jesus Christ taught that we should love our neighbour, pray for those in authority and forgive those who have offended us. I believe that the heritage of freedom and tolerance for other people's beliefs that has been won at great cost for this nation over the years still has a place in this now liberal society, alongside other views. I ask that the House consider removing the religious disqualification measures in clause 335. To highlight that, and the need to take consideration of Northern Ireland, we will support the relevant amendment.

9.23 pm

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): In view of the time, I shall shorten my remarks, but I hope that Government and Opposition Front-Bench Members will bear with me, as they took well over an hour to present their opening statements.

I also had the pleasure to serve on the Joint Committee with the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). It is always a pleasure to listen to him. Given the spirit of the debate, I do not think that it will harm his promotion prospects if I say that on some of the more controversial issues he was closer to the Government line than some Labour Members.

The Government should be congratulated on opening the draft Bill up to pre-legislative scrutiny. To their credit, they have accepted some major changes of policy as well as some drafting points. On content, for instance, they have accepted that Ofcom should be able to intervene to specify levels of original TV production at peak viewing times.

Clearly, in view of the Bill's deregulatory intent, safeguards for UK content and production are vital. I hope that the Government will go further in future amendments. We have, for instance, a thriving independent sector, producing and exporting everything from such hits as "Bob the Builder" to serious drama. These are creative national champions, writ small individually, but collectively the potential is huge. In the face of a powerful BBC and ever-increasing concentration of ownership in ITV, the sector needs all the help at home it can get.

In its recent report, the ITC reinforced the Committees concerns about the operation of the independent supply market. It suggested a code of practice; we suggested an urgent review by Ofcom. Along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, I hope that the Government will look favourably at the thrust of those recommendations. Indeed, I hope that they will go further still. Independents have clearly benefited from quotas, but the evidence shows, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) pointed out, that they act as ceilings, not floors, and are adhered to grudgingly. We know that 25 per cent. by hours is a world away from 25 per cent. by programme value.

The ITC's expert panel recently recommended that value should be part of the quota. The main ITC report said that Ofcom should have the power to look at this, and so did we on the Joint Committee. I hope that the Government will accept that. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has set a precedent in this respect with BBC3.

A second area in which the Government have changed their policy is on religious broadcasting. Indeed, I suspect that there is no other area on which we have been lobbied more religiously during this process. With the number of digital licences on offer, I think that the Government have got the balance right.

There are major areas of policy disagreement between the Joint Committee and the Government. I should like to say a few words on two in particular—major newspaper groups owning Channel Five and non-EEC ownership of ITV. When we called for evidence to back up the Government's bold assertions, we found that evidence to be sadly wanting. More than that, we found grave and widespread reservations, which is why we recommended keeping the restrictions until Ofcom had had the chance to review the issue within three years. What is the hurry? Why set up a powerful new regulator, a fount of all knowledge, only to plough up the playing field before it is even up and running?

As far as cross-media ownership and Channel Five is concerned, that has become known as the Murdoch clause, but it is wrong to personalise the issue. It is not about one media mogul of shifting nationality but the desirability of anyone—right, left or the North Korean Politburo—owning 36 per cent. of the national newspaper market, plus the dominant satellite provider, concentrating ownership even further in their hands by owning a significant terrestrial broadcaster. The Government have recognised the force of that important principle by retaining the ban on ownership of ITV after all.

The Government have also made much of the fact that under current rules Silvio Berlusconi, of all people, could buy Channel Five. That is a red herring, because unlike News International or the Daily Mail and General Trust, Silvio Berlusconi does not own a substantial UK newspaper group. What is at issue is the desirability of one person or group's world view or prejudices holding an ever greater sway over a UK audience. The same could be said for relaxing cross-media ownership with respect to radio and local newspapers. I agree with the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) that Members of Parliament, above all, should want to get the definition of three distinct local media voices right. Local should mean local, certainly not regional or national.

On non-EEC ownership of UK television, the major concerns lie with the potential effects of the takeover of ITV or Channel Five by major US media concerns. We heard no evidence that that would lead to a huge inward boost to our television industry, apart from snapping up shares on the stock market. Rather, we heard the opposite—the concern was that it would lead to reduced investment as US groups substituted local production for their own. If the Government are determined to go down that route, strengthening the safeguards of the content is vital.

Because of the merger of ITV companies, regional production outside London has already been decimated. What are the prospects if ITV is controlled from Miami or Hollywood?

The recent ITC report made further recommendations regarding clear and enforceable commitments for investment and production outside London. I hope that as we go through the Bill, the Government will act on these concerns as well. What is the rush on deregulation? Let us be calm; let us be considered. Let us set up Ofcom and let it examine all these important issues carefully.

9.29 pm

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The Bill has much support in the House, although reservations have been expressed by Members who represent constituencies on the margins of the country

[Mr. Roger Williams]

and in the countryside itself, in areas where communications have not yet developed to their full potential. Some Members are concerned that we are making changes at a time when our constituents are excluded from benefits enjoyed by people living in more urban areas.

In my constituency, for example, we do not even have full coverage for mobile telephones. As a result, the first responder initiative, whereby volunteers give help when people suffer a heart attack, cannot be spread across the whole area because there are not enough masts.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we are concerned that the representation that we enjoyed by right under the old system will be taken away from us. We have no certainty that we shall have representation on the main board of Ofcom. Many problems could be resolved if the Bill included a provision that the Secretary of State had a statutory responsibility to consult the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly on appointments to the board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) suggested that Ofcom should have a duty to set up consultative bodies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That would give people in those countries confidence that their special problems would be addressed and resolved.

Concerns have been expressed about the Welsh language in Wales and the role of S4C, our television channel, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary. S4C has a hugely successful output of programmes, but its financial situation remains tenuous. The company welcomes some of the Bill's provisions, although there are also some reservations. I hope that they can be dealt with in Committee and resolved by Ministers.

9.32 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): At this stage of our proceedings, it is often said that we have had a good debate. Having sat through almost all of it, I can say that it has been genuinely well informed. We have heard speeches in which Members expressed a range of views and reflected their knowledge and experience.

The debate has been interesting—as the Committee, too, will be interesting. As my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) pointed out, the Bill is a leviathan: 395 clauses and 19 schedules. I pay tribute to anyone who has tried to read the whole thing in one go, because it is hard going.

The Joint Committee made 148 recommendations and the Government accepted 120. I am sure that we all agree that the work of the Joint Committee on the draft Bill was extremely valuable. We have heard from several of its members, especially my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), and we have benefited from that. The Government were wise to set up that Joint Committee.

As we proceed to the Standing Committee, I suspect that the Government will propose yet more amendments—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] It is possible. I was told this morning that the team working on the Bill was happy and did not expect to table amendments. However, I am willing to make a small wager with anyone in the Chamber that the number of Government amendments will reach three figures before the Bill is enacted.

I was surprised to hear the Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry say that we needed little more scrutiny. This is an enormous Bill and it is important that the House and its Committees take a proper look at what will be extremely important legislation. Indeed, when we have explanatory notes that run to 268 pages, which is longer than most novels, we know that this is a complicated Bill. It is hugely complex and very technical.

I should like to highlight some issues. I wrote this little speech before the debate, so I am interested to note that several hon. Members have mentioned these subjects. First, I want to discuss the position of the BBC. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have said that it is not logical that the BBC should not be entirely subject to Ofcom. We shall certainly want to examine the reasoning behind that in Committee. We shall also wish to examine broadband access, which has been mentioned by hon. Members, especially those representing more distant parts of the United Kingdom. The lack of access to a speedy internet connection may be a major barrier to company growth, economic growth and, indeed, prosperity in future.

We should like to look at the scrutiny of Ofcom itself, and how it should report to Parliament. It should report to Parliament and its decisions should be scrutinised by Parliament. We are interested in the appointments to Ofcom. I wish to make no comment on Lord Currie, whom I do not know, except to quote from *The Guardian*—hardly my favourite reading. Its headline on 25 July was, "The lord Labour loves". The article said:

"Broadcasters"—

a big word for the Chairman of the Select Committee, I know—

"will be hoping today that, as a long-term Labour supporter and a handy cellist, David Currie's repertoire extends beyond simply playing the Government's tune . . . A glance at his curriculum vitae suggests that before Lord Currie . . . gets on with his role as one of the country's most important watchdogs, the quietly influential Labour peer will first have to prove he is not just another member of the party's north London intellectual clique being handed a cushy job."

I believe that Lord Currie has a very good reputation, and I have no personal criticism of him whatsoever, but I consider it a very great pity that so many key appointments in the Government's gift go to known Government supporters. It is no surprise that there is an issue of Tony's cronies, in which connection we might just mention the BBC, where the chairman, the director-general and the political editor are all known Government supporters. This is a very serious issue about impartiality, but Labour Members just sit there and laugh.

Mr. Joyce: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman recalls this, but the chair of the BBC under the last Conservative Administration was the brother-in-law of the then Cabinet Minister responsible for the BBC.

Mr. Robathan: Of course I do. I also recall that the former director-general, Lord Birt, now works for the

Prime Minister in a very close capacity, so I think that shows that we were genuinely impartial. *[Interruption.]* The cheap seats are a little rowdy as we discuss broadcasting and media.

I should like to turn to a few of the comments that have been made. The Secretary of State spoke of the Bill's economic importance and of its values. She said that it covers every one of the Government's wider aspirations for Britain. That was rather over-stating the case, if I may say so. She said that these were ambitious aims, as the Bill was ambitious. Well, I think that these are ambitious claims for the Bill because I do not think that the Government can claim the credit for everything in it. I suggest that it will be private companies and private enterprise and innovation that will bring the benefits, not the Bill itself. The Bill should set up the structure and allow others to get on and deliver.

Mr. Wyatt: That is what government is for.

Mr. Robathan: Indeed, but obviously the hon. Gentleman should pay attention and read in *Hansard* what the Secretary of State claimed.

I was glad that the Minister mentioned the licence fee, about which we may have something to say in Committee. We shall discuss the human rights issues, which she mentioned, especially those affecting religious broadcasters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) made an excellent speech. He raised many issues in detail, particularly religious broadcasting and cross-media ownership. I was particularly interested that he reminded us of the comments that the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), now the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, made during the passage of the Broadcasting Act 1996, because although I was there I had forgotten them. I look forward to hearing him explain how he has managed to change his position by 180 degrees.

My hon. Friend also discussed newspaper ownership and referred to the statutory regulation of newspapers through the back door.

The right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) brought his own expertise to the debate. That was particularly useful, but I think he was wrong about the Government sacking the BBC's governors. He wants the BBC to be properly regulated, as we do, under tier 3 by Ofcom, but I do not think that the Secretary of State can sack the governors. He referred to that as the nuclear option, but I doubt whether she can sack them—perhaps she can, and perhaps the Minister will mention that as well. He also mentioned piracy—a very important issue—and suggested that Ofcom should have responsibility for it, which is in interesting idea.

I wanted to say that the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, sat on the fence and agreed with both sides at once, but he actually made some good points: he agreed with us, for example, about religious broadcasting and broadband services. I look forward to hearing his very long and fascinating contributions in Committee.

I shall just skip through a few other hon. Members and refer to my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), whom I trust I can look forward to seeing on the Committee. He took us back to the Maastricht treaty. My hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford voted against Maastricht treaty Bill on Third Reading. I am not sure that we want to dwell on that, but he was very sensible about the BBC not being seen to be properly regulated and being its own judge and jury.

The hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), who also served on the Joint Committee, made some very sensible points about the BBC. I was interested to hear how we control pornographic spam. I am not entirely sure about the software to which he referred, but he revealed a depth of knowledge, some experience—*[Interruption]*—not of pornography but from his past as well as the Joint Committee and some thoughtful ideas. I should like to see him on the Committee, but I am afraid to say that with his knowledge, experience and sensible ideas there is absolutely no chance of that happening.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) particularly wanted me to refer to him because he made both the points that I made earlier, and I agree with him. Of course he is absolutely right to point out that there will be a tremendous failure of scrutiny in Committee because the debates will be guillotined.

The hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Anne McGuire): Ochil is not pronounced like that.

Mr. Robathan: I am sorry. We have the Communications Bill so that we can communicate better across the border. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman on one or two things, but it was nice to know that a Labour Member of Parliament is still allowed to refer to Lenin. *[Interruption.]* I think that it was Lenin, not Lennon.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), who spoke for the Welsh nationalists, and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) referred to the importance of broadband services. That reinforces exactly what we are saying—broadband must be mentioned.

Although I was absent at the time, I have a note from my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), who sat in for me, to the effect that Lord Thurso—my apologises, Madam Deputy Speaker; the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso)—said that a lot of people fishing on his river in Caithness will not be able to get digital television. He raised a very important point about the analogue switch-off.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who, I hope, will serve on the Standing Committee, has a tremendous contribution to make. He gave a thoughtful, well informed and incisive speech, particularly about Ofcom's priorities in relation to competition and protecting the interests of consumers and citizens.

[Mr. Robathan]

Lastly, I should like to refer to the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins), who honestly admitted to feeling technically challenged when studying the tome that is the Communications Bill, and I suspect that many hon. Members will have felt the same. That is certainly not unique, but I suggest that he should study more, rather than listening so much to Wythenshawe FM, to which he referred at length.

In conclusion, my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford and I served on the Committee that considered the Broadcasting Bill in 1996, as indeed did the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, who is about to reply to the debate.

I sat in silence throughout the Bill, as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Department of National Heritage. My hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford sat as a Parliamentary Private Secretary, but, halfway through, rebelled against the Conservative Government and resigned his position. Six years on, we look forward to revisiting the issues in Committee, and to giving this very important Bill as much detailed scrutiny as the guillotine will allow. I doubt whether all 395 clauses and 19 schedules will be examined, which is a matter of regret. I hope that there will be a spirit of co-operation, however, as we do not disagree with the principles of the Bill. I hope that we will try to achieve the best possible result for all those who are involved in, or who are consumers of, broadcasting and communications in this country.

9.45 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): Early in the new year, the first third-generation mobile services will become available in the UK. Users will be able, at any time, to download the latest television news bulletin and watch it on their mobile handset. Will that be a case of broadcasting or telecommunications? My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) quoted another example of the traditional distinctions and boundaries between the different domains becoming increasingly hard to maintain. Higher capabilities of mobiles, rapid take-up of broadband, growing use of wireless for fixed communications and the spread of digital television are all blurring the old distinctions. Bringing the regulators together is, therefore, clearly the right action. I welcome the support for that change that has been expressed on both sides of the House, and outside the House, too.

Brian White: Technology is undoubtedly converging. The uses to which people put that technology, however, are not necessarily converging. Will my hon. Friend address that point?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. What is important, however, is that those who make the judgments about how these matters should be regulated will be in one place rather than in different institutions. Increasingly, more than one of those regulators has had to get involved in a particular case. Ofcom will be the place where these decisions are made, which is clearly a big improvement.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The Minister referred to the blurred domain boundaries and Ofcom's role. Does he accept that the clause covering Ofcom's duty to ensure reasonable regional coverage is not strong enough in areas such as mine, which is close to the west midlands and east midlands regional boundaries? Because of topographical features, we are not able to receive east midlands television, for instance, in any form. The people of Ashby, Coalville and Whitwick want to hear about their own communities, and not about Aldridge, Cannock and Walsall, wonderful though those communities are.

Mr. Timms: I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents will be pleased by what he says on their behalf.

The recent Booz Allen Hamilton benchmarking study rated the UK as the second-best environment for electronic commerce among all the major economies after the United States. That is a good position for us, but we want to do better. A world-leading regulatory regime is an important step in that direction. We are seeing rapid development in the UK. As well as the imminent launch of third-generation mobile services, broadband connections passed the 1 million mark two months ago. They are available to about two thirds of households around the country, and that number is increasing by about 30,000 every week. The penetration of digital television is higher in the UK than anywhere else in the world. We are addressing the challenge of broadband content, as well as network infrastructure, including music, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Rosemary McKenna) pointed out. We are looking at encouraging new content and new applications through the research and development tax credit, business support schemes and embedding broadband in the modernisation of public services.

The Bill requires Ofcom, in performing its duties, to have regard both to the promotion of competition and the encouragement of investment and innovation. In developing the new networks, competition is key. There is sharp competition in the broadband market between services based on telephony and on cable television networks, with cable television having the larger share at the moment, and strong retail competition between BT and the large number of other service providers reselling its wholesale ADSL product.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: Not at the moment.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) was right to emphasise the fact that we need more competition to deliver the innovation in technology and marketing that alone can drive the extra functionality and the wider availability of the services that people demand into every part of the UK. Ofcom will need to ensure that new entrants and innovative players have a fair chance to offer their products and services so as to boost the competitiveness of the UK economy. Our communications infrastructure has long been one of the strengths underpinning our success in inward investment.

Sir Robert Smith: I am just a bit concerned. The Minister said that competition would drive these services into every part of the UK. Does he really believe that rural areas and the further-flung parts of the UK will receive these services as a result of competition? Will there have to be another route?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman should consider the example of mobile phones. Exactly the same concerns about the provision of services in rural areas were raised. The competition between the service providers led to innovation in marketing and technology that drove the services into those areas. It is also the case that public services in all parts of the country will demand broadband. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made the commitment the week before last that, by 2006, every school in the country will have broadband. Once the school in an area has broadband, it is possible for the service to be provided to other users as well. However, we need new investment as well as competition.

Michael Fabricant: Before the Minister starts believing his own propaganda, will he accept that the penetration of broadband in the UK is far less than in other parts of Europe, let alone the United States? Does he also realise that what he calls broadband—512 kilobytes per second—is far lower than the general definition of broadband, which is 1.5 megabytes? Basically, the Government have a lot further to go.

Mr. Timms: It is the case that the UK made a slow start with broadband but it is equally the case that we are catching up very rapidly. Some 30,000 new connections are made each week, and the rate of growth is significantly faster than elsewhere in Europe. We can look forward with a good deal of confidence to having the extensive as well as highly competitive broadband market in the UK that we most certainly need.

Mr. Robathan: I live only one and a half hours' drive from London. Lutterworth is a large town, but we cannot get broadband there or almost anywhere in my constituency.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that BT announced at the e-summit a couple of weeks ago that it would achieve 80 per cent. availability of broadband right across the country by 2005. He also needs to take account of the potential for wireless to deliver broadband services, particularly in rural areas. That will be another element of competition that holds out much promise for driving these services into areas where they are not available at the moment. It is important that we do that.

We need new investment. Players in the capital market need now to reassess their caution about the technology sector, particularly in the UK where economic stability provides such a strong foundation. Technological change is creating a vast array of new commercially attractive opportunities. We need investment on a substantial scale to come forward for those opportunities to be realised.

The Bill will help to make that easier. For example, it will enable Ofcom to designate people other than network operators, such as a local authority, to hold the powers necessary for infrastructure construction so helping to facilitate infrastructure sharing and to reduce the cost of rolling out new networks. Members may well be interested in clause 144, which restates the power for a local authority to provide a public network as originally set out in the Telegraph Act 1899. That may have new relevance in the digital era.

Let me comment on several of the major points that have been raised in the debate. I very much welcome the broad agreement across the House on some of the key issues, including some of those that have been hotly debated over the past year or so. Questions were raised about ITV news. When 59 per cent. of people consider television to be their most trustworthy source of information, it is vital that, as the main competitor to BBC news, ITV news should be impartial, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) pointed out, independent and of high quality. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) said, it should deal with international, as well as national, matters. That is why we are retaining the current nominated news provider system for ITV as a guarantor of quality and independence.

A number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), said that we need to go further. The Bill raises the ownership limit from 20 to 40 per cent. to help to make strategic decision making and investment easier. We will be able to change the system in the future, without further legislation, if the market can provide an adequate range of high-quality easily accessible television news services without those requirements.

The BBC's relationship with Ofcom has been a prominent theme. It was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who welcomed the Bill in its current form. The BBC will be regulated by Ofcom for tier 1 and tier 2 obligations. We have agreed, after careful consideration of the recommendation by the Joint Committee, that Ofcom should have the power to fine the BBC for breaches of those obligations. Tier 3, for which the governors will be responsible, requires the BBC to publish an annual statement of programme policy, to report on its performance on that policy and to consider relevant Ofcom guidance. We aim to ensure that the BBC maintains its independence. We want a regulatory regime that recognises its distinctive character through the charter, the agreement and its relationship with Parliament, while bringing it within the overall regulatory structure. I believe that our proposals will have that effect.

Effective reflection of the interests of all parts of the UK is important. That idea featured prominently in the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) and the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) among others. We have included provisions to ensure that the interests of nations and regions are represented on Ofcom. The board needs to remain small enough to react quickly to fast-changing circumstances. Adding members on the basis that they

[Mr. Timms]

are from different nations and regions would jeopardise that, as the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) said.

Mr. Mullin: Can my hon. Friend explain how it is possible to justify a relaxation of the rules on cross-media ownership to allow someone who already owns four national newspapers and one television channel to buy Channel Five?

Mr. Timms: The general approach in the Bill is to remove unnecessary restrictions. We are permitting some consolidation in ITV because of its size and reach, but Channel Five is small. It has a 6 per cent. market share compared with 24 per cent. for ITV and only 80 per cent. coverage. So it makes sense to remove the ownership restrictions in that case. Of course, if the audience grows, the Secretary of State could make changes, perhaps to require a nominated news provider system, as with ITV. We have established the right balance, which is reflected in the Bill.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) *rose—*

Michael Fabricant *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I am afraid that I need to press on.

The content board of Ofcom will have designated members representing Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England, as will the consumer panel. My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) was right to emphasise the importance of a robust consumer panel. The Bill requires Ofcom to establish and maintain offices in each country. A memorandum of understanding between Ofcom and the relevant Secretary of State could well include other measures, such as those mentioned by hon. Members.

The hon. Members for Maldon and East Chelmsford and for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) referred to religious ownership. It is worth explaining that the restrictions were placed on the statute book by the Conservative Government in the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996. The restrictions that will remain when the Bill is enacted will be largely theoretical. For example, it is highly unlikely that anyone who has lobbied us on the subject will be in a position to own a digital multiplex. Following the Committee's report, we have decided that religious organisations should have access to a national digital radio licence.

The Bill has been much improved by extensive consultation. I have great confidence in commending it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 14, Noes 329.

Division No. 15] **[9:59 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Ewing, Annabelle
Gummer, rh John
Hermon, Lady
Llwyd, Elfyn
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Salmond, Alex
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Weir, Michael

Tellers for the Ayes:
Pete Wishart and
Hywel Williams

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*

Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Dan Norris

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

"That, at this day's sitting, the motion relating to Estimates, 2001–02 in the name of Ruth Kelly may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Communications Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on 6th February 2003.

(3) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

(6) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 102.

Division No. 16] **[10:14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, rh Stephen
Cabom, rh Richard
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive

Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and Dan Norris

NOES

Allan, Richard
Arbuthnot, rh James
Baldry, Tony
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cameron, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Goodman, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Maclean, rh David
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mates, Michael
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan

Question accordingly agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Communications Bill ("the Act"), it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State—

(a) for or in connection with the carrying out of any of his functions under the Act; or

(b) in the making of payments to OFCOM in respect of the establishment, installation or use by the Crown of stations or apparatus for wireless telegraphy; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which are payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS BILL *[WAYS AND MEANS]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Communications Bill ("the Act"), it is expedient to authorise—

(1) provisions by virtue of which persons are or may be required to pay sums to the Office of Communications in respect of allocations of telephone numbers;

(2) provisions by virtue of which holders of licences granted under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 or of grants of recognised spectrum access are or may be required to pay sums to the Office of Communications in connection with such licences or grants;

(3) provisions by virtue of which holders of licences granted under the Broadcasting Act 1990 or the Broadcasting Act 1996 are or may be required to pay sums to the Office of Communications in connection with such licences;

(4) provisions by virtue of which holders of television licences granted under the Act are or may be required to pay sums to the British Broadcasting Corporation;

(5) provisions by virtue of which fees are chargeable under the Enterprise Act 2002;

(6) any incidental charges to tax which may arise from amendments made by the Act to references to public telecommunication systems or telecommunication apparatus in enactments relating to income tax; and

(7) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

Estimates, 2001–02

10.27 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I beg to move,

That the limits on non-operating appropriations in aid set for the purposes of section 2 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 for the year that ended on 31st March 2002 be modified in accordance with HC 121.

The purpose of the motion is to provide for the correction of an error in the Appropriation Act 2002. The annual Appropriation Act provides statutory authority for the spending plans of Departments as set out in their Supply estimates. Since 2001–02, the Supply estimates have been presented on a resource basis, and the Appropriation Acts, which cover various aspects of departmental spending over a three-year period, have been revised accordingly.

In authorising spending plans as set out in the supplementary estimates for 2001–02, however, the 2002 Act failed to reflect fully the move to resource estimates. The Act omitted the changes to non-operating appropriations-in-aid set out in those supplementary estimates. Details of the Departments and amounts involved are set out in HC121. The omission is in urgent need of correction. The 2001–02 accounts are in the process of being audited by the National Audit Office, which is signing off any departmental accounts affected by the error on the understanding that statutory authority to regularise the spending will be sought at the earliest opportunity. The procedures for drafting and checking the relevant draft legislation are being revised to help ensure that such an omission does not occur again.

I assure the House that there is no intention to provide new cash or resources for Departments. The purpose of the motion is simply to provide for the proper statutory authority for spending, as presented to Departments in their 2001–02 supplementary estimates and voted on by the House in the context of motions tabled on 11 December 2001 and 7 March 2002.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Is the Minister essentially saying that this was a £3,000 million mistake?

Ruth Kelly: I am telling the House that non-operating appropriations-in-aid were not underpinned by the necessary statutory authority.

I commend the motion to the House.

10.29 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I begin by thanking the Financial Secretary for her statement, although I should say that it was as interesting for what was left out as for what was kept in.

Opposition Members recognise that, where errors of this nature arise, they need prompt correction, so we welcome the opportunity to debate these estimates without restriction to a particular hour. I shall of course not detain the House any more than is necessary, but quite whether my colleagues will wish to raise important supplementary questions is entirely a matter for them and for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

From what the Financial Secretary did say, it is clear that errors have arisen in both the drafting and the checking of the original legislation. Some may argue that the fault rests with the parliamentary draftsman or with the Clerks. However, I do not know whether that is true in this instance, because the relevant information was not provided in the ministerial statement. Whether it is true or not, the ultimate responsibility for Government business that passes through this House must rest with the sponsoring Department—in this case, the Treasury. So I do hope that the Financial Secretary will, in her reply to this debate—whenever that may take place—accept that final responsibility for these errors rests with her and with the Treasury, and not simply with the parliamentary draftsman or with the Clerks.

On first reading, the omissions in the current appropriations legislation may seem minor and obscure—particularly at this time of day—but they are in fact of considerable importance. They mean that the 2001–02 winter-spring supplementary estimates have, strictly speaking, no statutory authority. Thus any Government spending that has drawn on these estimates is, in effect, irregular and illegal. The omissions also mean that, at the moment, it would not be possible for the National Audit Office to finalise the Government's accounts for the past financial year, because of the irregular nature of the resources involved. Given these problems and their significance for the public finances, I should appreciate it if the Financial Secretary provided the House with some assurances.

Further to the Financial Secretary's opening remarks, can she confirm that this motion represents merely a correction in respect of the statutory authority, and that it does not represent any change in policy—which she did not mention—or in the amount of resources or cash allocated? Secondly, is she certain that the only Departments and Government agencies affected are those listed in appendix A to the motion, and can she confirm—despite her attempt to avoid the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley)—that the sum involved is indeed £3,000 million, roughly speaking? Is she also aware that appendix A appears to contain an error in respect of the figure allocated to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions? Is that figure £2 and 6.8p, or is it in fact £2,068,154,000, as is printed in the document? I am afraid that the problems are beginning to pile up. The concern is the trustworthiness of the document before us. Given that its purpose is to correct an error in the first place, I hope that the Financial Secretary will treat the matter properly.

Thirdly, can the Financial Secretary confirm that these capital—or non-operating—resources include activities such as public-private partnerships and private finance initiative schemes, as well as other contracts with business suppliers? If so, what is the current legal status of those contracts? I ask that particular question because anyone in private business knows that they would face severe personal and regulatory penalties for entering into a commercial relationship without due authority.

Indeed, one of the criticisms of those behind the World Con and Enron scandals was that they entered into contracts when they did not have the appropriate money to do so. If the Minister is telling the House that Government Departments have bought goods and

services and have entered into contractual relationships backed only by resources that are irregular and illegal, many people—including business people—will want to know why. They will also want to know who in Government will take responsibility for the blunder.

I hope that the Financial Secretary will explain to the House the legal status of contracts backed by irregular resources, and whether there are any other financial or legal ramifications of the error of which the House should be advised.

Peter Bottomley: Will my hon. Friend ask the Financial Secretary to say, when she responds to the debate, whether the £2,000 million for the Department of Transport is disputed accountancy regarding the money to be provided to the successor to Railtrack, or whether that is still to come in some other supplementary estimate?

Mr. Prisk: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who as usual asks a pertinent question. I am sure that the Financial Secretary will be only too pleased to answer it when her turn comes.

Six days ago, the Chancellor came to the House to present corrected borrowing and growth figures, having got his sums wrong earlier in the year. Today, the Financial Secretary has had to come to the House to correct legislation that has rendered some Government expenditure illegal and irregular. Opposition Members will support the prompt correction of any errors, and will not oppose the motion. However, we expect the Financial Secretary to acknowledge the importance of the error, and to accept her responsibilities and those of the Department. We also expect her to answer our questions in full, and to explain why the once trusted work of the Treasury has become unreliable.

10.36 pm

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): You may have been in the Chamber some years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I told the First Lord of the Treasury that it was the duty of Labour Members to provide scrutiny and accountability, without fear or favour, and without showing partial affection. That is what I intend to do this evening. This matter deserves scrutiny. It raises an issue that hon. Members have neglected for far too long—our historic duty of voting Supply. We have abdicated that responsibility, but I think that it should be restored. This motion may give us an opportunity to canvass that proposition.

The error also shows that there has been sloppy administration and disregard for the House. In addition, I understand that even if we agree this motion we cannot escape the necessity of passing new primary legislation. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary or the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman covered that. I hope that my hon. Friend will confirm whether new primary legislation will be needed to correct the error.

The document in the possession of hon. Members states:

> The Appropriation Act 2002 did not include . . . the amounts, which it authorised to be applied . . . The absence of authorisation through the Appropriation Act 2002 means that departments' utilisation of any of those amounts to finance expenditure lacks statutory authority."

I took the opportunity during the Division to clarify the fact that the motion will get us through the crisis to which my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary referred and which probably involves the National Audit Office. However, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will probably have to make time available at some stage for new legislation to regularise the matter. The House is entitled to be told the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

In my life I have been guilty of many things, one of them being that I have occasionally criticised the Government. To that, I say, "No surrender." However, there are also times when it is possible to speak in favour of the Government with great enthusiasm.

Informally, I indicated that I should like to catch your eye in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can tell the House that the relationship between us is good, and you said that the motion was very narrowly drafted.

Indeed it is, but there are a lot of matters before us that I do not think the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) has rumbled. I did not see in his hands documents HC 636 or HC 391. If I am wrong, I apologise unreservedly. I know that other people are exercised by this matter, because I can see that they have their copies.

In the Supply estimates on non-operating appropriations in aid, paragraph 3 states:

> "Therefore, new authorisation is being sought from the House of Commons to appropriate the non-operating appropriations in aid contained in HC 391 and HC 636".

I have them here. I do not wish to delay the House, but bearing in mind your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think you will that confirm the documents are within the footprint of the debate.

Table 1.3 in both documents—dated February 2002 and December 2001—gives me an opportunity to speak proudly of the Government's achievements. I shall say why in summary, but I want to go into some detail. The table shows growth after growth in major essential public services voted for and provided by the Government. The No. 1 priority is giving everyone the chance, through education, training and work, to realise their full potential and thus build an inclusive and fair society. That was a key part of our manifesto. I had to check with my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) that we were talking in millions, but the new net provision is £19 million. Some £2,200 million is to go towards helping people without a job into work through the employment service. I hope that when I read the *Official Report* I will see the right number of noughts.

Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is taking us through the consequences of paragraph 3. I draw your attention to paragraph 1, which states:

> "The changes to the net cash requirements . . . were agreed to by the House of Commons in resolutions passed on 11 December 2001 and 7 March 2002."

We seem to be going back to why those resolutions were passed. It may be worth asking whether we have to listen to the hon. Gentleman's every detail.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The debate should relate to the proposed modifications and limits for non-operating appropriations-in-aid for the Departments set out in appendix A to HC 121 and to the circumstances that give rise to the need for new authorisation in the present Session. That is the narrowness of the debate on which I gave advice to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), and I hope that he will not try to drive a coach and horses through it by reciting things from the past.

Andrew Mackinlay: Absolutely not, but may I invite you to look at the second sentence of paragraph 3, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It is explicit that we are dealing with non-operating appropriations-in-aid contained in HC 391 and HC 636 and set out in appendix A. I did not print this; the House of Commons did. HC 391 and HC 636 are, I think, within the footprint of the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must advise the hon. Gentleman that we are debating the circumstances that have necessitated this motion coming before the House tonight. We cannot reopen issues that were discussed and agreed by the House in the past.

Andrew Mackinlay: I understood the Minister to say that they were not agreed. She said that unless we have this authorisation, the Government will be on skid row, or on the ropes with the auditors. I think that the *Official Report* will show that that is so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have a rehearsal of the policy behind the various items on which the hon. Gentleman has sought to embark. We are discussing the technical matter of making the correction and the circumstances that have led to it. I really hope that he will take my advice on this.

Andrew Mackinlay: I think that I am in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker; the document makes it clear. I do not think that your ruling excludes us from referring to the contents of HC 391 and HC 636—although I shall not do so.

Peter Bottomley: If the hon. Gentleman will allow—

Andrew Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman is not Speaker yet. I have a better hope than him—and more chance.

Peter Bottomley: Will the hon. Gentleman look at the verb in the penultimate line of the first paragraph of the document that we are discussing? He questions whether the House of Commons agreed the changes. That paragraph states clearly that they were agreed.

Andrew Mackinlay: But the hon. Gentleman will see that the first word of the next paragraph is "However" and that the paragraph continues:

"final Parliamentary approval for appropriations in aid is given through an Appropriation Act. The Appropriation Act 2002 did not include . . . the amounts."

That is why we are discussing the matter tonight, and that is why HC 636 and HC 391 are fully within the footprint of legitimate discussion—irritating though that must be. I hope that I have convinced you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What I am saying to the hon. Gentleman is that he may refer to a document but he cannot go over the ground in detail and embark on a recital, as he appeared to be doing, of the various reasons behind it. We are on narrower ground than that.

Andrew Mackinlay: I should not go into detail, because that would involve listing Labour's achievements, and to do that would take us beyond the relevant time tomorrow and we should lose a day's business. I should not do that.

The document relates to public expenditure growth in every key area. That has not been made clear enough. I referred to the Department for Work and Pensions and to the Home Office, where the increased agenda for combating crime is making places safer, improving the Prison Service and helping the Treasury solicitor to bring people to book.

It seems to me that we are entitled to examine every item of expenditure, because previous Parliaments abdicated their responsibility to do that and because the House to which we were elected has not—to our shame—set up adequate machinery for us to conduct that line-by-line scrutiny. The document deals with what is called virement in local government, and that should be the primary purpose of the House of Commons. It was in the past, and it should be so again.

Obviously, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am persuaded by the force of your argument and by the authority of the Chair, but it is important that on some occasions we should look at things in detail. I am bewildered. Why on earth were HC 636 and HC 391 printed if not for us to study? However, there is a lack of procedures for virement and for line-by-line scrutiny of such things. Those documents give detailed breakdowns for every Department.

I should like to go through the Government's great achievements, but as you have asked me not to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall leapfrog over several pages to demonstrate that I would abuse neither your patience nor the time of the House. The last page of table 1.3 in HC 391 details "Peers' expenses and administration", about which we should perhaps be concerned, as there has been an increase of £74 million.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): What a waste of public money.

Andrew Mackinlay: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that the hon. Gentleman is talking about recurrent expenditure and not non-operating appropriations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I advise the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) that we should stick to appropriations-in-aid.

Andrew Mackinlay: In that case, we should receive a fuller explanation from Members on the Treasury

Bench as to precisely what the appropriations-in-aid are. A simple explanatory document in plain English could have been produced for people who are not necessarily au fait with the details of the estimates—not only for humble Members of Parliament such as me but also for people outside. They would then have been able to understand the reason for the debate, because there has not been an adequate explanation.

We should be proclaiming the amount of expenditure; we should not be ashamed of it. I cannot understand why the Government are ashamed of the measures that we are endorsing, or authorising, or giving authority to, tonight. Why are we so shy about it? We all make mistakes sometimes. The Minister could have got the mistake over quickly, beaten her breast three times and said, "This is something that we are proud of, and we should proclaim it from the Dispatch Box," because we could be told about all these achievements.

Having made the point, I would hope that Treasury Ministers and the House authorities will not simply avoid a repetition of this occurrence but will reflect on how the House can in future give a critical examination of the estimates in general, and of any variations for the remedy of any procedural error that does occur; because otherwise, it seems to me, we just reinforce the charade of this House of Commons rubber-stamping tablets of stone handed down by the Executive of the day, which I am not prepared to acquiesce in any longer.

10.51 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Given the late hour, and the Financial Secretary's charming apology—I think that it was an apology, however short—it is tempting to nod through this error involving £3 billion of Government expenditure and laugh it off as an administrative error which we should not spend too much time on.

However, the mistake, and the speech by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), highlight the fact that there are some very substantive issues that the Government need to address, which cast light on the way in which the House scrutinises—or perhaps on many occasions fails to scrutinise—the expenditure side of the Government accounts. That for me was highlighted when I rang the Library earlier today to establish what this evening's debate was about.

The Library faxed through to me the very brief description that the Financial Secretary gave us about the substance of the debate. When a series of simple questions were then asked about what the sums of money consisted of, and what the causes of some of the errors were, the Library could not tell us the answers. It therefore telephoned the Treasury, and spoke to its contact for the Treasury officials to establish what these amounts were and what they related to, and to ask some basic questions about them—whether they were net or gross, and which Departments they related to specifically. I am afraid to say that the Treasury message that came back was that both the Treasury officials and the Library were uncertain about some of these answers, and that perhaps they were issues that we should raise in the debate. When we reach the stage when not only the Library but the Treasury officials are uncertain about what we are being asked to approve, it is incumbent on the House to scrutinise very carefully what the Government are putting before us.

May I therefore ask the Financial Secretary some specific points about the comments that she made at the beginning? First, can she give us some more detail about why that £3 billion of expenditure has been mislaid for a time in the Government's accounts? Who made the error and why was it not picked up? Is there no system of checks within the Treasury that would be expected to pick up errors of this type? Was the error a consequence of the shift to resource accounting and budgeting, or was it a consequence of some other error in the Department?

Secondly, as the hon. Members for Thurrock and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) asked in their speeches, what exactly are the amounts that have been put before us today? It suggests a certain amount of carelessness when the largest figure on the table before us, which we assume is £2,068,154,000 for what was then the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, is not even denominated correctly, so we cannot establish whether that is the precise sum. But what are these sums?

There are quite a variety of them, from that £2,068,154,000 for the DTLR all the way down to smaller sums, such as £76,000 for the Department of Trade and Industry. What exactly are those amounts? Can the Financial Secretary tell us what underlies those very large figures, which she expects us to scrutinise and approve tonight?

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The hon. Gentleman is making a very powerful point. I am looking at the figure for the DTLR and it clearly states—this may be a misprint—"2.068,154,000". That is extraordinary. There are commas and a delineating point. What is the figure? Are we talking about trillions or billions? Given that the Treasury presumably has a computer that works, is it not extraordinary that we are discussing the fact that the Government have made a mistake with £3 billion of taxpayers' money?

Mr. Laws: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point, as ever. I am not sure whether I agree that the sum is a trillion. I did not read the figure in that way, but it certainly denotes a certain carelessness when the Government have to return to the House to clarify whether £3 billion of expenditure has been lost, but then cannot even get the digits right.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Does not this whole saga highlight the appalling degree of innumeracy that often exists at the highest levels of Government? This is a nation of 60 million people that spends £420 billion—approximately £7,000 per head, on average—but that expenditure is subject to much less scrutiny than that of a parish of 600, which spends £4,200 at £7 per head. Have we not got the telescope the wrong way round in this country?

Mr. Laws: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point, which supports the position taken by the hon. Member for Thurrock. I hope to make a few more comments about that matter in a minute, but perhaps the Financial Secretary can clarify what the amounts are. We know that they are likely to represent capital expenditure, but what do they relate to? Why is the amount for the DTLR so large? Are these net payments

[Mr. Laws]

and receipts, or are they the gross amounts that have been paid? Does the fact that officials and Ministers are discussing these matters as we speak suggest that some of those exceptionally basic questions are not in the forefront of Treasury Ministers' minds?

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): The hon. Gentleman asks whether the amounts are net or gross, and whether they are receipts or payments. That is not entirely clear because the Department for International Development has a negative figure of £6 million. What on earth are we talking about—expenditure, receipts or both? The Government have not been entirely straightforward in explaining this matter to us.

Mr. Laws: That is another powerful point—*[Interruption.]* Very powerful points are being made by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

We do not know precisely what the figures are. We suspect that the negative amounts are capital receipts, but perhaps the Financial Secretary will clarify that. We do not know whether they have been netted off against capital payments. We look forward to the Financial Secretary's enlightening us on that later in the debate, because we certainly will not want to approve the estimates unless we know what they are.

Can the Financial Secretary also clarify whether the amounts have been spent and received already? Are we being asked for retrospective permission for expenditure and receipts that have already been given effect, or is the House being consulted in advance of any of these payments and expenditure being approved? What checks will be put in place in future to ensure that such errors are not repeated?

A number of Members have commented on the attitude of the House of Commons to the expenditure issues underlying this debate. That raises a wider issue that is directly relevant to the debate and to the way in which the House holds the Government to account for expenditure. To many of us, it seems that we still have a medieval system in this country in terms of the scrutiny of Government expenditure and receipts. We still act as if we were a Parliament in the 13th, 14th or 15th century being asked simply to approve revenue raising by a monarch, and being unconcerned about how the monarch spends that money once it is raised. We spend time on scrutinising the tax elements of the Budget, and sometimes we do not approve of them, but we have no record of scrutinising expenditure measures as many other legislatures throughout the world do.

The Select Committee on Procedure commented on that in 1981, when it produced a report saying:

"parliamentary control of government expenditure is a myth".

The Committee supported that in 1997–98 by saying:

"if . . . not a constitutional myth, it is very close to one".

You may be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that over the last year my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) has made similar points and expressed similar concerns about the lack of scrutiny of expenditure in this place. He has pointed out in a number of debates that the last occasion when the House turned down a request from Ministers for cash was in 1919, when the then Lord Chancellor was denied the funding for a second bathroom. That highlights the appalling lack of scrutiny of Government expenditure, which will rise, including these specific measures, to some £511 billion by the end of this expenditure review period.

The Government therefore have two major questions to answer tonight. First, as the hon. Member for Thurrock asked: what will they do to improve scrutiny of expenditure in the future, to make such errors less likely to occur by having a proper debate in this place, and to give the House power to scrutinise expenditure, to suggest increases in expenditure and to suggest changes to expenditure priorities? All those measures are available in other legislatures across the world, but not in this House. Those scrutiny measures relate directly to this debate, as, if we had such scrutiny, we would be less likely to vote through measures that miss out £3 billion worth of Government expenditure. Secondly, will the Financial Secretary respond to the detailed questions that I posed at the beginning of my comments about what the expenditure is, and the safeguards in the future? Unless we receive a persuasive response to both questions, we will be obliged to object to the estimates being approved.

11.3 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I should like to return to the motion. I wish that I could agree with the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) that high constitutional matters are at stake, but perhaps I can give a simple explanation. I am not sure that it is my job to ride to the aid of the Government, but in the interests of fairness, it is my duty as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to explain to the House what has happened.

The need for the motion has arisen, as the Financial Secretary has told us, because of the omission, in error, of details of non-operating appropriations-in-aid from the relevant schedules to the Appropriation Act 2002. The omission arose from an administrative error on the part of the Clerk of Supply, which was not spotted by the Treasury when it checked the Bill. There may, therefore, be some fault inside the Treasury, which we may need to examine in future. I very much doubt, however, that that fault went all the way up to Ministers—I would be surprised if it did.

The error was caused by changes made to the form of the Appropriation Act 2002 that resulted from the change to resource-based Supply. You may know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we are changing all Government accounts over to resource accounting and that has caused difficulties for Departments.

Michael Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Leigh: I shall carry on for the moment, as I am anxious to explain these matters calmly.

I have spoken today to the Clerk of the Public Accounts Committee, the National Audit Office and the directors responsible and, in my view, the error is not in any way attributable to the Government, but the motion is necessary to rectify the situation. Appropriations-in-aid are revenues that Departments generate and that they are authorised to retain to finance expenditures

over and above those financed from the consolidated fund. In other words and to explain it simply, if they have sold land, for instance, and want to keep the money in the Department, they can do so. The omission of references to these amounts in the Appropriation Act 2002 meant that the utilisation of these amounts had no statutory backing. That is why the motion is before us.

However, to be fair to the Government, it is important to note that the relevant information was laid before Parliament in the winter and spring supplementary estimates, voted on and approved. I do not think that anything has been kept back from the House of Commons, and I say that because I would not like the House, which should treat estimates seriously, to think that it has been kept in the dark.

The National Audit Office has been in discussion with the Clerk of Supply and the Treasury on the most appropriate way to give statutory backing to these amounts and so that the administrative error can be righted. The motion seeks to achieve that goal. I have discussed it with the National Audit Office and it has asked me to say that it has sought action to be taken as swiftly as possible because many departmental resource accounts are affected and are in the process of being finalised. In the meantime and in anticipation of the action that I hope that we shall take tonight, it has agreed for additional disclosure to be included in the accounts of the affected Departments. On that basis alone, it is comfortable that there is no need to qualify the accounts of the Departments.

In summary, it is the view of the National Audit Office that this motion is an appropriate course of action to rectify the effects of an administrative error by the Clerk of Supply. In fairness to him, he has written a memorandum to my Committee and I see no reason not to read it out. He says:

"I am extremely sorry that a mistake in the preparation of this Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill for which I am responsible as Clerk of Supply has caused considerable inconvenience to the House of Commons, to the National Audit Office and to Government Departments."

That is a very generous apology. We should leave the matter there.

11.8 pm

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) spoke in the way that he did. It is clear that we are not dealing with the general question of whether the House should approve line by line every part of Government expenditure. If that were the proposal before us, I would oppose it, because Members of Parliament and groups of Members of Parliament would go in for the type of pork-barrel politics that is not one of the greatest features of the American system. The fact that we can argue for our constituents' or other interests is important, but line-by-line approval of spending is not necessarily, on balance, a good thing.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) has probably found his way into a dictionary of quotations when he talked of rubber stamping tablets of stone. That expression will be remembered—especially if I have anything to do with it.

The Financial Secretary moved the motion properly. The combination of what she and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough said spelled the position out clearly. Even from the limited notes in appendix A, it is clear what happened. The House knew what it was doing, and the Financial Secretary has spelled out that there will be no extra spending. The only point that I wish to add is to ask whether it is possible to find a better expression than non-operating appropriations. If it is not capital spending or capital receipts, what is it? To say what it is not does not tell us what it is. I hope that the plain English campaign in the Treasury will deal with that point.

Andrew Mackinlay: I accept what the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) said. However, a serious point is involved. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary could have said the same thing and/or it could have been made clear in an explanatory memorandum. If we had been given the logical explanation, we would have avoided much understanding. The title of the document does not mean anything to anyone; it is gobbledygook.

Peter Bottomley: I agree that the debate is useful because things should not pass through the House without hon. Members understanding what is happening. The Minister should be congratulated, however, because it was better to hear the full explanation from my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who is Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. That courtesy to the House is appreciated.

11.10 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I welcome the brief opportunity to speak. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) for clarifying the situation. We often receive estimates for billions of pounds, which is not our money, but taxpayers' money, that we rubber stamp with little understanding of what we are agreeing to, as the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) said.

I understand that the problem was due to an accounting error because of the Government Resource and Accounts Act 2000, which sets out the new Treasury accounting procedures. Will this be the last time that the Minister comes to the House to ask for an amendment to be made because of an accounting error? I accept that it may not be, and we need to understand the situation fully.

I disagree ever so slightly with the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws). Although I was not in the Chamber, I listened to the Minister and am not altogether sure that she apologised. Although I do not think for one moment that she is personally responsible, or even that her officials are responsible, at the end of the day we are discussing £3 billion of taxpayers' money. There are many reasons why hon. Members are sent to the House. One of them is to look after taxpayers' money and how it is spent.

Peter Bottomley: The sense of my hon. Friend's comments may be right, but I suspect that we should pay

[Peter Bottomley]

attention to the fact that the error was made in the House. I am pretty certain that it was detected in the Treasury.

Michael Fabricant: That is reassuring, but the appropriation is generated from a Treasury motion. I am sure that the Minister will confirm that. To echo what my hon. Friend said, I, too, am grateful that the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee set the record straight. But why should my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough be the patsy? Surely the Minister should have explained the problem fully. As the hon. Member for Thurrock said, there should have been a clearer explanation on the Order Paper and in connection with Command Paper 121. It is not clear what precise moneys we are talking about and how the situation arose.

This is a brief but important debate. I reiterate that we are talking about £3 billion of taxpayers' money. Although the money was not lost, we have to account for it, and it is right and proper that it be debated. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that the problem will not happen again.

11.13 pm

Ruth Kelly: With the permission of the House, I thank hon. Members for their commendable interest in the debate. I want to pay a special tribute to the hon. Members for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, and for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley). They brought great experience and maturity to the debate. Much as I enjoyed the other contributions, especially by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), the hon. Member for Gainsborough in particular set out in detail why the motion has been tabled.

I was not aware of the letter of apology by the Clerk of Supply. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is a very generous apology, and the House should recognise that.

I accept responsibility for the fact that the matter was not picked up during the Treasury's checking procedure. The Treasury was the first Department to notice the error, but clearly it did so after the event rather than before the original votes had taken place. Procedures will, of course, be tightened up, and I am sure that much more attention will be paid to such issues in future.

This particular issue arose, as the hon. Gentleman set out so clearly, because 2001–02 was the first year of the resource estimates, and the Appropriation Act 2002 failed to reflect the changes required. Under cash-based supply there was only one type of appropriation-in-aid, whereas under resource supply we have operating, relating to resource income, and non-operating, relating to capital income, appropriations-in-aid. The 2002 Act included authority only for the operating appropriations in aid. The National Audit Office, although concerned about the lack of statutory underpinning, has accepted the income and expenditure in the accounts that were presented on the basis that the problem resulted from an administrative error, that Parliament has had the estimates laid before it and that it has voted on them.

Dr. Gibson: On a point of clarification, may I take it that the letter of apology was sent not to the Minister but to the Chairman of a Select Committee?

Ruth Kelly: I cannot answer as to whom the letter was written, but it has not yet found its way to my desk. It may well have been written to the hon. Member for Gainsborough.

Mr. Leigh: The letter is a memorandum submitted by the Clerk of Supply of the Public Bill Office of the House of Commons, and was sent to the Clerk of my Committee. I have read out the apology, and I think that we should pay tribute to a servant of the House who has made an honest mistake and who has now apologised for it.

Ruth Kelly: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman, as I am sure the House does. The motion in no way provides the Government with any additional spending authority. It simply provides for the correction of that regrettable administrative error.

Mr. Prisk: The hon. Lady said that, in these circumstances, the NAO is prepared to accept the accounts as long as matters progress. However, she did not say that, at the moment, the NAO cannot finalise the accounts, so without this change the Government's accounts for the last financial year cannot be completed. Will she confirm that?

Ruth Kelly: The NAO is signing off departmental accounts, and it has signed off some on the understanding that legislative authority is to be urgently sought because it is needed to regularise the position.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): The hon. Lady made that point in her opening remarks, when she said that the NAO was signing off accounts even though it does not have the authorisation to do so. Is it common for the NAO to do that? If a private company were to behave in that way towards a company's accounts, it would rightly be prosecuted. Call me old-fashioned, but that seems to me to be rather an important point.

Ruth Kelly: As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, most private companies do not have the opportunity to have their accounts agreed and voted on by Members of this House.

Clearly the position needs to be regularised; that is the NAO's approach, and I intend to rectify the matter through this motion.

Michael Fabricant: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ruth Kelly: I shall give way one last time, but after that I must not detain the House much longer.

Michael Fabricant: I just want to repeat the question that I asked when I made my small contribution. Can the Minister now assure us that she has, as she puts it,

regularised the position not only today, but for future years? Will she confirm that this error arising from the change in accounting practice will not happen again next year?

Ruth Kelly: As I have explained to the House, this was the result of a one-off change from cash accounting to resource accounting. Clearly I cannot guarantee that no drafting errors will occur in future. I would not like to commit myself to anything of the sort, even under such intense pressure.

However, the House should agree that we should resolve that issue today. Departments' spending, including the retention of income, must be regularised at the earliest opportunity. The motion paves the way for that process and will allow the 2001-02 resource accounts to be completed in accordance with legislative requirements. For those reasons, I commend the motion to the House.

Question put—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 4 December, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002.]

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With the leave of the House, I shall put motions 7 and 8 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 107) (HC60) on Special Grant for Activities Undertaken by Beacon Councils, which was laid before this House on 14th November, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Fur Farming (Prohibition) (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Sutton Coldfield Courthouse

11.20 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I have the honour of laying a petition before the House signed by more than 5,500 people from Sutton Coldfield and the surrounding area, who express a virtually unanimous, united and clear-cut view that the courthouse in Sutton Coldfield should not close, and are supported by all the political parties, the local magistracy, Her Majesty's coroner for Birmingham and councillors from all parties across Birmingham.

The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled

The humble petition of citizens in and around Sutton Coldfield showeth

That it is proposed that the courthouse in Sutton Coldfield shall be closed.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable house urge the Lord Chancellor's department not to permit this closure to go ahead.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Natural Health Products

11.22 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I have the pleasure to present a petition on behalf of 252 constituents in and around Harrogate and Knaresborough.

The petition states:

The petition of Consumers for Health Choice and it supporters,

Declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Produces would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The Petitioners therefore request that he House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

To lie upon the Table.

West Freugh Airfield

11.23 pm

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to present to the House a petition signed by almost 1,000 of my constituents, who expressed concern about the proposal to close West Freugh airfield and downgrade its range.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons,

The petition of residents of Dumfries and Galloway declares that the proposals to close West Freugh Airfield and to downgrade West Freugh range to campaign status are mistaken and that the community has supported MOD operations there for over 60 years.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Defence to reconsider the proposals and to arrange for Qinetiq to come forward with plans to continue with significant employment in the area, or else make plans to release assets for commercial job creating use by potential inward investors.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Ethiopia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

10.24 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): I am pleased to have secured the Adjournment debate on a subject that is of interest and concern to many people: the food shortages and subsequent possible famine in Ethiopia. I thank the Minister, the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew)—who will accompany me on a visit that I shall mention shortly—and other hon. Members for attending.

The debate is timely not only because of the recent warnings and appeal for help by the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, but because an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation leaves for Ethiopia on Saturday. I have the honour of having been appointed to lead it. I also have the pleasure of being a member of the British Ethiopian Society and secretary of the all-party British-Ethiopian group. I remain in regular contact with the Ethiopian ambassador to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Fisseha Adugna, who is an active and impressive representative of his country and a friend.

Why am I so interested in Ethiopia? Like many people, my interest developed in the 1984 crisis when Bob Geldof and Live Aid did so much to highlight the problems in that country. Two years ago, a threatened famine reawakened that interest. I am personally concerned not because I have travelled to that country—I have not yet done so—nor because of any business links to the region, but because Ethiopia is so poor. Its residents regularly face hunger and possible starvation. The aid agencies believe that things can be done to alleviate that poverty and at least mitigate if not remove the threat of hunger and famine in future.

I shall discuss medium-term and longer-term measures shortly. First, I want to concentrate on the urgent need for food aid, for which the Ethiopian Government pleaded recently. Earlier this year, the short Belg rains failed, and the long Kiremt rains occurred in late summer rather than earlier, resulting in a long dry period. The loss of those rains meant crop failure and further reduced pasture and water resources, with the latter leading to extensive livestock deaths in affected areas and poor physical conditions for surviving animals. In turn, that led to severely limited access to a green harvest of important lean season foods and the limited availability of livestock products. Serious food shortages are reported in several parts of the country.

There is therefore an urgent need for emergency food aid. The Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission says that the people who need assistance between October and December this year will peak at 6.3 million, requiring approximately 270,000 metric tonnes of food. The World Food Programme reported last month that such aid has been promised, although delivering it as quickly as possible is now urgent. However, the impact of the current drought is expected to extend into next year, as the failure of the rains has affected the growth of long-cycle crops.

Ninety-seven per cent. of crops are rain fed and more than 85 per cent. of Ethiopians are subsistence farmers who depend on their Maher—November, December and January—harvest. That food will simply not be there. In most years, Ethiopia depends on a certain amount of food aid to feed its people, but the position is now far more acute. The Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission estimates that as many as 14.3 million people could need assistance in the coming year.

A total of approximately 2 million metric tonnes of food will be required to meet the need, with 500,000 metric tonnes being required in the first quarter of next year. Such a requirement is unprecedented, even during the highly publicised famine of 1984–85. I admit that that is the worst-case scenario, but the world should be prepared for it. The world must respond immediately because it takes a long time from reaching an agreement to help to delivering the food to the needy. Much food would be delivered through the single port of Djibouti, and therefore planning is essential to ensure that it has the capacity to cope with the influx.

The response from the United Kingdom and the European Union is disappointing. I hope that a further announcement will be made by the Department for International Development before we leave for Ethiopia, but I am concerned that the Government appear reluctant to commit themselves to providing urgent food aid that could save people's lives.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I concur entirely with what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and I look forward to accompanying him. I hope that that will be on Sunday rather than Saturday, however, but we can sort that out in due course. Does he agree that one of the problems is that there is a big debate going on in Ethiopia and other African countries about whether they should take food aid—from America, in particular—containing genetically modified organisms? This is a crucial question, because the subsistence farmers are very reticent about accepting such food aid. Would the hon. Gentleman like to say that one thing that the British Government could do is to ensure that they do not send GMOs to Africa?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. I am not qualified to say whether genetically modified food is safe, but I know that many people are concerned about it. I am certainly concerned about its safety, and perhaps representations could be made for non-GM food to be sent. After all, as I am about to say, there is hardly a shortage of food in the world.

A world that produces more food than its population can eat can surely provide relief. In the European Union, we actually pay farmers not to farm. The 93,000 tonnes pledged by the EU, out of the first quarter requirement of up to 500,000 tonnes, could surely be increased. Let us not forget that, during the height of the common agricultural policy's folly—ironically, around the mid-1980s when Ethiopia's problems came to light, and when volunteers such as Bob Geldof were doing their utmost and the British public were digging deep into their own pockets—the EU spent half its entire budget on storing and disposing of surpluses. I realise that distribution problems existed at the time, but is it not obscene that people in one part of the world should destroy food while others, only a few hours away, starve to death? It is certainly obscene, but it is not inevitable.

The failure of the rains has exacerbated an already dire situation, which is perpetuated by ongoing poverty. At least 80 different languages are spoken in Ethiopia—which the Secretary of State has referred to as one of the poorest countries in the world—and it contains an even higher number of tribes. The common theme that links them all is, sadly, poverty, with a large part of the population living on less than $1 a day. On many occasions, people have cut trees down to sell for firewood. That leaves the topsoil exposed, increasing the risk of it being washed away if the rain should come. That would leave the ground hard and infertile, thereby adding to the desertification. Additionally, with the population growing rapidly in rural areas, trees and vegetation are being cleared to create more arable land. Other family assets have also been sold in an attempt to ward off short-term poverty. All those actions have resulted in the continuation of that poverty, and of the cycle of drought and famine.

It is a paradoxical fact that Ethiopia does not have a water shortage—a number of rivers, notably the Blue Nile, cross its plateau—but it has a poor record of water management, with only 5 per cent. of its irrigable land being irrigated. The country lacks the money and the expertise to create the necessary irrigation, and it is a tragedy that such schemes were not provided by development aid following the tragic events of 1984–85. Why did that not happen?

Ethiopia also lacks adequate storage facilities. In the last two years, it has enjoyed good harvests, but has been unable to store sufficient food to alleviate the present problem. Again, it would have been relatively easy for the developed world to provide such assistance. How sad it is that such measures were not taken, when those very actions would have had the potential to end famine in the country.

The developed world could have helped in other ways, too, particularly by reviewing trade rules. The value of Ethiopia's exports per capita is the lowest in the world, and even those exports have been hit hard by the slump in coffee prices, which have fallen by 70 per cent. in four years. That has cost Ethiopia almost half its total annual export earnings. Again, how sad it is that the country that gave the world coffee is suffering so much from that commodity being its main export. However, with other products too, the European Union should look to help by removing the protective barriers that mean that many EU farmers remain inefficient and wasteful while third-world exporters are forced to subsist on a pittance.

Debt, too, is an area in which the developed world can help. Total debt in Ethiopia has reached about 150 per cent. of gross domestic product and the cost of servicing that debt has risen to $118 million a year, which is about 12 per cent. of revenues. By contrast, the Government have spent only $13.5 million—a tenth of the cost of their debt interest payments—on food relief since July. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other shareholders should cancel that debt completely and immediately, with strings attached if necessary, to give Ethiopia a chance.

Other problems abound. AIDS has had a devastating effect on Ethiopia, as it has had on other areas of Africa. Many heads of household have lost their lives through the disease and many orphans have been created, thereby perpetuating poverty once again. Poverty leads to further poverty as further short-term measures are taken with disastrous medium to long-term results, yet Ethiopia has so much to be proud of in terms of its history and recent developments.

Ethiopia is the land of the fabled Queen of Sheba, the home of the Ark of the Covenant, the country of origin of coffee and the land where Lucy and, more recently, other remains dating back 4.4 million years were discovered. It can boast not only the longest archeological record of any country, but the fact that it has been independent longer than any country in Africa and that it was the first in the west, after Armenia, to adopt Christianity.

In modern terms, the overthrow of the dictator Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front and the move to democracy in 1992, which was followed by the appointment of Meles Zenawi as Prime Minister in 1995, represent an impressive political turnaround. Low inflation of 1.3 per cent. and growth of 4.6 per cent. are also impressive, but Ethiopia cannot realise its full potential nor repeat its impressive history while it remains in the grip of poverty.

Help is needed, including immediate emergency food aid, development aid, debt relief, a change in trade rules and reduced EU tariffs, and it is within the scope of the developed world to help in those ways. The UK should lead by setting an example. When we leave for Ethiopia on Saturday, we should be delighted to take good news with us, including details of how much aid this country is to provide, what form that aid will take and when Ethiopia can expect to receive it, for if and when we avert this crisis, we can move towards ensuring that it is the last. That would consign hunger and starvation in Ethiopia to the history books.

11.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on his success in securing this Adjournment debate. He has focused on an issue of deep concern to many people across the country—indeed, across the world—and I know that he has taken a long-standing and constructive interest in it. I am sure that he and his colleagues will return from their visit to Ethiopia with much important information and many insights to the situation there.

I shall try to deal with all the points that the hon. Gentleman raised as well as that raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on GM food. I shall also set out the work that my Department is doing to help to deal with the humanitarian crisis and the measures that we are taking on the development issues that the hon. Gentleman raised. If there are any outstanding issues that I do not have time to discuss, perhaps we can take them up in writing.

The hon. Gentleman graphically set out the nature of the problem in Ethiopia, which is an overwhelmingly agricultural society—the famine and the longer-term development issues. The situation there is a matter of deep concern and people are right to ask, "Why again?" However, I would argue that this time it is different, and the differences are both positive and negative.

[Ms Sally Keeble]

First, I shall deal with some negative factors. The needs of the whole of Africa this year are huge. The UN is looking for just over US$2 billion for Consolidated Appeals in Africa for 2003, to meet the needs of people in a variety of countries. In Sudan, many people yet again face severe malnutrition. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, following the violent conflict, there is increased mortality as well as gross human rights abuses, particularly against women. Southern African countries are suffering from a mixture of drought, bad governance and HIV/AIDS.

However, there have also been positive changes since 1984. The hon. Gentleman was right to highlight some of the progress that has been made in Ethiopia. Those positive developments include the effectiveness of early warning systems, and the willingness of the Government and the international community to work together. At the beginning of 2002 the Government made their normal request for food aid, not as an emergency appeal but as part of a package put together with the international community to address some of the more fundamental structural issues behind Ethiopia's continuing food insecurity.

A total of 427,000 tonnes of food aid was requested to help meet the needs of some 5.9 million people who were at risk. That followed the generally good harvests of 2001. Signs of additional need in some areas emerged in June and July. They were centred in the Afar region and some neighbouring areas where most of the people have traditionally led pastoral lives. We expect to have the first estimates from surveys of the present situation within the next few days, and we may be able to ensure that the hon. Gentleman has them before he leaves for Ethiopia on Saturday. Perhaps he could keep in touch with the Department.

Let me tell the hon. Gentleman what the Department is doing about the problems in Ethiopia. Along with our partners, we have taken action to help deal with the crisis. At the beginning of the year we supported the International Committee of the Red Cross appeal. In March we contacted the UN emergencies unit in Ethiopia to find out its priorities. We then contributed some £2.3 million to the World Food Programme for food relief, employment generation schemes and early warning systems. We have supported programmes initiated by UNICEF, the World Health Organisation, the UN emergencies unit in Ethiopia and the UN Development Programme. In response to emerging needs, we contributed again to the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNICEF, and in September we committed about £2.6 million to interventions by non-governmental organisations.

We have also worked closely with our partners—the Ethiopian Government, other donors, UN agencies, the ICRC and NGOs—to alleviate the crisis. We have taken a series of actions at every level: that has included the involvement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development.

Inevitably there have been many comparisons with 1984, some of which were made by the hon. Gentleman; but lessons have been learnt since then, especially about the importance of effective co-ordination and early warning. Ethiopia now has an early warning system, and a disaster preparedness and prevention commission. It has also established a food security reserve, which provides a buffer stock for times of crisis. Food can be released and distributed as soon as donor commitments are made. Donors can then restock the reserve through local purchase of grain, international purchase or in-kind donation of grain, principally from the United States. I will deal with the point about GM food shortly.

By contrast with what happened in 1984–85, Government, donors and non-governmental organisations now routinely work together to co-ordinate relief efforts and improve the response system. But, as the hon. Gentleman said, there is also a need to address some of the longer-term issues. We are focusing part of our long-term support on looking at ways of coping with the cyclical droughts from which Ethiopia has suffered. We are considering joint efforts with the Government of Ethiopia and key donors to tackle some of the underlying causes of food insecurity. For example, we will contribute to improvements in agriculture sector policies, and support efforts to increase people's access to markets through improvements in rural transport infrastructure. We will also help to reduce the vulnerability of the poor to drought by promoting the development of safety nets for people at risk. In pursuit of this, we are planning work with IrelandAid and USAID on different aspects of long-term food security. As one of the most vulnerable groups, the pastoralists to which the hon. Gentleman referred are an important target group for our work.

The basis of our long-term development partnership with Ethiopia is the country's poverty reduction strategy, which demonstrates how Ethiopia plans to prioritise resources and policies towards tackling poverty. The hon. Member for Tewkesbury is doubtless aware of the poverty reduction strategies that have been produced by various developing countries. We hope to move to the provision of a programme of direct budget support in the near future, along with some technical co-operation in certain areas.

One of the focal points of this programme is the long-term problem of food insecurity. Other planned areas for focus are capacity building and education. We are also actively supporting the tackling of HIV/AIDS, which the hon. Gentleman rightly said presents a difficultly in Ethiopia. We are also offering support to the road sector, which will be important in helping to reduce rural poverty.

On the GM issue, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud, GM varieties of maize and soya have been provided as food aid by the US for some time—since 1995, according to one report. Initially, this appears to have passed with little comment, but concerns were raised in southern Africa in 2002 because of the increasing domestic debate on GM issues in developing countries, and because of trade concerns.

Where GM maize is distributed in whole grain form, recipients of GM maize for food relief do have some cause for concern regarding the possible contamination of future exports to the EU. There might also be some risk to local biodiversity, because grain could be planted instead being consumed directly, or it could be introduced into the environment by spillage. However, this problem can be addressed if the grain is milled before distribution. In fact, my Department has provided the funds to do that where local objections have been raised.

On food safety, however, the World Health Organisation and the World Food Programme have concluded that the consumption of foods currently provided as food aid that contain genetically modified organisms is not likely to present a human health risk. These foods can be eaten safely, and trade concerns do not arise for products from animals fed on GM crops under current or foreseen labelling regimes in developing countries. My Department's policy on the provision of food aid is that recipient Governments should be given enough information on the type of food that they receive and its characteristics, including whether it is genetically modified. Recipient countries should be allowed to decide on its acceptability, and donors should respect the decisions of recipients, and accommodate them as far as possible. For example, if milled cereals are preferred to whole grain in order to avoid GM grain being planted as seed, such an arrangement should be made. As I have said, my Department has set aside funding for that.

At the moment, Zambia is the only country in southern Africa that has refused to accept grain containing genetically modified material. As Members will know, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has made it clear that that decision by the Zambian Government means that a lot of people in Zambia will go hungry. That decision is obviously disappointing. The scientific evidence is clear that there is no risk from GM maize. We will obviously do our best to ensure that hungry people are fed, but the Zambian Government's decision will make it much more difficult for the international community to help the hungry in Zambia. However, that problem is currently confined to that one country. DFID's position on GM has therefore been made clear, and I hope that that thoroughly answers the points raised by the hon. Member for Tewkesbury.

In summarising the aid that we have provided to date I shall also give the hon. Gentleman some good news to take with him on his trip to Ethiopia. In total, we have provided £12.3 million bilaterally to help meet humanitarian needs throughout 2002.

On a multilateral basis, nearly 20 per cent. of the EU support is funded by the UK. That has included a total of 197,000 metric tonnes of food aid, €2.5 million in humanitarian support earlier in the year, and a further €4.2 million programme of humanitarian support under preparation. The Commission is also considering the provision of further assistance for 2003.

We are constantly monitoring the situation and will play our part in terms of emergency relief, while also committing the resources needed to forge a long-term partnership to tackle the underlying poverty that increases the vulnerability of people if there is a drought.

The UN estimates that the food pipeline is adequate until about the end of January. Because of the nature of the Ethiopian food security reserve, further donor cash pledges can translate into the immediate release of food for at least two months beyond that. However, current needs are still manifest so I am pleased to be able to announce that we are making available, immediately, a further £5 million for humanitarian support for Ethiopia. I hope that the hon. Member for Tewkesbury can take that good news with him, as I said. In addition, we will be closely assessing the position in 2003. A consolidated Government-UN appeal is expected in mid-January, and we will be considering further support.

The situation in Ethiopia is serious, as it is elsewhere in Africa, but I hope that I have demonstrated very clearly to the House that we have moved on from 1984. With the close partnership between the Government and donors, and a swift and generous response from the international community—in which the Government will play a substantial part—we can prevent this from turning into a major crisis. That is the commitment of my Department, and I am sure that it is one that the hon. Member for Tewkesbury and others share.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 4 December 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Blood Transfusions (Cancer Patients)

1. **Mr. Dai Havard** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): What discussions he has had with (a) the Department of Health, (b) the National Assembly for Wales and (c) others about the greater use of alternatives to blood transfusions for cancer patients in Wales. [83067]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have many meetings, both with my colleagues in other Government Departments, such as the Department of Health, and with colleagues in the National Assembly for Wales. The provision of health care in Wales is a topic that we regularly discuss.

Mr. Havard: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. May I share some information with him? He will know that I have been campaigning about the use of blood alternatives for some time. The latest research from the renowned Health Economist Catalyst will show on Saturday that £600 million is now spent on transfusions within the hospital stay element alone. These are bed days that need not be used if there were alternatives. The economics are already proven. I welcome the possible referral of this issue to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, but that will take quite a time to take place. Perhaps my hon. Friend will agree with me that simple changes in Government policy and departmental policy could effect step changes as opposed to incremental changes.

Mr. Touhig: I am aware of my hon. Friend's interest in this matter. Indeed, he referred to it during Second Reading of the Health (Wales) Bill, which took place about a week ago. I am aware that he favours the use of alternatives to blood transfusions for patients with cancer. However, it is important to point out that each individual case is a matter for the health professionals. They decide on the appropriate treatment for any patient. As I have said, I am aware of my hon. Friend's concerns. I shall ensure that they are brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Manufacturing Industry

2. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If he will make a statement on the state of manufacturing industry in Wales. [83068]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): Although manufacturing has had a tough time, the picture for Welsh industry as a whole is promising, including Ford's new investment at Bridgend involving an estimated 640 jobs.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I am grateful for the rational response that I have received from the Secretary of State. He will be aware that United Kingdom manufacturing output last June fell by the largest amount ever, which was 5.3 per cent., and that there was a similar fall in all parts of the UK. Are the Government aware that some of their measures of increased regulation and indirect taxation, despite what they are doing with corporation tax, are placing unbearable burdens upon industry? Will the right hon. Gentleman do his best to do something about it?

Peter Hain: As the hon. Gentleman will know, as a keen enthusiast for manufacturing—that is something that I share with him—corporation tax for small companies has been cut hugely by the Government, which is much to our credit. He will also, as a follower of manufacturing in Wales, have read this morning's *Western Mail*—

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Of course.

Peter Hain: Otherwise, he would not be asking the question. He will have read that 50 small companies—fast-growth world-beating companies—have been identified as doing very well. They have created more than 800 new jobs over the past two years. This is a pattern of Wales doing well against a difficult international climate, with employment climbing with 33,000 extra jobs between July and September. Newport, Cardiff and Swansea have some of the fastest-growing companies in Britain, and Wales has one of the lowest levels of business failure in Britain. The Welsh Development Agency has created more than 2,000 new businesses over the past year. Despite the difficult international climate, Wales is doing much better than it has ever done before in these circumstances.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that only yesterday in Wrexham, a major multinational company, Owens Corning, announced redundancies involving 230 highly skilled jobs? These jobs are moving to mainland Europe. Will my right hon. Friend join me in carrying out a detailed investigation to ascertain why the company has made this decision, and then make representations within the Cabinet on my behalf to ensure that this does not happen again?

Peter Hain: I regret the company's decision and acknowledge the diligence with which my hon. Friend approaches the local economy, especially local manufacturers. I understand that no amount of financial assistance from the Government or the Welsh Assembly would have saved the plant. The company was

determined to shift it to eastern countries because of cheaper labour costs. The lesson for us is that we must constantly increase our value-added production, upskill and go for high quality jobs and investment. In that context, I visited Wrexham with my hon. Friend recently to ascertain the local picture, which includes a high quality, world-class company, CP Pharmaceuticals. It shows that Wrexham is going places under the Government.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): According to the latest Office for National Statistics figures, there was a net loss of 160,000 manufacturing jobs in the three months to September. That works out at a rate of 10,000 jobs a week. Four years ago, when the Secretary of State was Minister with responsibility for the industry, he wrote to the Chancellor to draw attention to the impact of the high pound on manufacturing. Given that the pound is higher now than it was then, will he write to his right hon. Friend again?

Peter Hain: Unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency has fallen by half under the Labour Government. That shows that Labour policies are working where nationalist policies would have failed. I draw his attention to Carmarthen county council's five-year master plan, which aims to create almost 5,000 jobs and safeguard another 2,000, thus revitalising the country's economy. Under the Government and the National Assembly for Wales, more business opportunities are being created day by day, new start-ups are taking place and Wales is doing better than many other parts of the world, including many advanced economies such as Canada and countries in Europe. That is a tribute to the success of the Government's policies—

Adam Price: In manufacturing?

Peter Hain: It is a tribute to their success, including in manufacturing. I tell the nationalists not to talk down Welsh manufacturing because many good Welsh manufacturers have weathered the difficult international climate and are doing well.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): Will my right hon. Friend hold early discussions with his ministerial colleagues about the difficulties that manufacturers experience in north Wales, including in my constituency, in obtaining public liability insurance at reasonable costs?

Peter Hain: I take my hon. Friend's point. That is one of the reasons why we are working closely with her, other colleagues in Parliament and the National Assembly to tackle those problems and provide new opportunities.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): No hon. Member is talking down Welsh manufacturing, but the Government are letting it down. Is not the problem with the Government's policy on manufacturing the fact that they do not have one? Business failure is much sharper in Wales than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Job losses are occurring at an alarming rate.

In 1997, there were 210,000 manufacturing jobs; today, there are 186,000. We learned yesterday of the sad closure of Owens Corning with the loss of 230 fibreglass manufacturing jobs. Why do the Government not appear to care about manufacturing?

Peter Hain: That is a bit rich from a member of a party that hammered Welsh manufacturing, slashing jobs in mining, steel and heavy industry so that unemployment leapt to 168,000 at its peak under Mrs. Thatcher. We have already introduced policies under which jobs have increased and more and more companies have started up, including in manufacturing. Wales has gone for high-value-added, high-skill, high-tech jobs because that is our future.

Mr. Evans: There are fewer manufacturing jobs in Wales today than in 1997. Surely manufacturers want a bonfire of useless regulations and a Government that understand their needs. They need a manufacturing champion in Cabinet who will be prepared to speak up for them.

The Secretary of State is a great fan of our emerging eastern European neighbours, but travelling to those countries and seeing our manufacturing jobs that have been exported there cannot be acceptable. Will he hold urgent meetings with manufacturers to discuss the measures that can be introduced to tackle the manufacturing meltdown in Wales?

Peter Hain: If the hon. Gentleman were a Welsh Member of Parliament, he would know that employment in Wales has increased by 33,000 in the past year, and that businesses are starting up all the time. He would know that the Welsh economy is doing better than ever in the context of an international recession. The hon. Gentleman should stop talking Wales down.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Will my right hon. Friend hold discussions with the Welsh Development Agency and people in the automotive industry to support the huge new investment at Ford in Bridgend—it will make that plant the major engine manufacturer in the European Union—and build up a centre of excellence for the world automotive industry with a world-class company?

Peter Hain: Yes, indeed, and I acknowledge my hon. Friend's role in helping to attract that extra investment. If Wales were doing as badly in manufacturing as the Conservatives and the nationalists maintain—following the same line, one might note—why would a world-beating company such as Ford choose to locate this extra investment in south Wales? It is doing so because Wales is doing well.

National Emergencies

4. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What discussions he has had with ministerial and National Assembly colleagues about contingency planning for national emergencies. [83070]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): I have regular meetings with ministerial and National Assembly colleagues in which we discuss a range of topics including contingency planning.

Miss McIntosh: I am delighted that the Secretary of State has found his place. Will he join me in expressing concern about who has responsibility in the event of a national emergency in Wales? The National Audit Office has said that the health service across Britain would struggle to cope. This place is responsible for security, defence and foreign policy. The First Minister is responsible for the side effects. Who is ultimately responsible?

Peter Hain: I should first acknowledge that the hon. Lady has the civil contingencies college in her constituency, which helps to train people to deal with national emergencies. The idea that the preparations for national emergencies—be they attacks by al-Qaeda or other threats—are not full and comprehensive is simply nonsense. At a time when we face the threat of attack, is the hon. Lady really suggesting that a time-consuming and costly wholesale reorganisation of Whitehall is the way forward, as the Conservatives have suggested? The truth is that the National Assembly and the Government are well prepared and ready to take on any threat, should it arise.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the Secretary of State bear in mind that the National Audit Office report that was just referred to revealed that, in England, there is incredible variability in the state of preparedness in the health service for a national emergency, particularly a terrorist attack? Will he draw the NAO report to the attention of our colleagues in Wales? Will he also ask them to ensure, given the restructuring that is going on in the health service in Wales, that we will still be able to maintain focused, co-ordinated preparations to protect the people of Wales?

Peter Hain: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's question. I assure him that we have a United Kingdom national reserve stock of pharmaceuticals and equipment ready for rapid deployment in the event of any such attack. In Wales, there is a rapid response team to manage, for example, cases of smallpox, in the event of a biological attack being waged. The National Assembly has undoubtedly made preparations, but my right hon. Friend's point will be well taken.

Governmental Institutions

5. **David Burnside** (South Antrim): What assessment he has made of the democratic accountability of governmental institutions in Wales since the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales. [83071]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): The National Assembly for Wales has helped to make the Government of Wales more accountable to the people of Wales.

David Burnside: I am interested in the Secretary of State's comment that the Assembly has improved democratic accountability. Under this Government, the nation has gone through major constitutional change in three parts of the kingdom—Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—with three different kinds of institution devolved to those three parts. Will the right hon. Gentleman enter into talks with his predecessor, now in the Northern Ireland Office, and pass on to him the benefits of the form of devolution in Wales—administrative devolution—which might be more appropriate for Northern Ireland than the present system, which has no collective Cabinet responsibility and a weak Committee system?

Peter Hain: No, I will not do that, because the different forms of devolution are tailored to the different needs of the different nations involved. The particular pattern of devolution that we have in Wales is Executive devolution, not legislative devolution. It has been working very well, and we are looking at ways of improving it all the time.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, because Wales is the land of quangos, we have a particular problem with the lack of accountability of government institutions? Would he also agree that those who falsely promised, before the referendum, that there would be a bonfire of quangos, had no intention of honouring that promise once the referendum was won?

Peter Hain: I do not agree with my right hon. Friend. One advantage of the National Assembly, which I am sure he accepts, is that it can hold accountable all the different agencies that are answerable to it much more directly. Therefore, they can work more effectively for the people of Wales.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): To what extent does that democratic accountability extend to involving leading Welsh language institutions such as the Nant Gwrtheyrn National Centre for Language and Culture in north Wales, which not only offers exceptional training in the language, but whose tutors and staff are well placed to provide guidance to Cardiff and Westminster Departments on Welsh-related matters?

Peter Hain: I take the hon. Gentleman's contribution with great interest, as I understand that he is a Welsh learner. I congratulate him on that—llongyfarchiadau.

I very much support the Assembly's programme to extend support for the Welsh language, including an action plan announced only a week ago. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is far too noisy.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The Secretary of State was one of the leading figures in the campaign for a "Yes" vote in the referendum, but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) said, the commitment was not just to change the political complexion of the quangos, but to make a bonfire of them. If that was not a publicity stunt, will the Secretary of State explain why there are as many quangos as when the Welsh Assembly was set up? What discussions is he having with the First Minister, who seems equally at ease with a quango state as does the Secretary of State?

Peter Hain: First, although I shall not go into detail, I repeat the point that I made to my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli: the Assembly provides for all its agencies to be much more accountable to government in Wales than was possible when government was administered from here. The truth is that we have much more responsive and accountable government in Wales, which was not the case under the previous Conservative Government when quangos, whose membership was usually rigged, flourished.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I see that the Secretary of State is a Welsh learner and I wish him well in that. The fact is that the devolved system of government was voted for by a thin margin by the people of Wales, but if the Ivor Richard commission recommends further powers being transferred from Westminster to the Welsh Assembly, will the Secretary of State give the people another voice in another referendum?

Peter Hain: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments on my Welsh learning ability—diolch yn fawr i chi. On the general question of increased powers, the Welsh Assembly is getting increased influence and powers as matters are devolved from here and fresh primary legislation is passed, such as that on the children's commissioner and the Health (Wales) Bill, which is going through the House. We shall await the outcome of the Richard commission and any debate on that before taking any decisions.

Bluestone Project

6. **Mrs. Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): What discussions he has had with the Economic Development Secretary of the National Assembly concerning investment in the Bluestone project in west Wales. [83072]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with the National Assembly's Economic Development Secretary on a range of issues, including the excellent news of Pembrokeshire's Bluestone project. I welcome the success of Team Wales, which is working together to deliver hundreds of jobs for the economy of west Wales.

Mrs. Lawrence: When I tabled my question, I expected to have to come here today to lobby for such investment, so that news is very welcome, as 600 much-needed full-time year-round jobs will be created in an area that depends heavily on the tourism industry. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is an example of how local indigenous business can come up with the goods and provide stable jobs when it is given the same investment as was previously reserved for inward investors?

Mr. Touhig: My hon. Friend is right. We are in an environment in which we are encouraging projects such as that in Narberth in her constituency. The £45 million of investment is most welcome and 600 year-round jobs will be provided. Indeed, the package, which involves £16.5 million, is the largest to be put together by Team Wales, which shows the commitment of the Government, our partners, the Labour-led National Assembly and the local authorities and others who are ensuring that the project is a success for west Wales.

Tourism

7. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What assessment he has made of the impact of the foot and mouth epidemic and September 11 on tourism into Wales from (a) England and (b) abroad. [83073]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): There is strong and positive evidence of recovery in the tourism industry in Wales in 2002 compared with 2001. I know that the hon. Gentleman is a regular visitor to Wales, and makes an important contribution to the growth of our tourism industry.

Michael Fabricant: As the Minister knows, I am a keen climber of Cader Idris. When I go to climb Cader Idris, of course I stay at Dolffanog Fach with Sioned and Danny Oliver. But does the Minister realise that only 2 per cent. of overseas visitors to the United Kingdom go to Wales? What can he do, and what can the Welsh tourism industry do, to attract more overseas visitors—not just me from England!—to Wales?

Mr. Touhig: The guest house at Dolffanog Fach must be the most famous in Britain. I think that was the third time the hon. Gentleman has referred to it since I have been a Wales Office Minister.

In fact, only last night I discussed the subject of bringing people to Wales from abroad with Charles Skinner, an official from the American Embassy, in the Wales office. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Wales tourist board has a record budget of £23 million for 2002–03. A further £15.3 million will be used through two objective 1 projects, for which the Assembly will provide match funding, as part of a campaign to make Wales better known and to draw in many more visitors.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman, and all other Members, will continue to visit Wales.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): Given the huge potential of tourism to create jobs—10 per cent. of the Welsh work force are involved in it—does the Minister agree that the Wales tourist board should embark on a strong campaign to attract flagship tourism projects to other parts of the Wales, including north Wales and my constituency?

Mr. Touhig: I have been very impressed by the Wales tourist board's work to promote Wales across the United Kingdom, and in Europe beyond. Tourism is a major contributor to the Welsh economy: about 100,000 people work in tourism in Wales, and it brings in about £2.6 billion in income. It is an important part of our infrastructure, and an important facility that Wales can offer the world. We must do all that we can to promote it.

As I have said, I am greatly encouraged by the work of the Wales tourist board. I certainly think that my hon. Friend's part of north Wales has many attractions, and that many people would be delighted to visit it.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Earlier this year I led a delegation of tour operators from objective 2 areas, who explained to the Secretary of State's predecessor the difficulty they were experiencing in using a recovery fund because of European regulations. Since then we have heard nothing from the Wales Office. Can the Minister tell me what progress has been made?

Mr. Touhig: I know of the hon. Gentleman's concern, and I know about the deputation that he brought to see my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State.

The rural recovery plan, which was launched in July 2001, is worth about £65 million. It contains a number of measures to combat the problems we found in rural Wales as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. Within that spending limit, £21 million has been made available through local authorities to assist small businesses. It is an important contribution to helping small business and the tourism industry in rural Wales to recover.

Figures indicate that tourism is growing in Wales post-11 September and post-foot and mouth. We must do all that we can to encourage that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again the House is far too noisy.

Pensioners

8. **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): What discussions he has had with ministerial and National Assembly colleagues on help for pensioners in Wales. [83074]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): We have regular discussions, and from October 2003 the new pension credit will benefit 250,000 pension households in Wales. Those on £150 a week will receive an extra £21.50, or £1,100 a year.

Julie Morgan: What plans has my right hon. Friend to help sort out the pensions of the work force of Allied Steel and Wire in Cardiff? Does he know the extent of the shortfall in the pension fund, and what discussions is he having with the Department of Work and Pensions?

Peter Hain: I know how much attention and support my hon. Friend has given the workers of ASW, along with her fellow Cardiff members. My hon. Friend the Minister is due to meet officials at the Department of Work and Pensions and the Department of Trade and Industry's redundancy payments service to take the discussions forward.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Does the Secretary of State share my concern that more than 40 per cent. of pensioners in Wales are not accessing the minimum income guarantee or the income support that is available to them? What steps are he and his Government going to take to ensure that that money reaches every pensioner in Wales, and that none is worse off simply because they cannot bear to go through a bureaucratic nightmare?

Peter Hain: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that not enough of the poorest pensioners are claiming their entitlement to the minimum pension guarantee, which would lift their income to £102 a week. That measure is part of the Government's strategy of tackling pensioner poverty, and we are trying to encourage all pensioners to take up those opportunities.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [83047] **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 4 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, in addition to my duties in the House. I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the Prime Minister agree with smallbusiness europe, a body funded by the Department of Trade and Industry, which has estimated that the agency workers directive recently passed by the European Parliament could cost 250,000 temporary jobs? The CBI says that if he had not signed up to the social chapter, we would not have to accept this job-destroying directive. Is the CBI right or wrong?

The Prime Minister: It is precisely for the reasons outlined by the CBI that we have been trying to make sure that the directive is amended and changed. I very much hope that we will get a satisfactory outcome that

will preserve the flexibility of our labour market, but which will also make sure that some agency workers—in some cases, they are badly exploited—are given the protection that they need. I believe that signing the social chapter was essential in order to keep this country's influence in social affairs.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): In the light of the tragic accident in my constituency yesterday, which resulted in the death of 12-year-old Stuart Cunningham-Jones and serious injury to several youngsters, will my right hon. Friend consider setting up a review into the legislation governing the safe transportation of our children to and from school on public service buses?

The Prime Minister: I share my hon. Friend's horror at yesterday's accident, and my deepest sympathies go to the family of Stuart Cunningham-Jones and to everyone else affected by this tragedy. As my hon. Friend may know, a full-scale inquiry by the police and the Vehicle Inspectorate is under way. I think that we should await the outcome of that report before we take further steps, but I will keep him closely informed.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Prime Minister agree with his Chancellor that top-up fees would prevent young people from low-income families from going to university, and are therefore a ridiculous idea?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, in January the Government will publish their conclusions on the student finance review. However, one thing that is absolutely clear is that the status quo is not an option, because universities need more money. Let me give him the facts. They need more money because funding for higher education per student was cut by 36 per cent. under the previous Government. Student-staff ratios have doubled and there is an £8 billion backlog of repairs and investment, so we have to change the existing system.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister has said what is clear, but what is not clear is whether he agrees with his right hon. Friend the Chancellor. What is the point of a review, as he describes it, if the Chancellor has already made up his mind? The Chancellor may not have told the Prime Minister, but at a breakfast with *The Guardian*—*[Interruption.]* Yes, at a breakfast with *The Guardian* he said—no doubt over muesli—that he favoured a graduate tax. Does the Prime Minister agree with him about that as well?

The Prime Minister: The position of the Government will be set out in January. If the right hon. Gentleman is driven to trying to replay second-hand reports of what might have happened at a breakfast held by *The Guardian*, that indicates the depths to which he has sunk. The fact is that the status quo is not an option. We need to get more money into our university education system, and it can come from the taxpayer, the parent or the student. If it comes from the taxpayer, that means that the majority of people—who pay their taxes but who have not been to university—will have to pay. If it comes from parents, the danger is that the possibility that parents might be forced to pay large amounts of money up front could indeed deter people from university education. The final alternative is the student, yet we do not want students to get further into debt. It is a difficult problem. We are resolving it. We will publish the conclusions in January.

Mr. Duncan Smith: But the Chancellor is going around saying things that are completely different from what the Prime Minister has just said. The result is that students up and down the country do not know whether Labour wants them to pay higher fees or higher taxes. If the Prime Minister wants a genuine review, as he has described it, surely he needs to overrule his Chancellor? Will he get to the Dispatch Box and tell us: when the Chancellor said that he was in favour of graduate taxes, was he right or wrong? Yes or no?

The Prime Minister: As a review is due to be published in January, it would be absurd for me to give its results now. I assure the right hon. Gentleman, however, that everyone is agreed that we need more money for universities. That should be done in the fairest way possible that does not deter people from lower-income families from going to university. This is an issue that any Government in power would have to tackle.

If the Leader of the Opposition wants an example of muddle and confusion, let me tell the House what he said his solution was. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Yes, three days ago, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"we have a crisis of funding for higher education".

His answer to the problem was:

"there are lots of ways you need to look at it, possibly endowing them with money from further sell offs, in this case, we are talking about Channel 4".

The Leader of the Opposition's idea is that we are going to fund the whole of university education by selling off Channel 4 TV. *[Interruption.]* If I am wrong, he can come to the Dispatch Box and say so.

There will be a review. We will publish it in January, and I shall tell the Leader of the Opposition what it will do. It will increase access to university. It will not mean that parents will have to pay thousands of pounds up front in fees. It will allow people the chance to go to university, which hon. Members on the Government side of the House favour, and the right hon. Gentleman does not.

Colin Burgon (Elmet): Arising from talks that I have had with firefighters in my constituency, I should like to put three points to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Just one point.

Colin Burgon: Thank you for putting me right, Mr. Speaker.

In the firefighters' dispute, does the Prime Minister agree that just as there can be no victors, there should be no vanquished, and that we should all be working towards a settlement of the dispute that is fair to all involved and gives us peace in the fire service for the next 25 years?

The Prime Minister: I agree with that. We do not want people to feel humiliated. The firefighters of this

country, as I have often said, do a fine job of work. I have said it before and I shall say it again: we never sought this dispute. However, I know that my hon. Friend will agree that any settlement has to be fair right across the public service. That is why we have said that firefighters can have the pay award under the existing formula, which is as generous as—if not more generous than—the awards given to teachers, nurses, police officers, members of the armed forces and others. However, if they want more, that has to be paid for by changes in working practices. The one thing that has emerged over the past couple of weeks is that our claim that these practices need change is valid. I hope that people get around the table and negotiate on that basis.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): The Prime Minister has again confirmed that the status quo for university education funding is not an option. Will he confirm that he is saying that top-up fees remain under active consideration by the Government?

The Prime Minister: Whenever a review is held, it is important to wait for its outcome. My point is that universities need more money because college lecturers are not paid enough, and there is a massive backlog of repairs. There was a 36 per cent. cut in funding per student under the Conservative Government. We have managed only to keep the situation stable, even though we have put more money into universities. We need to get more money into the university sector, but we shall do so in a way that improves access to our universities rather than deters it.

Mr. Kennedy: People notice, however, that when given the opportunity, the Prime Minister still refuses to rule out top-up fees. Given that the Chancellor, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for International Development are against them, why does he not look to the Scottish experience, which has kept access to education free at the point of need, reintroduced grants for poorer students and is a much better way forward than the top-up fee?

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman. He omits to say that under the Scottish system, all students have to pay something. There are two separate issues. First, are we to have a flat fee for all universities or will there be a variable fee, with different universities charging different fees? Secondly, if we have a variable fee and agree that all universities should not be treated the same, where do the additional sums of money necessary for universities come from? I am afraid that it can come from only three sources—the taxpayer, the parent or the student. What is important is to put together those elements in the fairest possible way. The one thing that I did not notice the right hon. Gentleman say is whether he agrees with me, and with what the Leader of the Opposition said a few days ago, which is that universities desperately need more money. If they do need more money, before the consultation process is over in early January, let us hear from him about his proposals as well.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Last week the Chancellor announced changes to the landfill tax from next April. Many community projects, such as Heeley city farm in my constituency, have benefited from the scheme. Can the Prime Minister confirm that under the reformed scheme, such community projects will continue to benefit?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the changes will be introduced in the financial year 2005–06. We are consulting on the effect of those changes, but I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend and I am sure that we will take what she says into account.

Q2. [83048] **Miss Ann Widdecombe** (Maidstone and The Weald): Does the Prime Minister agree that it is a basic duty of the Government to supply places for all those whom, for the protection of the public, the courts believe should be in custody? If so, why, despite inheriting the biggest prison-building programme this century and a reduction in overcrowding, do we have the worst overcrowding in our prisons for 10 years?

The Prime Minister: First, we are increasing the amount of money that we are spending on prisons and expanding prison places. With the greatest respect to the right hon. Lady, there is an inconsistency in what she says. The very reason why there are more people in prison is precisely that it is the duty of Government to find places in prison for those whom the courts sentence. It is important to realise that we are increasing the supply of places, but I do not think that we can limit arbitrarily the number of people whom the courts send to prison. We are trying to make sure that there are more prison places precisely so that the courts can obey the principle that the right hon. Lady has outlined.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why did my right hon. Friend not say to the last Tory questioner that we are doing our best to keep the prison population down? We have kept two butlers out of jail in the last three months. What is wrong with a system of justice that allows these people to prepare cases while the police go along with those people at the palace, with the result that the taxpayer finishes up with a loss of 2 million quid? We could use that money for the firefighters.

The Prime Minister: I had a bad feeling that you were going to call him, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Skinner: You will not find the answer in that book.

The Prime Minister: Certainly not. If my hon. Friend does not mind, I will reply diplomatically: the Crown Prosecution Service is learning the lessons of both cases—and I hope that it will learn them quickly.

Q3. [83049] **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): Last week I asked the Prime Minister about the Chief of the Defence Staff's concerns about training. The right hon. Gentleman replied with the claim:

"He did not say that".—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2002; Vol. 395, c. 40.]

Given that the Downing street website quotes Admiral Boyce as using almost the very words I put to the Prime Minister last week, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us who we should believe?

The Prime Minister: My apologies, but I have not checked in with the Downing street website today. I thought that the hon. Gentleman's point was that the Chief of the Defence Staff had said that as a result of the firefighters' dispute, we could not undertake operations in Iraq. I was pointing out that the Chief of the Defence Staff did not say that: he said that we would have the full operational requirement that we needed. I do not have before me the exact words that I said last week, or exactly what is on the Downing street website, or exactly what the Chief of the Defence Staff said—but I think that I am more right than the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): May I take my right hon. Friend back to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn)? Is he not aware that the landfill tax credit scheme is the best and most innovative environmental tax yet introduced by the House, and that it will be not in 2005–06 but next April that we shall lose between 3,000 and 5,000 jobs in environmental innovation, and £500 million of matched funding will also be lost to environmental innovation? Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will look seriously at the matter, and will invite a delegation to visit him to talk about it?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly treat what my hon. Friend says very seriously indeed. I know that landfill tax credit schemes near my constituency have been of enormous benefit. I am informed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that we are going to protect the projects that are valuable, so perhaps I can correspond with my hon. Friend about the matter—and if he is dissatisfied, yes of course I will see him and his colleagues.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Can the Prime Minister tell us how many major road schemes have been started since May 1997?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, I do not know the figure offhand, but I think I am right in saying that there will be 10 of them in this financial year and the next.

Mr. Duncan Smith: What the Prime Minister should know is that the Government have started fewer schemes for improving major roads than in any five-year period since the second world war. They have cancelled bypasses and relief schemes that would have eased congestion, so could he perhaps now tell us how many major road schemes were actually completed last year?

The Prime Minister: As I say, I do not know the answer offhand, although I shall send the right hon. Gentleman the answer. What I do know, however, is that I think I am right in saying that there are 10 such road schemes this year and next year. It is correct, of course, that for our first two years of government we froze spending. We inherited a very difficult budget deficit and we thought it right to do that, but we are actually putting a substantial amount of money into road schemes now.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is always promises with the Prime Minister, but not a single major road scheme was completed last year—not one. The result is gridlock Britain. Average journey times under the Labour Government are up by one fifth. The M6 and M25 are virtually car parks, and average traffic speeds in central London are down to 3 mph. After five years of Labour Government, is it not true to say that British motorists pay the highest taxes in Europe for the most congested roads?

The Prime Minister: It certainly is right to say that there are severe problems on our roads, which require major investment. That is why there are transport plans for an extra £60 billion worth of investment in our roads. I agree entirely that we need more roads investment—that is why we are putting in the extra money—but I am afraid I have to point out that it was only a few days ago that the right hon. Gentleman and the shadow Chancellor told us that they were against all that extra investment, so however difficult the situation is with us, it would surely be even more difficult if we took his advice and cut back the very investment that we are putting in.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): Does the Prime Minister believe that a reduction in human wickedness can be achieved by a reduction in civil liberty?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not believe that. What I do believe—and I assume that this is what my hon. and learned Friend was getting at—is that a criminal justice system that fails to convict the guilty and does not have the confidence of the public is not a criminal justice system that we should support. I believe passionately that reform to our criminal justice system is long overdue, and I hope that both sides of the House will support the proposals put forward by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, which are the result of a long study and work carried out, as my hon. and learned Friend knows, by Lord Justice Auld, who is very experienced in the criminal justice field.

I believe that those reforms to our criminal justice system are long overdue. If we are to reduce the stock of human evil, as my hon. and learned Friend put it, of course it is important that we must protect civil liberties—but we must also protect the civil liberty of people to go around free from fear.

Q4. [83050] **Mr. John Taylor** (Solihull): Since the Government's airport consultation process was overturned by the High Court, what comfort has the Prime Minister for the Solihull residents who are now experiencing blight without compensation?

The Prime Minister: A lot of what people have said about the consultation process is that it has been too quick, but obviously we have to make sure that we give people the chance to put their views, and, necessarily, when we engage in a review of air transport policy there

will be a period of uncertainty. I am afraid that that is the inevitable consequence of having to look at every option.

Q5. [83051] **Mrs. Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): May I remind the Prime Minister, just in case he has forgotten, that Wales had led the way yet again by introducing free bus transport for pensioners—an example that is shortly to be followed in England? Will he consider extending that concession to disabled people and students in full-time education, both for their own benefit and to decrease car use, but without penalising our pensioners?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right in saying that the policy of the Welsh Assembly includes free bus passes. Our policy is for concessionary half fares. Of course there is also discretion for local authorities, and the new Connexions service will offer certain young people discounts on travel to allow them to get to school or college. However, in the end, all those things come at a significant cost, and it is important to balance out the costs and make sure that the money is used most effectively.

Q6. [83053] **Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): In 1997 the Prime Minister appointed the first ever Minister for Public Health. Since then, excess winter deaths among our elderly, TB, HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, the teenage abortion rate and the health gap between the rich and the poor have all increased. Clearly, the Prime Minister's stewardship of public health has been a disaster. When is it going to improve?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept the figures that the hon. Gentleman gives, incidentally. With smoking and in other areas, the Government have made considerable advances. In relation to public health, surely the most important thing is not only the gap between rich and poor, but the overall amount of money that we are putting into the national health service. We are treating more people—*[Interruption.]* We are getting more nurses and doctors into the health service. In the hon. Gentleman's constituency and others, we are building more hospitals. All those things matter to the people of this country, and each and every penny to pay for them is opposed by him and his party.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): We all recognise that secure recognised borders for Israel and Palestine are an essential part of a long-term middle east solution, and the Prime Minister referred to that with some passion in his speech to the Labour party conference. Can he tell us how he is helping to take that agenda forward?

The Prime Minister: I hope very much that we get progress in the middle east on the necessary key issues: security reform, political reform for the Palestinians and final status negotiations. Obviously, the situation is complicated by the advent of the Israeli elections. None the less, I believe that there is a real will and sense in the international community that the issue of the middle east peace process has to be dealt with urgently. That was my position, and it remains my position.

Q7. [83054] **Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): The 1997 Labour manifesto said that the drugs tsar would be

"a symbol of"

Labour's

"commitment to tackle the modern menace of drugs".

Can the Prime Minister tell the House what has happened to him and his targets?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that as a result of the extra finance that we are putting into drugs spending, the budget will increase from more than £1 billion to £1.5 billion. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about the tsar?"] One of the things that Keith Hellawell said, and one of the main targets that we had, was to increase the treatment of people for drugs, and that treatment has gone up by somewhere in the region of 10 per cent. under this Government—and, as I say, all that investment is opposed by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Does the Prime Minister accept the assessment of the intelligence service that whatever else Saddam Hussein is guilty of, he is almost certainly innocent of the charge of associating with al-Qaeda?

The Prime Minister: What I have said is that we have no evidence directly linking the Iraqi regime to the attack on 11 September. That is true. I would also say, however, that I believe that the issues of weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism are linked indirectly, I believe, however, that unless we tackle that issue they will at some point be directly linked. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the world today is a test for the United Nations and the world community. We have laid down a clear demand to the Iraqi regime. If we were to give up on that demand at this moment, that would have a serious impact on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. As I said, that issue is linked indirectly to international terrorism at the moment, but I believe that it could be linked directly to international terrorism.

Q8. [83055] **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): Yesterday—not a day too soon—the Home Secretary announced an expansion of drug services in the criminal justice system. Does the Prime Minister really think that that will help drug addicts in prisons who need help now, such as my constituent, Ben Launchbury, about whom I wrote to him on Monday? Is it right that Ben, who was sentenced to four and a half years for drug-related crime in February, should still be denied access to treatment for his heroin addiction 10 months later, apparently because he was moved from Gloucester prison to Manchester prison to deal with overcrowding? The Prison Service now says that it cannot afford to move a single prisoner to Channings Wood prison in Newton Abbott.

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman said, he wrote to me about this case, and I shall certainly look

into it for him. If the facts are as he described, however, it is not acceptable. That is precisely why we need extended rehabilitation programmes for prisoners on drugs. We also need to make sure that that treatment is available in the community. The point that I was trying to make earlier is that we are extending these programmes significantly—drug treatment in prison and drug treatment out of prison—but there is a huge unmet need. It will take time, through the new National Treatment Agency, to provide treatment for all who need it, and it is very expensive treatment. I agree, however, that there is no point in having these people in prison on drugs and not giving them rehabilitation.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On page 7 of yesterday's document on human rights in Iraq appears the statement that, for failing to qualify for a World cup football match, the Iraqi team were caned on the soles of their feet. As FIFA investigated this matter and on 4 November 1997 made a statement that there was no truth in it whatever, do the Government have better information on a footballing matter than FIFA?

The Prime Minister: No, I would not say that we had better information than FIFA. But leaving aside that incident—*[Interruption.]* There may be a disagreement between FIFA and the Government or the Iraqi authorities there. I ask my hon. Friend to focus on the human rights abuses in Iraq that are beyond doubt. A couple of days ago I met 10 Iraqi women, all of whom have suffered seeing their families disappear and their relatives tortured, and who are subject to death threats even now. The Iraqi football team may be one matter, but these human rights abuses are self-evident. No one who has talked to people who have lived through the regime of Saddam Hussein can dispute that it is an appalling, brutal and terrible regime.

Q9. [83056] **Bob Russell** (Colchester): When the Prime Minister was still a lad, before his tuition-free days at university—*[Laughter.]*—was the Prime Minister then aware that the policies of real Labour Governments, and of one-nation Conservative Governments, had effectively ended homelessness in this country? In his current privileged position, is he aware that, after a quarter of a century of right-wing Governments, both Conservative and new Labour, we now have a housing crisis again? When will his Government do something to provide decent housing for homeless people, particularly for the underclass that has developed under new Labour?

The Prime Minister: The problem with my university education was that it was indeed often tuition free. Again, homelessness requires substantial investment, and we are putting that investment in. There are still problems, particularly with the number of families needing accommodation in the south. However, there is no point in the hon. Gentleman saying that we are pursuing the same policies as the last Conservative Government. He knows that is not correct. We are putting a massive additional sum both into our public services generally and into housing in particular. It is probably never enough—and, frankly, it never is enough for the Liberal Democrats. In the end, it all has to be paid for, and I do not think that it is fair to say that we have done nothing. The hon. Gentleman will know, for example, that we have cut the number of rough sleepers by two-thirds.

BILL PRESENTED

PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE

Mr. Secretary Prescott, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Secretary Margaret Beckett, Mr. Secretary Darling, Mr. Secretary Milburn, Ms Secretary Hewitt, Mr. Secretary Clarke, Secretary Peter Hain, Ms Barbara Roche and Mr. Tony McNulty, presented a Bill to make provision relating to spatial development and town and country planning; compulsory acquisition for development; and loss payments in respect of certain interests in property compulsorily acquired. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow; and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 12].

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When you agreed on behalf of the House to the modernisation procedures, you were kind enough to say that you would protect the rights of individual Back Benchers, so that if written statements were made by Ministers you would expect them to be non-contentious in the way that they were presented. You may like to know that today, the Secretary of State for Transport has made a statement about the London underground. There are considerable economic and political reasons for that statement to be debated in the Chamber, as it includes the suggestion that the underground system will not now be handed over to Transport for London as quickly as possible. May I ask you to examine the way in which the matter has been handled, because, whatever the reasons for the decision, Members of Parliament have a right to question the Secretary of State about this contentious matter?

Mr. Speaker: My priority is that Ministers should inform the House. They have a choice and they can use their judgment. They may make oral or written statements. In this case, a written statement has been made, and there has been no infringement of the rules of the House.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am aware that you do not have any responsibility for the content of ministerial questions, but could I ask you to direct a slight frown of disapproval towards the Home Secretary? I tabled, with due notice, 15 questions on prison overcrowding and received an answer to precisely one.

Mr. Speaker: I think that the right hon. Lady meant to refer to ministerial answers, not to questions. I have said before that perseverance is important in the House. She should keep annoying the Home Secretary until she gets the answer that she wants.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Further to the point of order of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), Mr. Speaker. Will you consider a slightly wider issue that relates to today's business as well as the matter that the right hon. Lady raised? At the end of the last Session of Parliament, I tabled in due time a number of questions to the Home Office that were material to the matters coming up in the Bill that we are about to debate. Most of them received answers saying, "I will answer this as soon as possible", or "shortly", or "I will write to the hon. Gentleman."

I retabled the questions at the beginning of this Session. We have now had about a month of this Session, and yesterday I received a whole sheaf of answers saying, "I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly." The questions are all material to the issues that we shall consider in today's debate.

In addition to that, we had one week's delay in the publication of the explanatory notes to the flagship Bill of this Parliament, and we received today a written

[Simon Hughes]

statement from the Home Secretary—the item appears on the Order Paper—entitled "Responses to consultation exercise contained in the Criminal Justice White Paper". Many of us have pressed for answers and the statement tells us that answers to the consultation exercise will be published in the Library shortly.

Can you help us, Mr. Speaker? Can we do our job of scrutinising the Government if they do not give us key material until after we have debated the legislation to which it relates? That is unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker: I say to the hon. Gentleman—this may also help the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe)—that the Public Administration Committee is prepared to look at any complaints from hon. Members. The hon. Gentleman may wish to take that course of action.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I received a reply from a Health Minister yesterday in response to a constituent's query raised in April, seven months after the original complaint was made. Can you help Back Benchers to get Ministers and Departments to give an early reply, because it makes us look like fools?

Mr. Speaker: Seven months is an undue length of time. If the hon. Gentleman sends me the correspondence, I will look into the matter.

Orders of the Day

Criminal Justice Bill

[Relevant document: The Second Report from the Home Affairs Committee, Session 2002–03, on the Criminal Justice Bill (HC 83).]

Order for Second Reading read.

3.35 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Before I begin my speech on this important measure, I want to pick up on the points of order raised by Opposition Members on questions that have not been answered. I instructed my Department that the consultation responses should be put in the Library today and I hope they are there this afternoon. However, I apologise unreservedly if Members who have laid questions that are relevant to the debate have not received substantive answers. That is not acceptable and should not have happened, and I will investigate it.

Although I will address specific clauses so that hon. Members can reflect on those aspects that are most relevant to them and then intervene if they want to, I first want to place on the record my thanks, and I am sure those of the House, to John Halliday and Lord Justice Auld for the way in which they conducted their inquiries, which informed the White Paper of 17 July and the legislation. I thank the Law Commission for its work over a number of years which has also informed the Bill's content, along with Ministers from all three Departments that are concerned with criminal justice. I am pleased that they are represented in the Chamber today.

I also want to thank those who contributed to the consultation on the White Paper. That was extremely helpful. In doing the same for the White Paper on sex offenders and sex offences, which we discussed a couple of weeks ago, we hope to engage Members more readily than appears to have been the case when we answered questions on the White Paper of 17 July.

We have endeavoured to pull together a range of issues that are relevant to the reform and modernisation of the criminal justice system. We started in the first Parliament of this Government by introducing legislative measures that have laid the foundations for what we propose in the Bill. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 has made a significant contribution, as I highlighted in our debate on the Queen's Speech. It is now absolutely clear that we need end-to-end reform of the criminal justice service and that that should fit with the other measures taken alongside it.

The Police Reform Act 2002 has already started to make a difference to the ability of the police to deliver their significant contribution to improving the criminal justice service as a whole. The initiative on street crime has not only made a difference by reducing robbery and snatch theft; it has also helped us to determine in what circumstances Departments and agencies fail to work adequately and, more importantly, to work together. We were able to see when they were not co-ordinated acceptably at a local level, and any major inefficiencies. All those agencies have people who work hard at a

local level. With the assistance of Ministers across Departments, we have seen a major difference. Importantly, we have also been able to bring that information and those insights to bear on the Bill.

I want to make this offer, which I know the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn), and his colleagues serving on the Bill will want to proceed with: we are prepared to listen to those who have a major contribution to make to the Bill's improvement in Committee, in both this House and the House of Lords. We do not pretend to be the fount of all wisdom; we know that this is a complex and difficult area, and we know that proportionality is required. Although I have been and will continue to be extremely robust with vested interests, I recognise that there are voices of common sense who will guide us and help us to get this right.

If the Crown Prosecution Service, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Home Office are to be able to take forward broad-based reform that will stand the test of time and have the support of all those of good will from different political parties, it behoves us to continue listening and to recognise that we must underpin the measures in the Bill with preventive action, which is crucial if we are to avoid people entering the criminal justice system in the first place.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I hope that my offer is extremely popular. I am just working out which of the voices I should give way to. I thought that I heard the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, and I will give way to him.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way to one of the reasonable voices in the House. In the spirit of what he has just said, may I put it to him that our Committee and most of those who gave evidence to us think that this would be a far better Bill if it did not contain the provision for disclosure of previous convictions? I do not ask him now to give an undertaking on that point, but I hope that he will think very carefully about it before persisting.

Mr. Blunkett: There are many safeguards built into that provision which we will come to as we proceed through the Bill, and I will be happy to give way to my hon. Friend again at that point. The Select Committee made suggestions on a range of issues which were very helpful to us, and I will be happy to consider them, as I have done with previous Bills. I shall give way to some of my hon. Friends, but I shall give way first to the lead spokesman for the Liberal Democrats.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for the tone and content of his remarks so far. I want to ask him about one of the provisions on which there is potentially a dispute as to the principle but on which I hope we can achieve agreement.

We are all united in our desire to increase support and protection for victims and witnesses—I do not think that there is a dissenting voice in the House. However, does the Home Secretary accept that it is not a direct balancing operation to increase support and protection for witnesses and victims and to take away the rights of defendants? It is just as important that defendants, when they are in court, have protection as it is that victims and witnesses have protection when they are engaged in the criminal justice process.

Mr. Blunkett: I entirely accept that. I have made the point in the House and elsewhere that this is not a zero sum game in which, if we enhance the rights of one set of people, we automatically diminish the rights of others. If we can approach the Bill in that spirit, we will achieve a degree of unity. I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen).

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I thank the Home Secretary for his generous offer to improve the Bill in Committee. Will he comment on the fact that the Bill may be with us for 20-odd years but we could not find six weeks in which to perform even more thorough pre-legislative scrutiny? If we had done that online, it would have involved police officers, probation officers, court officials, victims and witnesses, who would have made a great contribution.

I know that my right hon. Friend is constrained by the fact that the carry-over provision does not come into effect immediately, but will he undertake to ensure that any future Bills of this nature, which are very amenable to public participation, will go through full pre-legislative scrutiny, including online consultation to involve the public, who are so concerned about crime?

Mr. Blunkett: In principle, the argument that where we can have pre-legislative scrutiny, we should, is unanswerable. I hope that the White Paper gave people an idea of our intentions and enabled them to respond. I know that many people have been debating these issues for a long time, but my hon. Friend's point is well taken. I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), and then I must make progress.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Bill could be improved if we took the opportunity to draw a much clearer distinction between children and adults and set the defining age at 18 rather than 14, 16 or 17? Would that not help us to make a clearer and good response to last week's judicial review, which held that the Children Act 1989 should apply to under-18s in custody?

Mr. Blunkett: We are all concerned to achieve substantial improvement in the juvenile estate. As the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central has said publicly, we shall introduce measures, not least in relation to the judgment given earlier this week. We are mindful about getting that right. It is important that we intervene at an earlier stage rather than rely on the correctional services to deal with youngsters. We have done important work in establishing the Youth Justice Board, and improvements in correctional services in recent years, if overdue, are extremely welcome.

[Mr. Blunkett]

Departments and agencies, both locally and nationally, are working together on, for instance, Splash schemes and their related support services in Connexions, which made an enormous difference over the summer to the level of criminality. In street crime areas with preventive diversionary programmes, there was just over a 20 per cent. drop in recorded crime, compared with a 5 per cent. drop in similar areas without such programmes. There is a lot to learn from intervening at that stage, providing alternative activities and reducing opportunities for crime. I want to put that on record because criminal justice reforms tend to deal with the horse once it has bolted past the stable door. We need to make better progress on prevention in the first place—that is true of rehabilitation as well.

We have done quite a lot with youth justice. Not only have we developed the Youth Justice Board, but we have fulfilled our pledge to halve the time it takes for young people to pass from arrest and to sentence. Initially we got that down to 71 days, but we have now got it down to 63 days—a tremendous improvement on the previous time. There has been a 14.6 per cent. reduction in reconviction rates for that age group in the new reformed system of youth justice. We have introduced intensive treatment and supervision orders and have done work on tagging and home detention curfews. We need to bear all those things in mind when considering what is possible and how we may achieve improvements.

This afternoon, I appeal to people with a long-standing professional involvement and interest to play their part in making the Bill better and ensuring that the reforms are carried through. In the Queen's Speech debate, I said that the Law Society had been positive. When I addressed its annual conference, I was heartened by the way in which its members were committed to assisting us with reform. I again appeal to people inside the system to work with us, not against us, to ensure that we bring this programme into the 21st century, as it is important for the protection of the public and the credibility and standing of the criminal justice service as a whole. We should acknowledge that, together, we treasure our traditions. Some we will remember with nostalgia; others we will bring carefully from medieval England into the 21st century; all of them we will treat with care. I accept what has been said in the House on a number of occasions—we should change what exists with care.

Not everyone agrees on the central objective of the criminal justice service. I believe that, above all, it is a search for truth. We are trying to get to the truth on behalf of victims and the wider community. Unless that objective is at the heart of the system, we shall never protect victims in future and will never have a culture in our communities that accepts that order and stability, as well as people's security in their homes and neighbourhoods, is the paramount job of any civilised Government.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Serious cases of miscarriage of justice have done much to damage the criminal justice system. During consideration of the Bill, I ask the Home Secretary to examine the operation that was set up by the Derbyshire constabulary—it was called Operation Noble—in the reinvestigation of the Wendy Sewell murder, following the release of Stephen Downing about 27 years after being convicted, the conviction having been found unsafe by the Court of Appeal. Will the right hon. Gentleman take it from me that Operation Noble has been far sighted and has enabled the chief constable to reinvestigate a serious crime, involving all those who were concerned in the case? Operation Noble should be examined by other police forces throughout the country.

Mr. Blunkett: We would all be pleased to learn lessons from that operation and to reflect on improvements. It is not often that I pay tribute to a measure was enacted under Baroness Thatcher's notorious reign.

Mr. McLoughlin: Go on.

Mr. Blunkett: I will go on. I shall dip a toe in hot water. By 1984, it had been recognised by everyone that there were major problems. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the development of the PACE code since have been important and welcomed by everyone. We need to build upon that in a sensitive way. We are not sweeping that aside in introducing the Bill. We need to be able to enhance and modernise a learning experience over the past 18 years. I welcome the way in which the Derbyshire police have approached the Downing case.

I was about to reflect on a point about protecting the public and getting the measure of what we are about in the Bill. There are those who have almost come to the conclusion that Parliament is a threat in terms of the way in which the judiciary works or in terms of the innocent fearing conviction. I do not believe that a democratically elected Parliament is a threat. I think that the threat lies with people committing crimes on our streets and in our homes. I believe that being able to hold us to account for what we do and to demand change from us—the public are able to expect us to deal with these issues, including sentencing policy—are pluses in persuading people that democracy is worth sustaining, that Parliament is worth listening to and supporting, and that it is worth participating in our elections. If people believe that nothing can be changed, that nothing can be improved and that we must be hands off because we are frightened of dealing with these issues, and if they consequently turn away from our democracy and our Parliament, we shall all be the losers.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I shall give my right hon. Friend an example from my constituency of a 19-year-old who is a persistent young offender. He had five previous convictions involving 11 offences. In May, he was fined £100 for burglary. In September, he was arrested for driving while disqualified and having no insurance. He was bailed and then arrested for the same sort of offence two days later. When he returned to court, he was given 100 hours of community punishment. Does not this sort of sentencing anger the victim, demoralise the police and undermine whatever confidence the public have in the criminal justice system? Will my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that the Bill will get to grips with that sort of sentencing?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes. The extension of intensive supervision, the tagging measures, the provisions on bail

that are crucial to credibility, will all make a substantial difference. It is regrettable that every hon. Member could give a similar example.

Acquitting the innocent is critical; convicting the guilty is vital. I shall not use many soundbites in my speech, but ensuring that the scales of justice pass the trading standards test in the 21st century is important.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I am sorry to provoke more interventions, but I shall give way.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way with his usual courtesy. He spoke eloquently about the powers of the House to make changes. His proposals include removing the double jeopardy rule and providing for the retrial of serious offences. I oppose that change, but I agree that it should be a matter for the House. Why, then, have the Government signed up to the European Union charter of fundamental rights? Article 50 explicitly forbids retrial and protects the double jeopardy rule. Why do Ministers on the Convention on the Future of Europe argue for the charter to be made legally binding? That would undermine the House's discretion and its ability to make the changes that the Home Secretary advocates.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not believe that the charter prevents that. I would be against signing into European statute or our laws anything that interferes with our rights. That is why I oppose a European public prosecutor and will argue vehemently against the extension of powers in the European Union that infringe our right to introduce measures such as those that we are debating.

Some Members of the other place claim to be on my side but say the most extraordinary things. For example, they claim that the Bill was developed from a focus group. I am happy to plead guilty, because one focus group did influence me. It incorporates 82,000 men, women and children; I regret that not all of them were eligible to vote in the last general election, but they constitute the population of Sheffield, Brightside.

Those who hold surgeries, are accountable to their electorate and receive representations day in, day out in correspondence to their constituency offices, have a different view from those who have never held a surgery, are accountable to no one and, in some cases, picture matters from a great distance. They may be travelling the world when events pervade our consciousness. I ask those who attack us day in, day out, on television, radio and in the press, as calmly and reasonably as I can, to return to the world in which we live and that our constituents inhabit.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Would my right hon. Friend include in his focus group my 83-year-old constituent who has been terrorised? Her windows have been shot at with air gun pellets, but the system has given her no support. Is not she a member of the sort of focus group to which we should listen?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes. I hope that our debate on antisocial behaviour will be as sensible as this afternoon's discussion.

Modernising and improving are a necessity and a promise, not a threat. I want to go through the aspects of the measure about which we agree and disagree. All three major parties as well as the minor parties agree on the bulk of the provisions. We will focus on some aspects that have received public attention, but I want to make it clear that the provisions that engender the greatest heat are not necessarily those that encapsulate the biggest changes.

Some aspects of the Bill are controversial. Hon. Members will refer to that now, in Committee and in the House of Lords. However, many other provisions will be instrumental in massively improving the system, its timing, its sensitivity and its ability to respond to the needs of victims and witnesses.

Parts 1 and 2 set out the reforms and modernisation of the codes established by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984—the PACE codes—and of bail, in the context of the issue I mentioned earlier, and provide the opportunity to look at additional powers in the future. These measures are all intended to ensure that the police can do their job more effectively and, I hope, more fairly. Part 3 is about conditional cautions and about rehabilitation, diversion and proper enforcement measures, and the work of the Crown Prosecution Service. Part 4 deals with the relationship between the police and the CPS in relation to charging policy, and we are pleased that the experiments have been successful in developing a new role for the CPS in this area. I hope that it will work effectively in the future.

Part 5 deals with disclosure. We are simply seeking to avoid any scope for abuse of the system, to ensure that information requirements for the defence are placed on a par with those of the prosecution, and to deal with the way in which witnesses can be protected, including ensuring that the development of knowledge about the list of expert witnesses on which the defence will draw will be available to the prosecution. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), the Chair of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, has been very generous in not intervening on me yet, but I would like to refer to his input in this matter. The Committee made the suggestion that we might develop a code that could incorporate measures to offer protection if there were any suggestion of a defence witness being leant on in the intervening period. I am happy to give the assurance that we will be prepared, in Committee, to provide for a code.

The way in which we are moving this afternoon, and will move in Committee, and the way in which the Home Affairs Committee dealt with the code's immediate look—it did not have a lot of time, but it has done its job very effectively—demonstrate the way in which we might proceed in the future.

Mr. Mullin: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that assurance. I think that it will resolve a problem. To make this measure effective, however, it will be necessary to ensure that defence witnesses whom the prosecution wish to contact should be interviewed only in the presence of a defence solicitor, and, preferably, that the interview should be recorded; otherwise, the measure will undoubtedly be abused.

Mr. Blunkett: I am agreeing now that the code should cover those areas.

Mr. Mullin: Thank you.

Mr. Blunkett: I think that that will help us.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Does the Home Secretary accept that my focus group—or, certainly, some of the constituents in it—are concerned about the other side of the coin, which is that the technical failure to disclose a single piece of evidence might invalidate a trial? Will he assure the House that there is no intention that that situation should arise unless a serious miscarriage of justice has followed?

Mr. Blunkett: I think that trial judges would want to use common sense in those circumstances, and we would encourage them to do so. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman agrees that we should be concerned with justice and seeking the truth, rather than with technical knockouts. I have said that before and I believe it very sincerely.

Part 6 is about streamlining the process, cutting down on wasted time, and speeding up the way in which we operate the system. It is also about encouraging early pleas, to avoid the prevarication, the waste of enormous resources and the delays that not only inconvenience us and cost us dearly—£80 million, as has been mentioned in the House on a number of occasions—but are detrimental to persuading witnesses to come forward and to stay in the system. I hope that we can all get this right. Part 7—

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes.

Mr. Banks: I am sorry. I would have waited until my right hon. Friend had made his point on part 7. Obviously, schedule 22 is linked to that.

Is my right hon. Friend fully satisfied that the proposed removal of the right of Members to refuse jury service does not conflict with the rights and privileges of the House? It has long been held that our duties in this place supersede the obligations of attendance in any other court. I must refer him to Holford's case of 1826 and the subsequent report of the Committee of Privileges. The Bill refers to rights that are very much attendant on the privileges of this place, so I hope that he has consulted on the matter. If not, perhaps he will consider doing so.

Mr. Blunkett: I would not dismiss out of hand the point that my hon. Friend raises, but although it would be an interesting experience for the Home Secretary, it would not do us any harm to be exposed to the vagaries of what is going on in various services that we use, which is the case regularly in other areas of our lives. We—certainly those of us who get a recess—might be able to serve on a jury.

Mr. Banks: Ah! In the recess.

Mr. Blunkett: Well, we may be able to defer to a point at which it becomes possible for us to perform such a service rather than refuse altogether. We need to examine the point with an eye to not avoiding what we ask of others. Of course, I suggest in the Bill that certain trials go on for so long—we will come to the relevant clauses under part 11 in a few moments—that they bedevil people's lives generally. We would be as sympathetic to ourselves as we would be to them.

I want to make a point on part 7. There has been a debate, not necessarily among Members of the House, but certainly elsewhere—again, I look across Central Lobby—as though we were introducing the previous mode of trial Bills and as though the 20,000 jury trials that were allegedly affected by those Bills will be affected by this Bill. Of course, we are giving people not only the right to opt for jury trial, as they do now, but the right to opt for a judge-only trial, which they do not have at the moment. We are giving people more rights, not taking them away.

As for very difficult, prolonged and complex trials—serious frauds and complicated commercial cases—we estimate that there will probably be a maximum of about 100 a year. There will be more when people themselves have opted to go to trial. Roskill in 1986 and Sir Robin Auld made suggestions on serious fraud and what it means. It is worth reflecting for a second on what happened in the Maxwell trial: there were 131 working days in the first, and the second and third trials, which were scheduled, never took place. That followed 60 days of pre-trial work, which took up the jury's time.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will in two seconds. Let me take the point further. The trial judges were both concerned about the impact of that. In fact, the second trial judge made it absolutely clear that he believed that there was a major problem in terms of the jury in the first trial being able to assess the full weight of the evidence in that trial, because they were not able to hear the second and third trial evidence. They were unable to do so because, as the first trial judge said, they could not face the likelihood of those three lots of evidence being put together in one trial. It was unthinkable, he said, that it was possible for that to be done. That is why he separated matters into three different elements, two of which were never heard for the reasons that I have enunciated. Therefore, that is why the second trial judge recommended that such trials should in future be heard by a judge rather than by a jury.

David Winnick: Like most members of the Home Affairs Select Committee, I entirely accept that there is a strong argument for most serious fraud cases, of the kind referred to by my right hon. Friend, to be heard without a jury. There is, however, a worry—touched on by my right hon. Friend—that the Government want, or he as Home Secretary somehow wants, to weaken the jury system. I will not use the word "undermine". Does my right hon. Friend accept that the jury system has served the country very well—and long may it continue?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I do accept that—which is precisely why I, along with the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General, decided not to pursue the proposals in the two mode of trial Bills.

I will not take offence this afternoon, or Melanie Phillips and Anne McEvoy will have another go at me in the papers later this week. I would be really upset and it would really throw me. I would be timorous at the Dispatch Box. But it takes the biscuit that those who argued vehemently against those Bills cannot distinguish between this Bill and legislation that is no longer being presented to the House. I know that my hon. Friend is not one of those people; I just wanted to make the point, and I feel better for it.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Some of us, not least those who were on the Home Office team at the time, supported the mode of trial Bills. One reason for that was a wish to prevent abuse of the system whereby cases for which jury trial was not appropriate were referred to juries in an attempt to get someone off with a shorter sentence. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that although such measures are not being pursued in this Bill, it will be able to deal with some of the opportunities for abuse of the system by lawyers? Will he stress that the system exists to provide justice for victims, not justice for lawyers?

Mr. Blunkett: Amen to that. Indeed, that is the thrust of what I am trying to do.

I hope I have picked out the best parts of what was in other respects an excellent Bill from my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). The aspects that gained it support—enunciated just now by my hon. Friend—are precisely the aspects that I am supporting today. We are, for instance, extending the role of magistrates, ensuring that people can opt for jury trial and introducing measures to stop people from interfering technically with the process of seeking after truth.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway) *rose—*

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I will give way two more times.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: As the Home Secretary knows, juries convict in 85 per cent. of serious fraud cases, or at any rate there are convictions in 85 per cent. of such cases. That is considerably above the norm. Does the Home Secretary accept what is the view of the vast majority of judges and lawyers in serious fraud trials—that juries have no problem whatever in dealing with the matters put before them?

Mr. Blunkett: It is not a question of whether we can immediately lever up the level of conviction—although there are issues in regard to what cases are currently brought forward, under the current system, and how they are brought forward. That also involves the reforms that we seek to make, including reforms of the Serious Fraud Office. No, it is a question of what juries must face. I gave an example of that. If my hon. and learned Friend and others think that the Maxwell trial is not a good example, I am sure they will say so during the Bill's passage; but I believe that where there is a problem, we should try to address it. We must take into account complexity, the length of time involved in jury service, and the enormous burden placed on individuals who would not wish to serve on a jury in such circumstances. We must take account of those factors if we are aiming for justice.

Mr. Lilley: The two Bills that the Home Secretary rightly discarded were justified by arguing that it was wrong in principle for the defendant to have the right to choose jury trial. Now he is saying that it is right in principle for the defendant to have the right to be tried not by jury, but by a judge. If that amounted to a change in his principles, I would be happy, but is it not a common feature that he and the Government favour only those measures that result in fewer jury trials?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall turn the point around. If the right hon. Gentleman's argument concerns choice and I am providing greater choice, I can hardly be accused of doing something heinous. Either he is arguing for choice or he is not, and if he is, he can rejoice. I am obviously a convert to choice, so I had better plead guilty to that now to save the House a lot of time, and to save a lot of money in fees for lawyers representing my interests.

Part 8 of the Bill is straightforward. It is concerned with the use of technology, and it brings us into the 21st century. Part 9 deals with prosecution appeals, and will enable, before and during trials, an appeal against a stop. Part 10 deals with double jeopardy. I know that controversy surrounds this issue, on which my party made a manifesto commitment, and that it will be argued closely. We believe that, given our approach and the safeguards that we have built in through the Crown Prosecution Service and the Appeal Court, it will be possible to find a way to implement this measure without denying rights.

I am painfully aware that people are worried that publicity will make matters difficult for juries; however, we must trust them. They have to assess the evidence and the facts. These points are true of all trials. A lot of publicity surrounds high-profile trials in the first place, never mind those in which new DNA evidence and forensic evidence has come to light, and in which modern techniques make it possible to return to failed evidence. I believe that, if we are careful and the safeguards are right, we can trust the jury to get it right, and that we can trust the Appeal Court not to allow through the gateway presentations of evidence that do not stand up to scrutiny.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): All Members accept that double jeopardy must be handled very carefully and that appropriate safeguards must be put in place, but does my right hon. Friend recognise that concern nevertheless exists in the community that people are allowed to go free, even though new evidence points to their having committed a very serious offence? If there is to be confidence in the criminal justice system, there must be an assurance that, in such cases, the evidence will be weighed very carefully and that, if necessary, such people will face another trial.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, and I cannot but agree, because that is the thrust of this part of the Bill. My hon. Friend

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enables me to demonstrate that there are lawyers whom I like very much, and who are really good friends of mine.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Give her a job.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall make representations on my hon. Friend's behalf.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth) *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: We have started something now.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. He referred to the proposed reporting restrictions on retrials south of the border. Significant concerns have been expressed in Scotland—including by the fourth estate—as to whether press-gagging orders made in England will be imposed on Scottish courts. If that is the purport of the Bill, does the Home Secretary accept that the best place to consider such significant changes to Scots law would be in the Scots Parliament, not in Westminster?

Mr. Blunkett: I think that the Government should, with the Executive of the Scottish Parliament, seriously consider how to proceed. I should be happy to do that. I put my hands up and say, as I always do, that if I had a straight answer, I would give it.

Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary properly understands the difficulties that could arise with a retrial if press coverage of the first trial remains in the minds of a future jury. He knows too that there are wider concerns about the press coverage of trials the first time around, which begins from the moment a person is arrested. We can all think of such cases, without needing any reminder. Does the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues across Government have in hand any review of the way in which the press can at present get away with condemning people, in effect, from immediately after their arrest right through to the end of the trial? Is that an item on the agenda? It is a big concern across the country.

Mr. Blunkett: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. The Attorney-General has warned the press about the matter, and he repeated the warning only recently. There have been causes célèbres in which press coverage has made it very difficult to pursue a trial properly. I am sure that that has been inadvertent, but it is also inept. I have in mind an example of that. We need to be mindful of the problem.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) raised a substantive point at the beginning of his question. The difficulty that he described arises when a trial moves from one court to another. Judges must bear in mind the influences affecting the case.

There is a myth about judges' lives, but I shall be careful about how I phrase what I want to say. There are people who sometimes suggest, mischievously, that judges live in a cocoon, a different world. I am not one of them, as I believe that judges could be influenced, if they were not careful, by what they read and heard. They steel themselves against that possibility and are able to accept the facts as they are presented. They make a judgment on the basis of the facts, and advise juries to do the same. They would advise retrial juries in the same manner, and we trust juries—we have all just agreed that we do—to judge according to the facts.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: Will the Home Secretary give way again?

Mr. Blunkett: I will give way one more time to my hon. and learned Friend, as a generous gesture to someone who took the trouble to table an amendment against giving the Bill a Second Reading.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: I am very grateful to the Home Secretary. May I say straight away that I do not want to attempt to inveigle myself into the category of lawyer that he mentioned a little while ago? I know that I certainly will not so inveigle myself.

Will the Home Secretary accept that many people are worried about the double jeopardy proposals? Their concern arises not from some liberal adherence to the rights of defendants, but from the fact that double jeopardy is the primary rule that discourages rotten policing. If a witness simply fails to come forward—and there has been a topical example of that recently—will that be sufficient grounds for an application to reopen a prosecution?

Mr. Blunkett: The Attorney-General and the Appeal Court will assess whether there is clear and compelling new evidence in a case. That double-locked gateway will mean that the situation outlined by my hon. and learned Friend will not arise. However, I will make representations on his behalf as well in the future, although they might not be quite the same as the representations on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones).

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): The Law Commission's report into double jeopardy made it clear that cases should be retried only when evidence did not become available until after the original acquittal. Does the Home Secretary agree?

Mr. Blunkett: Evidence that is clear, compelling and, in particular, new falls into that category. I am concerned with the word "new". No new evidence would have been available at the original trial.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will, as I love the right hon. Lady and I want her to sharpen her teeth for future work on the Select Committee on Home Affairs.

Miss Widdecombe: I am very grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way. I invite him to draw a distinction between "new" and the phrase "could not possibly have been available". If, for example, the new evidence is a scientific advance such as DNA, which

simply could not have been applied before its discovery, that new evidence could not possibly have been available at the trial. However, if new evidence is brought that was not available but, with more diligent policing could have been, there is a distinction between the two. I am sympathetic to these aims, and I think that the right hon. Gentleman is being invited to make that distinction.

Mr. Blunkett: I knew that it was a good idea to give way because I do not disagree with the right hon. Lady. I do not believe that we would want failure of the investigation to be used and I do not believe that the Court of Appeal would allow it to be used. I did not respond by acknowledging that a witness failing to come forward would not, in any circumstances, be likely to be agreed by the Attorney-General and the Court of Appeal for this reason: even with the internet, mobile phones and satellite television, someone could return from abroad who could not be interviewed at the time as opposed to not being interviewed because of failure. That is why I was not definitive on the example that was given. It is important that we allow the Attorney-General and the Court of Appeal to do their job, within the parameters of this afternoon's debate and the assurance that I hope I have given, that failure of investigation—incompetence, in other words—should not be the test. I shall turn now to part 11 because I am sure that we will come back to these issues in Committee, on Report and beyond.

Chapter 1 of part 11 is about relevant evidence and bad character. Chapter 2 is about reported evidence, material in writing, previous statements being available and witnesses being able to use their statements rather than simply testing their good memory, parrot-fashion. Chapter 3 refers to miscellaneous matters.

We believe that if we are careful and proportionate, we will get this right. We believe that in recommending that we should ensure that when a husband is accused of battery or rape and the defence is that he has been sweetness and light to his wife, the evidence available, including arrest or conviction, should be relevant. That is an extension of and consistence in applying what the Law Commission recommended and, to a moderate degree, what is already practised but is spasmodic and inconsistent in its application.

Part 12 is about sentencing and part 13 covers miscellaneous activity.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I am not a lawyer, but am I the only person who is astonished at the sentences that are handed down to people who pervert the criminal justice system by deliberately lying to courts? The maximum sentence for perjury is seven years. Does anything in the Bill offer advice to the courts as to the appropriateness of sentences that allow people who have perjured themselves to go to an open prison with days off to go to the pub and make social visits miles and miles away from their prison? It is a serious point.

Mr. Blunkett: I am pleased to have given my hon. Friend the opportunity to make his point but I shall not be drawn into discussing it this afternoon, partly because it is not directly relevant to the Bill and partly because recently more heat than light has been shed on the issue.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): In paragraph 653, on page 133 of the explanatory notes kindly provided with the Bill, reference is made to the extra pressure on and costs for the Prison Service both of the measures to which the Home Secretary has already referred and those to which I think that he is about to refer. Can he reassure me that resources will be available to deal with those pressures? Secondly, will he address the question raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) during Prime Minister's questions, when she rightly referred to the overall pressure on prison places? Thirdly, will the right hon. Gentleman assure me that resources will be devoted to dealing with the problem of recidivism? Every provision in the Bill will be as nought if we do not stop people going back into prison because they have reoffended.

Mr. Blunkett: We agree wholeheartedly about positive action in relation to rehabilitation and the avoidance of reoffending. Yesterday, we were dealing with a revised report and recommendations on the relationship between drug addiction and the criminal justice system. That is part of the preventive process, as are the signals that the measure will send out on the sentencing of recidivists.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about resources. Yes, measures are being taken in respect of the probation service. There has been enormous investment—a 50 per cent. increase—as well as the new spending since 1998. The national probation service was established and commenced a year ago last April. In our first Parliament, there was a 20 per cent. increase in prison places and 2,300 extra places were agreed in the Budget last April. Extra money has been agreed for an additional 750 places next year, so there will be more than 3,000 extra places. As part of next year's spending increase, we have just agreed that there will be £275 million for the Prison Service for improvements and extra places. There will be £70 million for the probation service.

Of course, we face a challenge. In the long term, some measures will increase pressure on both services. The custody minus proposals, which are close to my heart because I invented them, will, I hope, provide a clear signal to people not to reoffend because if they do, they will immediately go to prison. People will also have an opportunity to redeem themselves because under the proposals they will not be sent to prison immediately for a first offence or for an offence that should be dealt with in the community.

We should all agree about that because, as I have said before, we should send people to prison only as a last resort. The proposals will help to put the sense back into sentences.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Blunkett: In a moment.

I want to deal with a misunderstanding. The words "mixed message" have replaced "spin" and "command and centralisation" as the latest mantra and are

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supposed to be opposite to centralised diktat—the predetermined spin on the pager. Recently, I have met judges who cannot understand the difference between a clear message that violent, dangerous sex offenders will be sent down for longer, supervised more intensively for longer, and that for the most heinous offences life will mean life, and the fact that for first time, lesser offences we shall try to redeem the situation immediately by giving people intensive supervision in community sentences, as well as making reparation to victims.

David Winnick *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and then to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bercow: Given that schedule 20 provides for an increase in penalties for drug-related offences, will the Home Secretary confirm whether he stands by his statement to the House in July of this year that cannabis will be reclassified from a class B drug to a class C drug by July of next year? In the process of confirming that, what would he say to Roger Howard, the chief executive of DrugScope, who says that, far from saving police time and producing a more logical drugs policy, the law that the right hon. Gentleman proposes will, in fact, make things more severe and confused than they were previously?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I do not accept that aspect of what DrugScope has said because the residual powers of arrest remain to avoid public order disturbance, to avoid young people being enticed into drug taking and to avoid people trying to evade being picked up as dealers by pretending that they are merely users.

Guidance will be provided through the chief constables to make the position absolutely clear at the beginning of next year, in good time for the new measure to take effect, in the same way as we would expect to do with other class C illegal drugs if they were being used in a way that made nonsense of the law and a monkey of the police. Some people are prepared to do that, and we do not want to stand by and let them do it.

David Winnick: Public anxiety is arising from the decision of the courts that they, not the Home Secretary, can decide whether someone who has been sentenced to life imprisonment should be released. I am sure that he thoroughly agrees that there are those who have been convicted who should never be released under any circumstances, so is there any way in which he can assure the public—not all these cases are high profile by any means—that those who should not be released under any circumstances will not be?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I agree. That is why there is the new role for Parliament in lesser offences through the establishment of the sentencing guidelines council. I hope that the influence of Parliament will be expressed through the Select Committee on Home Affairs. We are talking about the Lord Chancellor, in consultation with the Home Secretary, determining the exact avenue.

I am recommending that the Select Committee on Home Affairs should have a role for the first time in response to the Anderson judgment to set up a framework, determined by Parliament, in which principles will be laid down. Judges will use discretion within that framework and those principles, which will ensure that life means life when we say it does and that the most heinous crimes are dealt with properly.

As the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) will know from her time in the Home Office—I think that we agree on this—it is not always the high-profile cases where tariffs are set. I rarely speak about these matters, but let me say very clearly that I have dealt with cases where my staff have wept when reading on to cassette for me what has been done to children and other human beings by the scum of the earth who should never leave prison. If we get that right, the public might have greater faith in us—they rely on us—and in the judicial system to protect them and to use what all the rest of us would call decent common sense. That is not vindictiveness; we are laying down for the first time ever the particular objectives of sentencing.

We talk about punishment, protection, reducing crime, reparations and, of course, rehabilitation, so we are laying down new guidance on why we are doing things. Through the sentencing guidelines council and Parliament's new influence we are laying down the new the ways in which we are trying to make sense of sentencing. In the framework and principles, we are laying down how to deal with cases and principles, as with the Anderson judgement. Of course, we have a new range of sentences: the intermittent sentence, which will help at the lower end, and the indeterminate sentence, which will help at the upper end, with intensive supervision and with the requirement that people should not be released at the upper end unless it is safe to do so.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am not clear. Is the Home Secretary signalling that the Government's legislative solution to the problem posed by the Anderson judgment will be entered as amendments to the Bill, or will it be in separate legislation?

Mr. Blunkett: The right hon. Gentleman rightly pulls me up. I should have said—I was responding to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) at the time—that we will bring forward amendments to the Bill and seek to give the official Opposition as much notice as possible of the detail. I have asked for that to be done as quickly as possible. Clearly, I will inform the Committee of that, and I will be happy to hear views in response. Clearly, on this occasion, we are all dealing as quickly as we can—it is not a failure of desire—with the consequences of that judgment. I have clearance to make sure that we can do that in this Bill. People will want that, not least because we want those who would otherwise seek to have their tariff readjusted to know that that will not happen outside the parameters of the new legislation. Their appeal will not be heard therefore until the legislation, in whatever form the House agrees it, has been passed. It will be judged within the new framework and the new guidance. I hope that that helps the House to understand the process by which we intend to proceed.

I think that I have spoken for too long.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am encouraged by what the Home Secretary said about prison being the last resort and the need for further use of constructive community penalties. Does he share the view of Professor Rod Morgan that there is a danger that the lower courts are using community penalties far too often when a fine would suffice?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I do agree with that. The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), has taken decisive steps, and I very much welcome what she has done. We really need to make sure that we collect the fines when they are levied. When we say that there is a punishment, people must know that it happens. That is true of a number of issues dealt with in the Bill. The House will be unanimous in its views on the punishment fitting the crime, punishment being applied and commitment to enforcement. The court system, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Home Office are committed to making enforcement work. Nothing is more likely to undermine confidence in the service as a whole and to send the wrong signal, particularly to young people creating mayhem on our streets and our estates, than the belief that there is no enforcement behind the law that we claim exists to put our streets in order, to ensure stability and security and to give confidence to our citizenry. We are all in favour of that. What we seek to do in the Bill—it is a partial step, as legislation alone will not make it work—is to provide the tools to those inside the service and throughout the court system, including the police, to ensure that people can at last have confidence that when we say it, we mean it, and, when we mean it, someone will do something about it.

4.44 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): We are at the beginning of what I suspect will be a long series of debates in this House and in the other place. The Home Secretary has laid out his position in some detail and at length—I do not criticise that; he was generous in giving way for many questions, which was worth while. It is therefore right that I should be relatively brief.

I want to set out our views about the generality of the Bill and to talk about the extent to which legislation is used and, by contrast, the extent to which it may be valuable to concentrate on administration. I also want to tackle the controversial elements that the Home Secretary mentioned: trial by jury, double jeopardy and the character of the defendant. Finally, I shall say a few words about what I understand to be the role of the Opposition—indeed, the oppositions—in this matter.

I have frequently debated issues relating to the generality of the Bill with the Home Secretary and Lord Falconer during statements to the House or in public. We support the general principle of reform of the criminal justice system. When I went to wash my hands before the debate, I was privileged to find an item in the gentlemen's cloakroom in the Lobby.

Mr. Bercow: Give us the details.

Mr. Letwin: I shall give my hon. Friend the details. I found a small rag, posing as something to wash one's hands on. A pink slip placed on it said that it was "in need of repair". I thought that that was an apt analogy for the criminal justice system, and we agree with the Home Secretary that repairs are required. *[Interruption.]* I shall return the object in question after the debate. I need hardly fear that, if I were arrested, any fine against me would be enforced.

Measures such as the creation of the Sentencing Guidelines Council and the making of that council answerable in some form to the House and to Parliament are admirable. They are among many such admirable measures in the Bill. I have repeatedly said that the time is long overdue for the progressive codification of sentencing, of the procedures for the giving of evidence and of the procedures for the holding of trials. There is no doubt that the criminal justice system does not command the confidence of the ordinary public, victims, witnesses or, indeed, the professionals that it should command. All that argues for legislation, much of which is helpfully introduced in the Bill.

As I have frequently remarked in the past, this is not the first Criminal Justice Bill to come before the House in recent times. There is no reason to suppose that, alas, it will be the last. Legislation is not easy; it is arduous. However, it is easier than something else, and that something else is the improvement of the administrative systems that make the legislation live in practice.

There has just been some discussion of the enforcement—or rather the almost complete lack of enforcement—in some jurisdictions of fines. However, I draw the House's attention to a separate and parallel topic. Some years ago, the House passed the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, and one of its effects was to require a custody sergeant to be present in the custody suite. When a police constable brought into the station someone who had been arrested, the Act also required the custody sergeant to interview both the constable and the person arrested.

I am sure that the Home Secretary and his colleagues in the Home Office will have had the same experience that I have had in the past year. I have repeatedly been around the police stations of this country and talked to police constables and asked them how they spend their time—very often, their nights—when they are on duty. I am repeatedly told that they spend two, three or four hours queuing outside the custody suite of their own police station because there is a logjam with only one sergeant in the suite. I am told that they sometimes have to take the prisoner in a car—and with a colleague, if that is necessary for safety purposes—to a station further afield to book him in. I do not have, and I understand from unofficial contacts that the Home Secretary does not have, accurate statistics on what proportion of police time is occupied in that fruitless endeavour.

The example is non-partisan. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act was not the fault, so to speak, of the Home Secretary or his predecessor. On the whole, it is an admirable Act. Indeed, it happens to be a Conservative Act. However, it is a fact that it is allied to a failure of administration—not just in one police force or police station, but across the police stations of England and Wales—that is significantly diminishing the ability of an already overstretched police force to apprehend criminals.

[Mr. Letwin]

I have frequently said that the bulk of the problem of our population's failure of confidence, which is very real, in the criminal justice system arises not from the failure of the criminal justice system to convict, but from the failure to apprehend criminals in the first place. Judging by statistics in the British crime survey, which for various reasons understates crime such as retail crime and crime against the young, the likelihood of not being apprehended, let alone convicted, exceeds 80 per cent. When a criminal knows that his chance of not being apprehended is enormous, the idea that criminal justice is an effective system is risible. The problem that confronts us is clearly administrative. I suspect that no amount of additional legislation will cure the deficiency. I do not want, and I am sure the Home Secretary does not want, to abolish the PACE rules, but we need to find a way to address the administrative deficiency that causes people to queue outside the custody suite.

I have chosen just one example of the problem, and I recognise the great difficulty of achieving such an administrative change. The Home Secretary will no doubt taunt me with the fact that I am against centralised control and ask me how I can ask him to do something about it given that he is not in charge of each chief constable, but we need systems that impose pressures on chief constables and police forces in ways that make for sustainable improved administration. We do not have those at the moment.

I do not want to deal with those elements that may provoke detailed consideration in Committee and on which we are broadly agreed. Instead, I want to discuss the controversial elements that will occupy most of the public's attention and most of the time of the House and, perhaps more importantly, of another place.

On trial by jury, I recognise that part 7 does not contain the same measures as those proposed in the draft mode of trial Bill. For that we are truly grateful. I also recognise that some aspects of part 7 are carefully calculated to be minimally objectionable. For example, clause 36, which gives a defendant the right to choose his or her mode of trial under certain circumstances, has been constructed to be minimally objectionable.

Given that the Government have rightly abandoned the mode of trial Bill, and given their desire to be minimally objectionable, why do we need to address trial by jury at all? What is the advantage of so doing and, balancing that, what are the risks attendant in so doing? I do not see the issue as black and white and utterly binary. There may be advantages and risks, and those need to be balanced. I have searched with my colleagues on the Front-Bench team and others, who are learned in such matters, to understand what the great gain is anticipated to be from addressing trial by jury.

The hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) pointed out that the proportion of convictions by juries in serious fraud cases is approximately 85 per cent. I had thought the figure to be 83 per cent. That does not indicate any failure of the system to be able to bring the guilty face to face with their guilt, and I am in no way clear as to how the choice by the defendant of trial by judge rather than by jury under clause 36 will effect great improvement in the criminal justice system. We wait to hear the arguments that may be deployed in Committee and on Report by Ministers to defend the proposition that there will be a great gain in that department, and the same is true of the other clauses in part 7. However, against any such advantages—which, as I said, at the moment I cannot see to be very great—we must set out the danger.

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): Is the right hon. Gentleman saying on behalf of the Conservative party that, as a matter of principle, the tribunals that may try serious fraud cases and the like are incapable of delivering justice? Does he object in principle to that new procedure, which will, as the Home Secretary has said, remove from juries the burden of trying massive fraud cases?

Mr. Letwin: I am not saying that a new tribunal would be incapable of delivering justice. How should I know? It may be that such a tribunal would be capable of delivering justice; that is not the question that the House needs to address. The House needs to address the question that I am trying to address: is there such an advantage in moving away from a system that has served us a very long time as to justify that move in the light of any disadvantages?

I have asked, and we may hear from Ministers, what great advantages attend. In circumstances where there may be inconveniences for juries, but where juries have repeatedly shown themselves to be capable of understanding fraud trials and of convicting in such trials—indeed, they are more capable of convicting in fraud trials than in others—I do not yet see the force of an argument that starts from the presumption that there is a vast advantage. But is there a great disadvantage? It has to be admitted that the disadvantages to the propositions in part 7 are by no means so great as the disadvantages to the mode of trial Bill. I accept that wholeheartedly. However, I still worry greatly about these measures.

I harbour the thought, and I hope that it is not unworthy, that the Lord Chancellor, like some others, maintains scepticism about the validity of amateurs. He demonstrates that in his attitude to the lay magistracy, a feature of the British justice scheme that has long served us and is now dwindling fast. He demonstrates it also, I fear, in relation to juries. If this House and the other place eventually permit the Government to legislate as they intend in part 7, will we not be laying the ground for precedents that will later be used gradually to erode the scope for trial by jury and to enlarge the scope for trial by judge?

I know from long and bitter experience in dealing with matters European that whenever one uses the argument of the slippery slope, one is told that one is being unnecessarily alarmist and it is pointed out that the measure in question is slight. It is argued that no precedent can be taken from the slight to the major. It is pointed out that the measure that is before us, such as the Single European Act in place of the draft treaty of union, is nugatory in comparison with the horrors that might have been visited on us.

That structure of argument is familiar to all of us who witnessed that debate. Here we move to different terrain, but I fear that the structure of argument will be the same. I am sure that, as we pursue this issue through this

House and the other place, we will be told that we need not fear because these measures are in themselves unobjectionable and no precedent will be set. However, I think that a precedent will be set, and I fear that precedent.

Mr. Bercow: I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend about trial by jury. I am not a lawyer—I say that as a matter of pride—and my exegesis of clause 36 may be flawed. However, whatever the other arguments about the clause, there is a danger that the Government may inadvertently create new confusion and complexity in subsection (6), which appears to suggest that people who have held office or employment in the administration of the civil or criminal justice system will be denied the right afforded to others to seek a trial without a jury. What is the reason for that?

Mr. Letwin: It is delightful that my hon. Friend, whose Buckingham constituency lies close to Beaconsfield, by telepathy understands the very points that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) has been making about clause 36 to me for the past few weeks. The clause is indeed inelegant, but I do not want to dwell on that unduly. In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), we do not know why that inelegant structure is there.

Mr. Miller: As another non-lawyer, may I put the reverse argument to the right hon. Gentleman? In my constituency, a large sum of money disappeared from a pension fund. The police, looking at a chart as big as the Table in the Chamber, eventually told me, "If it's legal, why aren't we all doing it?" They then concluded that there was not sufficient evidence to convince a jury. Either it is legal and we should all be doing it, or it is not legal and the current system for bringing such cases to justice is inadequate.

Mr. Letwin: My response is, "What has that got to do with the price of eggs?"

Mr. Miller: Tell that to my constituents who lost their pension fund.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands me. If there was not enough evidence to convince a jury, that is an extremely good reason for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service not to bring a prosecution. On the whole, I agree with the old-fashioned concept that convincing juries of guilt is an extremely important part of the criminal justice system.

Simon Hughes: May I make one final point on this issue? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one criticism of some charges being tried in judge-only trials and others in jury trials is that that would create a two-tier justice system? If someone were charged with serious fraud or another offence specified in the Bill, they could be convicted by a judge, not the larger population. A different view would be taken of sentencing, and the public confidence that stems from people like us or members of the wider public serving on juries would be lost. For the first time, not at the defendant's instigation, a judge alone would judge guilt and innocence in the most serious cases in the land.

Mr. Letwin: I agree.

Mr. Blunkett: If the right hon. Gentleman does agree, that puts the stipendiary magistrates and the higher courts in an interesting position. They do not just confirm sentencing—sometimes they make that judgment. By agreeing with his friend, the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the right hon. Gentleman is going down a very dangerous avenue indeed.

Mr. Letwin: That is interesting—I think that the Home Secretary is going down a dangerous avenue. Stipendiary magistrates, he will recall, no longer exist.

Mr. Blunkett: They are district judges.

Mr. Letwin: Indeed, I do not quibble about that. They are now district judges because the Lord Chancellor is keen to replace people whom he apparently considers dreadful amateurs with serious professionals who will be efficient district judges. Let us call them district judges and let us have efficiency by all means. Let us have them concentrated in great centres. No more rural courthouses staffed by amateurs—they are to be replaced by large, centralised courthouses staffed by serious professionals: district judges. I have nothing against district judges; indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) is a district judge. However, I believe that the amateur has a great role to play.

In addition to agreeing with the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), I fear that a precedent will be set and what will happen next is that those like the Lord Chancellor who fear the amateur will argue that efficiency has improved and that we should slightly widen the scope. So, by slow degrees over the next decade or so, we will find those of like mind persuading us that the jury system is actually old hat. I hear the word "modernisation"—I hear it loudly ringing in my ears, and I fear it in this context.

Miss Widdecombe: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is another dimension? By and large, juries are anonymous—no one knows exactly who has sat on a jury. When there is a very big and controversial case, where there may be a great deal of public and tabloid pressure for a particular outcome, at least with a jury there is no individual pressure inasmuch as someone will have to answer to the public afterwards. A judge, of course, is fully identifiable. Could this be just the first step—I hate to use this phrase—on a rather slippery slope towards politicisation of the judiciary?

Mr. Letwin: First, my right hon. Friend, as so often, makes a very telling point with which I wholeheartedly agree. Secondly, the fears that she raises—although I will not go into them in great detail now for obvious reasons—range far more widely. The pressures leading to the politicisation of the judiciary from the scope of action given through the Human Rights Act 1998 and a wide range of international agreements, to the extent that we see in the Anderson judgment, is leading

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towards calls for parliamentary scrutiny or even election of judges. I fear the whole trend of thought that we see before us today in the British judicial system.

I am unashamed in wishing to defend the principle of trial by jury, even against slight inroads that may in themselves appear relatively unobjectionable.

Stephen Hesford: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who is generous in giving way for a second time. What does he say about clause 38 and the problems with jury tampering in respect of safeguarding the rights of victims in serious gangster crime, when jury nobbling in some parts of London is rife?

Mr. Letwin: We have very seriously considered that matter. It is the most serious accusation that can be made against the jury system in a given case. At present, juries are heavily protected when there is tampering. I am open to persuasion, as we move through the Committee stage, that we have not fully grasped the situation. However, we have considered whether there is evidence available that after the trial jurors who have convicted someone—but were protected during the trial because of tampering—have been subject to pressure, or worse. Were that to be proven on a significant scale, I would accept that it would constitute a significant argument for clause 38. I am not aware of such evidence at present. If the jury is adequately protected during the trial, and if there is no substantial evidence of jurors after the trial being subject to intimidation, and if jurors know that that is the currently the position—all of which are empirical points that can be verified by further investigation—the argument becomes very weak.

I can go further. The structure of clause 38 illustrates well the fears that I am expressing. As I understand the provision, it will be open to the prosecution to move to remove the jury and replace it with a judge, not in cases of tampering but in cases where it is alleged that tampering may occur. The scope is therefore wide. I do not suggest that the prosecution service, the barristers that it employs or the police are ill disposed; they are all trying to do their job. However, their job is, properly, to convict speedily. In some cases, they may perceive that it would be easier to convince a judge than a jury, and there could be a temptation to allege that jury tampering might occur. It will be difficult to be sure that that does not become general practice. That is the slippery slope.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the main strengths of the jury system is that it is almost impossible to corrupt a jury? It has been proved time and again that 12 jurors are infinitely more powerful than one judge. If there is an allegation of jury tampering, and the judge hears it and receives evidence in secret under public interest immunity rules, he could not in any circumstances go on to try the case. Has the right hon. Gentleman considered that?

Mr. Letwin: We have been discussing that internally. There will be much more debate in Committee, on Report and in another place, but today's early discussion has already revealed the considerable doubts that must be harboured about part 7. My hon. Friends and I will take a great deal of persuading about it.

Interventions from Conservative Members were not confined to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham, who might be regarded as a louche moderniser. *[Interruption.]* He is also an old friend. They included contributions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe).

Miss Widdecombe: I am not a moderniser.

Mr. Letwin: I was about to observe that my right hon. Friend is not typically regarded as being on the side of the criminal or uninterested in obtaining justice. She is not perceived as being unconcerned with victims and witnesses. Indeed, a large part of her political career has been devoted to precisely those causes. We do not need to be bullied into accepting provisions that may set dangerous precedents, by accusations that we are lily-livered or on the side of the criminal. We are not. However, in the memorable words of the hon. and learned Member for Medway at Prime Minister's questions today, it is not always necessary in pursuit of apprehending the wicked to sacrifice liberties that are of great value to the nation.

Let us consider double jeopardy. I accept that there is a genuine case for some change in the rules on double jeopardy in some circumstances. I know that some of my hon. Friends and some Labour Members do not accept that. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald, who has been a strong proponent of such changes in the past, made the salient point that the definitions of, for example, new evidence, are critical. However, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, rightly pointed out that, beyond that there is a considerable and justified anxiety that, without great safeguards, the second trial may not start with the presumption of innocence. I accept that there is a certain unfairness in the logic here. It was partly, I suspect, because of pressure from myself and my hon. Friends—and, indeed, from the Liberal Democrats—that the Home Secretary carefully and rightly concocted the clauses in question to provide the safeguard that the Court of Appeal must judge that there is clear and compelling evidence, and that is welcome.

With a certain irony, however, that creates its own problem. If the Court of Appeal has judged that there is clear and compelling evidence, it is difficult to see how that, if it is known to a jury, ceases to be a reason for starting with a presumption of guilt. If I know that the Court of Appeal has ruled that a defendant has against him clear and compelling evidence, how can I start with the presumption that he is innocent? I will go further in my tribute to the Home Secretary and his colleagues, because they have also—again, perhaps as a result of conversations that we have had—taken care, rightly, to build in reporting restrictions.

That is welcome, and it helps to redress the problem. I am not convinced, however, that there are yet complete safeguards. Certainly, the amendment that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald suggested in relation to the character of the new evidence required would address the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Medway that we need to be sure that the changes would not induce sloppy policing in the hope of a second trial. I think that there is common ground between us on that subject.

Beyond that, we shall want to consider carefully in Committee how we can build sufficient safeguards in to the clauses to ensure that there is a presumption of innocence. We may part company at that point from the Liberal Democrats, who may object in principle to double jeopardy. I respect that position, but it is not ours. Ours is a balanced position on double jeopardy. We accept the basis for change, but only if the safeguards can be very robust.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): Surely the effect on the presumption of innocence if new evidence is declared significant is no different from the presumption of innocence at the beginning of the first trial. The first trial would not have been brought unless the prosecution felt that it had compelling evidence, so I cannot really see the difference.

Mr. Letwin: Seeing the difference depends on the beholder as well as on the thing seen. Let me try to convey to the hon. Gentleman how this looks from my perspective. If I were a juror and I knew that a prosecution barrister, whose job it is to prosecute—guided by the CPS, whose job it is to prepare prosecutions—and the police, whose job it is to get prosecutions to succeed, were all alleging that the defendant was guilty, I would regard that as part of the ordinary course of business. That is, after all, those people's job. I would, I hope, start with the presumption that they were wrong, and try to ensure that they had proved to me beyond all reasonable doubt that they were right.

If, however, there were added to the mixture the observation that the second most senior set of judges in the kingdom had considered the case at great length, in the light of prolonged further investigations, and had already adjudicated that there was clear and compelling evidence, I think that it would be more difficult—although not absolutely impossible—to start with a presumption of innocence. To my mind, therefore, there is a difference between the first trial and the second. In this instance, the balance of doubt—the balance of advantage, so to speak—in the argument ought to lie with my perception rather than with that of the hon. Gentleman. If he is right, there will not be much to worry about if we follow the course that I recommend. If I am right, however, and we do as he recommends, we would have a real problem. The presumption of innocence is the single most important feature of our judicial system, and I want to protect it absolutely—even, if necessary, beyond the point at which it needs protection.

I shall now move on to the question of the character of the defendant. I should begin by saying that some weeks ago, I would have described this issue in terms of the release of information about previous convictions. If I were still able so to describe it, I would say that we had severe hesitations about the release of previous convictions to juries and that we wanted, in this case as in that of double jeopardy, explicit and much tougher safeguards to ensure that such convictions were released and continued to be released—of course, they are already released under certain circumstances—only where the presumption of innocence and the prosecution's duty to prove beyond reasonable doubt were protected. In Committee or on Report or both, we shall table amendments specifically to introduce such additional safeguards.

However, I cannot describe that part of the Bill as dealing with the release of previous convictions because, to my astonishment—that is an accurate description—when we saw the Bill we discovered that it does not deal with the release of previous convictions alone. For example, if I understand it correctly, it deals with the release to juries of previous acquittals. I have to say that that fair takes the breath away. I cannot understand for the life of me how a jury can be expected to start with the presumption of innocence if it is open to the prosecution to bring forward a general character assassination based on innuendo and previous acquittal, tending, in the words of the Bill, to show a disposition on the part of the defendant towards criminality.

Alas, I think that I understand entirely the logic behind the proposals in that part of the Bill. Lord Falconer, who is one of the Home Secretary's close colleagues, will handle the Bill in the Lords. He is a distinguished jurist—one of Britain's most distinguished—and he comes from a long tradition of civil litigation. I believe that he starts with the idea that, in the words of Lord Justice Auld, with which I agree, justice is not a game. However, I believe that he also starts with the view that if justice is not a game it should, fundamentally, be a judgment on the balance of probabilities. That is an appropriate test when two people are arguing about how to allocate moneys between them, but it is wholly inappropriate to the question of depriving citizens of their liberties, perhaps for a long time.

I am devoted to the principle that we should eliminate from the list of factors that can be brought before a jury in any circumstances all those that have not been the subject of proof beyond reasonable doubt in a prior court. Having eliminated all other items, we would need additional safeguards that explicitly referred to the presumption of innocence and proof beyond reasonable doubt. Even then, if that position were achieved, I would, with a heavy heart, ask my hon. Friends to vote for such amended proposals. I would fear them even so, although I see the strength of the argument that at present there are inhibitions on trial judges that may need to be reduced to some degree.

I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House, for having gone on so long, but I want two minutes to add one more point.

Mr. Llwyd: The right hon. Gentleman knows, of course, that there is a right to introduce similar-fact evidence in certain circumstances, but is it not strange that the one category, or qualifying term, with regard to introducing bad character is that

"without it, the court or jury would find it impossible or difficult properly to understand other evidence in the case"?

I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me for saying so, but I have prosecuted many cases, and one of the prosecutor's jobs is to explain the case to the court and the jury. Frankly, if prosecutors cannot do so without denigrating the defendant's character, they should jolly well give up the Bar.

Mr. Letwin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman—and beyond that, that phrasing reveals all too clearly the

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very logic that I was exposing. It means that trying to persuade an old-fashioned jury beyond reasonable doubt, and against the presumption of innocence, that according to the facts presented, the person in question did what they are accused of, is beyond the wit of the prosecution, and therefore that explaining the prosecution's point to the jury's satisfaction is easier if it can make a pile of other assertions about the defendant. Well, I am sure that is true. If the hon. Gentleman were prosecuting me, he could say things about me—with perfect truth, alas—that would help him in his prosecution, but that would not prove that I had performed the deed of which I was accused. That is the essential difference.

As I was saying, I want to spend two minutes responding to and defending myself against accusations. On various occasions, in the House and outside, the Home Secretary has said he finds it annoying that the official Opposition often greet his proposals with some warmth—that has been the case with the generality of the Bill—and then, following the outcome, cause an awful lot of trouble for him and his colleagues in the House of Lords.

I have to say that I am not ashamed of that concatenation. I think it reasonable for us to back the generality of the Bill but to object to certain clauses. I also think it reasonable for us to try to forge an alliance with Members of the other House who are members of the Home Secretary's own party, and with Liberal Democrats and Cross Benchers in the other place—with, in many instances, Law Lords and bishops—and to limit the scope of Government action, especially in relation to matters that have very little effect on the control of crime.

The three things I have mentioned in particular today will not, between them, account for any significant number of trials, or for any significant number of criminals. They do, however, have vast potential significance in relation to the fabric of our liberties. If there is a proper role for this House and the other place in checking and limiting the Government of this country, it is to protect the fabric of liberties against the Executive. That is the solemn duty of Parliament, and I am unashamed of trying to use Parliament to fulfil it.

One of my colleagues in the shadow Cabinet who used to be involved, as a lawyer, in trials in Scotland told me that at the beginning of one trial the judge said, "Bring on the next criminal". That is the mindset to which we object.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

5.27 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): May I draw Members' attention to my Select Committee's report on the Bill, which was published this morning and may help them? May I also lodge the usual protest that it is extremely difficult for a Select Committee to scrutinise a Bill published only 13 days before Second Reading, without explanatory notes—which became available only on Friday last week, after our report had been finalised? Our witnesses had to give evidence without having seen the Bill. I will not labour the point, because it was made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). Let me repeat, however, that the sooner all Bills are published in draft, as the Extradition Bill was, the better it will be for all concerned. I do not know what the Home Secretary has lined up for us to deal with in the next Session, but it would be nice to think that the finest minds in his Department were already working on it, so that we could avoid the same unseemly rush next time.

I believe that I speak for the entire Committee in saying that I am happy to support any measures designed to cut out unnecessary delay, and to make our notoriously insensitive judicial system more sensitive to the interests of victims and witnesses. We will also support any reasonable measures that help to make the judicial process a search for truth rather than a game of chance. I entirely agree with what the Home Secretary said about that.

The penny still has to drop for many of our learned friends. A policeman of my acquaintance told me last week that he recently heard a judge who was addressing an audience of 50 flatly reject the notion that the trial process constituted a search for truth. What we will not support, however, are measures that, however well intentioned, are likely to dilute the quality of justice. This Bill contains one or two such measures, one of which we have dealt with thanks to assurances from the Home Secretary about the disclosure of names and addresses of witnesses to the prosecution. The other measure—concerning previous character, which I shall come to in a moment—requires further discussion.

On part 1 of the Bill, we welcome measures such as street bail, which will reduce unnecessary police bureaucracy without impinging on the rights of the accused. We do not, however, believe that a convincing case has been made for extending to 36 hours the detention limit. In our view, there are alternative and more appropriate measures in the Bill, such as conditional bail, which will help to alleviate any problems with existing time constraints. On amendments to PACE, we strongly believe that any significant amendments should come into effect by affirmative order and not, as proposed in clause 7, simply by laying the amendment before Parliament. I should be grateful for the Minister's assurance on that point.

On parts 2 and 4, which deal with bail and charging, we support the proposal in clause 16 to impose a treatment condition on bail for class A drug abusers. However, it is obvious that that will work only if treatment is readily available, and we look forward to the Minister's proposals as to where and when treatment will be available. Perhaps we can discuss that matter in more detail tomorrow. We accept that a power to impose conditions on bail before charging is a necessary and logical part of the move towards charging by the Crown Prosecution Service, but we recommend a number of safeguards in addition to those in schedule 2—notably a time limit of four weeks, which the Association of Chief Police Officers proposed in its evidence to the Committee. I should be grateful if Ministers would consider this point.

On part 5, which deals with disclosure, we welcome the proposal for a single objective test. As I have said, I think that revisions to the Home Secretary's proposed code will deal with the problem of potential abuse where names and addresses of defence witnesses are disclosed to the prosecution.

On part 7, we welcome the Government's decision to retain the defendant's right to elect jury trial in so-called either-way cases. However, we accept that, in a limited category of cases—such as those where there is evidence of jury tampering—cogent reasons may exist for dispensing with jury trial. Nevertheless, as has already been pointed out, we should scrutinise carefully whether an allegation that a jury is about to be tampered with is being used as a device for escaping jury trial. Members of the Committee reluctantly accepted—we were by no means unanimous on this point—that this measure may also be necessary in complex fraud and financial trials, on the ground that length alone arguably undermines the principle of random selection of juries. We accept that in such cases, the rights of the defendant are adequately protected by the provision of a right to appeal against a decision not to grant a jury trial.

I should add, however, that I do not accept—as I have sometimes heard it suggested—that it is necessary to dispense with a jury because the issues are so complex that only a clever lawyer can understand them. It is up to the prosecution to present its case in such a way that ordinary mortals can understand the issues. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I have also heard it argued that this may be the thin end of the wedge. I hope that no one in the Government takes that view—to judge by what the Home Secretary has said today, I doubt whether he does—because I do not, and nor does my Committee. Any attempt to go further will be met with stiff resistance.

On double jeopardy, the Committee welcomes the proposed reforms, which are in line with the conclusions of its report of two years ago. The Committee believes that the proposed safeguards—that only certain serious offences will be taken into account, that retrials will be subject to the approval of the Attorney-General and the Court of Appeal, and that new and compelling evidence must exist—are adequate to prevent abuse.

There was concern that the proposed increase in magistrates' sentencing powers might inflate the prison population unless it was implemented after the custody plus scheme was rolled out. I look forward to hearing from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn), on that point.

We welcome the Government's proposal to preserve the presumption against hearsay evidence, subject to certain exceptions. I understand that the Government are proposing to adopt the Law Commission's suggestions on the reform of hearsay. I welcome that.

The biggest bone of contention is the proposal to admit previous similar convictions. The Committee was unanimously of the view that such convictions should not be disclosed automatically. We believe that that is a bridge too far. As the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) noted, the measure undermines a fundamental principle of our criminal justice system—the presumption of innocence. It opens up the prospect of previous convictions being used to prop up an otherwise weak case. In our view, it will inevitably increase the temptation for police to round up the usual suspects. Far from helping to create a balance between the rights of defendants and accusers, the proposal would create an imbalance. For all those reasons, we believe that clauses 84 to 92 should be deleted from the Bill.

It may well be that safeguards can be brought in to meet our concerns on these matters. I shall only say that they will have to be pretty mighty, and that it is difficult for me to think what they could be. Speaking for myself, I shall vote for the Bill on Second Reading, but I shall not be minded to support it on Third Reading if it still contains that proposal. I should regret that, because I hope that I have made it clear that the Bill contains many useful and sensible measures. This proposal is not one of them, however.

The Committee has suggested some possible additions to the Bill that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary might consider. They include anonymity for defendants in sexual offence cases, especially in those that involve historical abuse; the outlawing of unrecorded cell confessions; and the question of payments to witnesses.

I shall elaborate on the latter suggestion. As Ministers will know, a number of major criminal trials have collapsed because the media have made payments to witnesses, sometimes on condition that the trial results in conviction. The issue has been the subject of endless debate and consultation. The Government accepted the National Heritage Select Committee recommendation that self-regulation would not work and that legislation was the only possible solution. Five years later, the media are still drinking in that much frequented hostelry, the last chance saloon. We think that the Bill provides an ideal opportunity to legislate on this matter, although I appreciate that the business managers may have something say about that.

In conclusion, the question that arose over and over again in relation to many of the measures in the Bill was, "What is the problem they are intended to solve?" In many cases, the answer was that the resulting improvements would be modest in the overall scheme of things. I do not denigrate them: as I have just made clear, many represent progress and are perfectly sensible. However, as the right hon. Member for West Dorset noted a moment ago, if we are to restore the credibility of our system of justice, a cultural change by all the agencies concerned is required more than legislation. It is disorganised crime rather than organised crime that blights the lives of so many of our constituents. In most cases, the perpetrators never get anywhere near the courts because they are not apprehended and, in many cases, the courts are not the relevant agency.

First, we must end the culture of impunity. That requires effective and visible policing. I have always believed that 100 policemen on bicycles are more effective than two in a helicopter. For cases that do not reach court, we need efficient, speedy and fair justice that takes into account the legitimate rights of victims and witnesses and not just those of the defendant, important though those are, or the convenience of the lawyers. That is not so important.

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

Above all, we must end the culture of adjournment, which more than anything else makes our legal system a nightmare for victims and witnesses. It plays into the hands of unscrupulous defence lawyers and their clients.

In the end, those are management issues. They require not legislation, but effective management. I hope that the Government have now created for the police and the courts the legislative framework that will enable our system of justice to be managed in a way that commands the confidence of everyone who comes into contact with it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

5.39 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and to the work that he and the Select Committee on Home Affairs do so promptly and efficiently to ensure that we regularly have the support and advice of his Committee before we deliberate on important Bills such as this. Let me pick just one matter from the many items that the Home Affairs Committee has recommended with which Liberal Democrat Members agree. The hon. Gentleman's last point has often been made to me about so much Home Office business—we need to deal with the administration, not the legislation. The Home Secretary understands this point and often makes it himself. If we could get the system working well, that might be more useful than seeking to amend the law which often does not make things work better.

I thank the Home Secretary for the way in which he responded to the concerns expressed about the run-up to today in terms of the information available. I look forward to having the missing pieces of the information jigsaw as soon as possible. He must understand that we are all grappling with a work load that is bigger than we might have chosen—none the less we need the tools to enable Parliament to do its job.

I understand exactly the point made by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). I also take the view that we should have draft Bills and pre-legislative scrutiny. The only reason we did not put down a motion proposing that this should be committed to a Special Standing Committee was that we had the Halliday report, the Auld report, the White Paper and a period of consultation. I hope that the Home Secretary understands that that was an attempt to respond positively to a Bill that has had a longer gestation period than much legislation. However, legislation often changes quite a lot between concept and delivery. As the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, the Bill contains some provisions that were not in the plans a few weeks ago.

Mr. Allen: One of the advantages of pre-legislative scrutiny on the White Paper, which was eminently readable and well put together, would be to avoid having some of these provisions in draft legislation. There would be less confrontation in this House or the other place because we would have been listening to people outside the House ahead of time.

Simon Hughes: Absolutely. Let me then make a point that I was going to make later. At lunchtime today, I had the privilege of being invited to Church House for the launch of a book called "The Future of Criminal Justice", published by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. I know that the Under-Secretary of State was also invited. The book's editorial was written by Lord Hurd of Westwell. The book was written in tribute to Bob Hardy who, for 16 years until last year, was the bishop for the prisons. He was Bishop of Lincoln for much of that time. I went in part because he used to be my college chaplain—I thought that he was a good man then and he went on to be an even more important good man later.

Lord Hurd said in his introduction that one of the problems is that the penal system is a rather forlorn public service. The criminal justice system, until recently, has also been a rather forlorn public service in terms of the way in which we do our business. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point—that we need a less confrontational way of dealing with these reforms. I hope that the tone of the Liberal Democrats in this debate, in Committee and in the conversations that have taken place between the three major parties in recent weeks, has shown and will continue to show that although we may have strong differences and strong views, we will listen to the arguments, respond to them and amend our views if we are persuaded. That must be the way to make this very important Bill better and get it as near to being right as any legislation can be.

I have one last point that I hope will be accepted as a statement of desire for consensus. The Home Secretary has heard me say elsewhere that we want to try, with him, to get a settled criminal justice system, not one that is for ever open to legislative change. We will work with him and others in all parties to get a codification of the criminal law. There are big prizes if we can work together.

The Government have accepted that some of the mistakes that they made in their last Administration should not be made again. It is clear that the Home Secretary and the present Government have accepted the case that was made and won in the last Parliament: to get rid of the right to elect for trial by jury is a mistake and it should not have been proposed. After being defeated three times on the issue, the Government have understood that it should no longer be on the agenda. That is definite progress and we welcome it.

At the reception that I attended earlier, Lord Hurd said that the House of Commons often does not "do its stuff" in ensuring that Bills such as this are right. Other people who were there made points that were partly alluded to in the remarks of the right hon. Member for West Dorset. The biggest failures in the criminal justice system do not happen between the beginning and ending of the trial—they occur elsewhere. There is not enough crime prevention. People are not deterred enough from committing crimes. We do not catch people who commit crimes nearly enough. Punishments are not effective enough. We do not prevent reoffending enough. Those are the priorities, and I have heard no dissenting voices about that.

At the end of the last Session, when we debated the laws on immigration, nationality and asylum and the Home Office directorates that dealt with those matters, we pointed out that administration and organisation require the most attention from the Government. The same is true for this Bill. We may try to improve things by legislating, but our systems of trial and punishment will benefit much more from structural review. There will of course be resource implications.

Our consideration of the Bill gives us the opportunity to do two equally important things during the next few months. First, it will put the criminal justice system on trial—out in the open. There can be real debate about how to get it right. Secondly, it will put Parliament on trial, for the reasons set out by the right hon. Member for West Dorset and with which Liberal Democrats agree.

One test of whether Parliament does its job properly is whether we understand what the fundamentally important liberties of the subject are, and how to defend them. Unless we understand that, we shall not pass the test. All participants in the criminal justice system must believe that it is just for them, and that means just for defendants, too, even though they start by being the least popular group in the system.

Many people deserve praise for the way in which they participate in our criminal justice system: lay magistrates; people who work for the Court Service; judges and the Prison Service, from the director general downwards. By and large, they do an extremely good job. If there are mistakes and failings, it is often because people are not given the right direction or leadership.

As I pointed out to the Home Secretary earlier, however, it is not necessary to reduce the rights of defendants in order to increase rights and a sense of justice for victims, and some of us become somewhat aggrieved when that is suggested. In the sort of communities represented by the Home Secretary, the Under-Secretary and me, we need no lessons on the need to look after victims and witnesses. In many urban communities, we know the score extremely well. However, those communities have more than their fair share of defendants too. It is no accident that most people who end up as defendants are not rich and well heeled—although some are—but are those with the least education and the poorest start in life. That is not to say that my hon. Friends and I believe that people should not take responsibility for their actions whatever their circumstances. Adults should be accountable for what they do. They are answerable for their actions and they should be dealt with. But it is not without significance that the majority of inmates in nearly every prison or youth offender institute have lower than average academic qualifications, fewer skills, more mental illness and more disordered backgrounds. Many have been in care, have become prey to addiction or are socially inadequate and sad.

We all have a responsibility to understand that situation. The better answer is not to keep such people locked up for longer and longer. We have to ensure that they do not get into those circumstances in the first place. That is why, behind all we can do to get our trial and punishment systems right at the end of the day, sentencing reform—alternatives to prison—is the central, underlying issue for me. The alternatives need huge improvement and significant investment, and they have often been the Cinderella service because prisons are not the most popular things to put in an election manifesto for reasons that we all understand.

There are two areas of common ground, and I will mention them in a sentence each. As the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) said, we need to get back to an understanding that the sequence of punishment starts with rebuke, warning and caution, goes on to fines, which have been grossly under-used and have become inefficient because no one collects them properly—a point made by the hon. Gentleman—then involves non-custodial alternatives, and only when all those have been absolutely exhausted should the custodial alternative be considered last.

May I also tell Ministers without qualification that the custody plus and custody minus proposals are extremely good? When people receive a sentence, some of which will be served in custody, they will in future understand that the sentence does not end when they come out of the prison doors, that what happens outside is as important as what happens inside and that the support, rehabilitation and retraining will continue afterwards too. If we can get that right, the ridiculous nonsense of people being literally thrown out of the prison gate and left to fend for themselves, with the consequence—we all know about it—that they often go back in again will, we hope, be considerably reduced.

The Home Secretary does not like this phrase, but there are three mixed messages and at least one wrong message. The Prime Minister has often said—he did so again today in answer to the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews)—that the criminal justice system does not adequately convict the guilty. I simply do not think that that is right; it is a gross exaggeration of what happens. The Prime Minister also sometimes says that the greatest miscarriage of justice is when the guilty go free, not when the innocent are convicted. I do not think that that is right either.

The price of a decent justice system is that, occasionally, the guilty will go free—the guilty will not be convicted—and it is wrong to think that trying to deal with that very small number of people is a price worth paying if, as a result, we end up with a criminal justice system that convicts more people unjustly or treats them unfairly.

I shall remind the House of the figures. I need not elaborate on them, but 95 per cent. of defendants in magistrates courts plead guilty, 74 per cent. of defendants in Crown courts plead guilty and 65 per cent. of defendants in contested trials at Crown courts are acquitted. The total shows that nothing like most people are acquitted; a huge proportion of them are convicted because those people admit their guilt or because they are found guilty after trial. So the failure is not that hordes of people are let out when they should have been convicted. That is not the central issue that we need to address today.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Prime Minister's comments today introduce a slightly worrying feature to the debate? It is important that we have a rational debate, but for the Prime Minister to suggest—I also heard his words today—that those who are acquitted by juries are

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

guilty seems to run counter to the entirety of our legal principles and to start our serious debate on quite the wrong foot.

Simon Hughes: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I was extremely troubled by what the Prime Minister said in answer to the question asked from the Labour Benches. The Government are becoming increasingly obsessed with putting up the conviction rate as though that were the right test and with trying to produce a system that makes that outcome more likely. The danger is that they will start to cut corners, to eat away at liberties and to undermine the criminal justice system, which used to have the best reputation in the world.

Other things concern me. I hear mixed messages from the Government about whether the number of people in prison ought to be increased or decreased. The Prime Minister seems to say that more people need to be put in prison; the Home Secretary seems to say that fewer people need to be imprisoned. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches believe that many people who are in prison do not need to be there and that we should not seek to go on increasing the numbers.

It would be helpful if the Government would make it clear whether it is their wish that prison numbers should start to go down and that the recent huge increase and huge overcrowding are trends that should not be replicated, with the danger of 100,000 people being locked up, increasingly two to a cell and with increasingly unsuccessful outcomes.

Miss Widdecombe: Of course there is a difference between deploring overcrowding, as I did today, and taking a view as to whether more or fewer people should be in prison. With overcrowding, the number of places is inadequate no matter how many people there are. I put it to the hon. Gentleman that the aim of the justice system is not to imprison more or fewer people; the aim must be to find places where courts determine that custody is appropriate to protect the public.

Simon Hughes: I agree with the right hon. Lady, but if she looks at the figures—she probably knows them as well as I do and will probably remember them specifically from her time as a Minister—she will see that, 10 years ago, one in 26 people who appeared before the courts went into custody. Now, one in 13 do so—exactly double the number. The same number of people appears before the courts and I cannot believe that is it necessary for double the number of people to be sent into custody now compared with 10 years ago. That happens because fines or alternatives to custody are not considered or thought to be inadequate. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Lady says from a sedentary position that there is more crime, but I have to challenge her: there is not.

Miss Widdecombe: I said that the system has brought crime down.

Simon Hughes: It may or may not have brought crime down, but the Liberal Democrats share the view of the Director General of the Prison Service that the length of prison sentences imposed by the courts, especially magistrates courts, is drifting upwards, as is the frequency with which they impose prison sentences, and that more effective alternatives to custody should be available so that the best punishment and treatment is provided.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time; it is extremely generous of him. What I said from a sedentary position—I did not dare test his generosity by standing up again—was not that there is more crime now, but that the system brought crime down. Does he accept that, in fact, a sharp increase in the prison population has coincided with the only sharp decrease in crime that we have had in 30 years?

Simon Hughes: The answer is that, as the right hon. Lady rightly suggests, there is one recent period when an increase in the prison population coincided with a fall in the crime figures, but whether the two things are directly linked is much more disputable. All that I know from those who do such things for their day jobs all the time is that, at the moment, the prison system has a high failure rate in terms of reoffending, particularly for young people, but for adults as well. We need a more successful punishment regime, with fewer people being imprisoned and more people receiving punishment in the community so that they can keep their jobs and stop their families breaking up. That must be a better alternative.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way; he has been generous. Does he agree that community sentences will not work as an alternative to prison unless they are viewed as tough and rigorous by those who impose sentences—magistrates, mostly—and by victims? That is absolutely key if we are to keep the prison population down. What does he think about weekend prison, which seems expensive in terms of prison places? The key is to have community sentences—whether picking up litter or wiping away graffiti—that people can see are rigorous, tough and meaningful.

Simon Hughes: I have always taken the view that community sentences not only need to mean something, but to be seen to mean something. They must be seen to be worth imposing. They are getting much better. The Youth Justice Board and many other people have recently done a lot of work on them, but I entirely accept what the hon. Gentleman says. I agree that such sentences will often not be adequate, unless victims and others think that they represent real alternatives. As a postscript to that point, one of the things being explored in the hon. Gentleman's police authority area is the idea of victims and defendants confronting each other, so that the defendant understands the effect of his crime on the victim. The pilot schemes are not concluded, but it appears that it is much more likely that people will be persuaded not to repeat certain behaviour when they realise and accept the trauma that has been caused to the victim.

I am conscious that many other Members want and ought to be heard, so I shall be brief about my two other concerns about Government mixed messages, one of

which is about money. The explanatory notes include the bill for the Government's custody plus and custody minus schemes. We have also had an announcement of more money in the coming year for the probation service. It is quite a large bill. The costs of implementation, over the next five years, will be £34 million, £195 million, £301 million, £361 million, £378 million and £390 million. According to the projection, the costs will continue at £390 million per year thereafter. It would be very helpful if, at the end of the debate, the Minister could tell us whether it is true that if we pass the Bill the Government will be able to fund the custody plus and custody minus schemes. Alternatively, is it true, as some of his ministerial colleagues have suggested recently, that it will be 10 or 12 years before the money comes through the system to provide the kind of intelligent sentencing system that we all agree is necessary?

The last mixed message relates to clause 9 on drugs. It is unclear to send a message that cannabis is much less harmful than heroin, crack cocaine and the rest yet legislate to make an arrestable offence with an imprisonment consequence for possession, as well as other things, as clause 9 seeks to do. It would be far better if the dealing and commercial exploitation of drugs was seen as the iniquity that needed to be punished and dealing in cannabis for personal use was seen in a different league.

I must refer to the three giant issues of the Bill. Liberal Democrats stand up for lay justice. Like the Conservative spokesman for us, lay magistrates and lay jury trials are the cornerstone of a criminal justice system in which the public have confidence. Because we are dealing with the fundamentals of liberty—whether people are arrested, detained, convicted and imprisoned—the best people to decide those matters with confidence are those who come from the community concerned, not the professionals. We cannot therefore accept the changes that are currently recommended.

On the change in the rules of evidence, it cannot be right, as the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee said, that there is wider scope for evidence relating to a defendant's previous life to be brought into a trial when what they are being judged on is the specific offence with which they are charged. There is a huge risk that people will in future be judged not by whether they have done something on a particular day, but by how they have lived their life and whether they have done things wrong previously. Rehabilitation is not possible if people cannot escape from their past. It is too easy to pick up people who have been regular offenders. That changes the presumption of a fair trial and the presumption of innocence in a way that we cannot accept.

In relation to jury trials, the Minister knows—because we have had a conversation and debates about our objections—how successful serious fraud trials are. We have been reminded of that today. There are other ways of dealing with such cases. We can have assessors together with the judge, a smaller jury, a jury in which people are able to commit themselves for a long period, additional written material to help jurors, and an adviser to make sure that people understand the issues, but we need not get rid of the principle that, ultimately, the jury decides.

On the dangers in relation to the risk of intimidation, we understand the issue, but the threshold is too low. The serious risk applying to one defendant could suddenly mean that the jury trial disappears for all. We do not believe that that is right, and we hope that the Government will accept that that must be changed.

On double jeopardy, in answer to the question asked by the right hon. Member for West Dorset, we do not have an absolutist view. We do believe, however, that questions must be answered before we need to change the law. How will we ensure that, in future, any acquittal on a serious offence in the list will not, in effect, be a conditional acquittal? How will the press be prevented from determining the jury's view as it starts the second trial? We also express concern, as my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) said in his intervention on the Home Secretary, that the Law Commission recommendations in relation to the test and the charges—namely, murder—have been greatly widened by the Government. Again, we would require a much narrower range of opportunities for retrial. My honest judgment is that retrial only on the basis of scientific evidence that was not previously available might be agreed across the parties and would be likely to find more acceptance outside the House.

I have a long list of lesser first division points, although I can only deal with a couple. We share the concerns of the Home Affairs Committee that increased detention may not be the right answer, but more effective inquiry is needed in the time provided. We are worried that the criteria for the most serious violent and sex offenders—from whom we agree the public need greater protection—have been drawn too widely. For example, one of the offences in the list of those that would put someone in the indefinite sentence category is soliciting by men, which will be abolished in the sexual offences Bill that will be introduced in only a few months' time. It seems to us that the net is too wide. Ministers should seriously consider whether a decision later in a sentence on whether someone who has been convicted for a serious sex or violence offence is safe to be released should come back to court, so that a judge, having heard the case in public, can decide whether that person is fit to go back into the community. I do not accept the Home Secretary's view that there can never be redemption or rehabilitation, however terrible the crimes are. People may commit crimes that make them reviled as the scum of the earth, but even some of those individuals may later come good and be safe to be released. We must always allow for that eventuality.

In relation to the increase in magistrates' powers, the risk is that we have much more severe sentences, although we do not have objections in principle to more severe sentences for persistent offenders. In our view, however, there should never be mandatory sentences; otherwise, we will end up with a nonsense in which people are sentenced to a long term of imprisonment when their last offence may have been after a very long interval or may have been much less serious than those that they committed previously. That is why we are clear too that Ministers should not set tariffs. Parliament should set a maximum sentence, judges should set the actual sentence and, in dangerous and violent cases, the courts should decide when somebody should be released.

[Simon Hughes]

Since I have been my party's spokesman, I have tried to make it clear, along with my hon. Friends, that our party is not weak on crime or naïve about the causes of crime. Like everybody else, my focus group is my community. We are all formed by our experiences, and crime is at the top of many people's agenda. But neither will we be weak on justice nor on defending the rights and liberties of an ordinary person who happens to be a defendant, possibly for the first time in their life, and possibly only once in their life in a criminal trial.

Like the hon. and learned Member for Medway, although we tabled a reasoned amendment, it was not accepted, about which we make no criticism. We will therefore vote against the Second Reading of the Bill. That is not because we think that everything in the Bill is wrong—as I said to the Minister, we welcome many aspects of it—but because we believe that we need to register our opposition to some fundamentally wrong elements in it. We invite hon. Members on both sides of the House who feel able to do so to join us in that opposition. We will then work constructively, in this place and in the other place, because, when legislating for criminal justice, it is important that everybody thinks that justice has won, and that everybody feels that the system will treat them more justly in the future than it does at present.

6.9 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I declare an interest. I am a member of one of the unpopular groups that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) mentioned. I am a lawyer in the House. The register also has the entry that I am a recorder. I have sat in the Crown court for 10 years.

I commend very much the measured and open-minded way in which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary presented the Bill. That paves the way for its thorough consideration as it wends its way through both Houses.

On the Bill's background, I do not accept the view that some people have expressed, including police groups, that the Bill swings the pendulum back in favour of victims and witnesses. There is no symmetry between defendants on the one hand and victims and witnesses on the other. I also do not accept what is said at the other end of the spectrum. The Bill is not a frightening attack on civil liberties or a fundamental attack on ancient constitutional values. It is a collection of discrete and sensible reforms, based on detailed inquiries by John Halliday, Sir Robin Auld and the Law Commission. I commend John Halliday on his excellent report on sentencing. It was also right that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister paid tribute this afternoon to Lord Justice Auld for his thoroughly researched and rewarding report. As my right hon. Friend said, Sir Robin Auld is a man of enormous experience.

I do not want to spend too much time on the non-controversial provisions in the Bill, but I very much welcome the sentencing provisions in it. A philosophy of sentencing is clearly set out and there are useful measures on the deferral of sentences and rehabilitative sentencing. They are very much to be welcomed. I also welcome provisions that will give the prosecution the right to appeal when a judge stops a case halfway through. At present, there is a convoluted procedure whereby the Attorney-General has to refer the case to the Court of Appeal, but it cannot make a definitive ruling on it although there is a prospective effect given what the court might say about the judge's ruling. These changes are valuable.

I want to discuss the controversial measures that were addressed in the speeches made by the Front-Bench spokesmen. The first measure is the possibility that in complex and lengthy cases—fraud cases in particular—the jury will be dispensed with and the case will be tried by the judge alone. I accept the point made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) that juries are competent to deal with such cases. If the charges are stripped down and presented properly to the jury, it can understand them.

However, I support the change for two reasons. First, it is not possible to find a representative jury for such long and complex cases. We cannot expect people in ordinary jobs to take three, four, six or eight months off work. Therefore, it is not possible to have a representative jury. Secondly and more important—this point has not yet come out—the way in which the cases are stripped down to be presented to juries does not demonstrate to them the true complexity of the case and the true criminality of the fraud involved.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Ross Cranston: May I seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Do I lose part of my time if I give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The hon. and learned Gentleman has obviously not been diligently reading *Hansard* or our rulings on the matter. I assure him that there is an additional minute for any intervention that he takes, up to and including the first two. I hope that that is helpful.

Ross Cranston: Thank you for that guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that, with modernisation, the rule might have changed. I give way to my hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: Can my hon. and learned Friend cite a single fraud case that bears out or backs up the proposition that he has just made?

Ross Cranston: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned the Maxwell case, and abuse-of-process arguments apply to such cases. The prosecution brings first a stripped-down charge, the jury acquits after six months, the prosecution then comes along with the second charge and is told by the judge that that is an abuse of process. The trial then stops. The true complexity of the criminality is never revealed to the public if such an approach is used.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Ross Cranston: As this is the second intervention, I will give way.

Mr. Grieve: Surely the abuse of process is related to the onerous burden that it placed upon defendants.

That was the nub of the burden; it had nothing to do with the jury or its status. A new jury might be produced. The problem was the burden placed on defendants in a series of prosecutions and, doubtless, may also have reflected the judge's view of the state that the prosecution had got itself into.

Ross Cranston: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. That is precisely what I am saying. The true complexity of the fraud was never put before a jury, because of the abuse-of-process arguments.The hon. Gentleman also misunderstood what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said this afternoon.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Ross Cranston: I cannot give way again. My hon. and learned Friend will have his say.

The shadow Home Secretary talked about slippery slopes in relation to this change. He suggested that it would somehow lead to elected judges. Frankly, I am still grappling with the gap in the logic there. I support the change as a sensible, limited and discrete measure to deal with complex fraud.

I also want to speak briefly about the issue of double jeopardy, which arose in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. The gateways in the Bill are very narrowly drawn. First, the Court of Appeal has to sanction a second trial. Secondly, the Director of Public Prosecutions has to give his consent, and that must include a public interest test. Thirdly, there must be new and compelling evidence, such as DNA evidence or a post-acquittal admission. It must be highly probable that the person is guilty. Fourthly, there is the interests-of-justice test.

Concerns have been expressed about bad policing, but I invite my hon. Friends to look at clause 66(2)(c), where that issue is specifically addressed. It is not, therefore, a serious concern. There are problems about retrials and the prejudice that might be caused to the defendant if it becomes known that the Court of Appeal has held that it was highly probable that he was guilty. There are provisions in the Bill about how the media can be handled, and retrials already happen in some cases. I acknowledge the practical problem but that should be examined more clearly later in our considerations.

Evidence about bad character will, in the main, be about previous convictions. Previous convictions are already admissible. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) raised the issue of important explanatory evidence. If someone is prosecuted and has already been convicted of the offence of driving while disqualified, we have to adduce his previous conviction. I concede that the provision can be more broadly interpreted, and I shall deal with that point shortly. However, previous convictions can already be admitted. The House of Lords considered similar-fact evidence recently and extended the circumstances in which previous convictions can be admissible. Other examples include evidence of state of mind in handling cases and attacks on the prosecution. When a jury does not receive a good character direction, it knows implicitly that the defendant has previous convictions.

Clause 84 rationalises those provisions in many ways, but there are concerns. The Bar Council rightly asked whether the judicial filter should be stronger. Clause 84(3) imposes a judicial filter, but not in relation to all provisions in clause 84(1). I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider whether judges should always consider the admissibility of previous convictions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) referred to bolstering a bad case. A stronger judicial filter would deal with his objection. Propensity is not proof, but we have to be realistic. The chairman of the Magistrates Association said in a speech yesterday that when she sat on the bench she usually knew that a defendant had previous convictions because, in a small community, she had dealt with that person before. Typically in France, the first thing a judge does is to read out previous convictions. If properly applied and modified as I suggest, the provision could be useful.

I agree with what the Front-Bench spokesmen said about the administration of justice. That is one aspect of the necessary changes. The courts Bill will address some of the other problems with the administration of justice, but this Bill is sensible and modest and will improve confidence in the criminal justice system.

6.22 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I want to address not only what is in the Bill, but what is not in it because there are one or two important omissions.

The Bill makes no attempt to introduce an offence of substantial possession in drugs cases. The arrestability for possession of drugs has been mentioned. My principal concern is that following the Home Secretary's decision to reclassify cannabis—I shall leave my strong disapproval of that to one side for a moment—someone who carries a substantial quantity of it can argue that it is for personal use only and is, for example, a year's supply. Indeed, such a defence was mounted by someone accused of dealing in ecstasy. He said that he happened to be carrying 52 tablets because it amounted to one a week for a year.

I have long argued that there should be an offence of substantial possession. I would welcome the Government's response to that because the Home Secretary has said that he would take the matter seriously. Such an offence would mean that although intent to supply cannot be absolutely proved, the quantity possessed is sufficiently great for it not to be treated as a case of simple possession. It would be helpful to address the idea of substantial possession. The argument that a drug is for personal consumption over a long time is a standard defence to charges of intent to supply.

The Chairman of the Select Committee briefly touched on the other measure that is missing. He suggested that the Home Secretary might like to consider anonymity for defendants in rape cases. It is wholly wrong and completely unbalanced against the accused that his identity is known throughout when the accuser's identity is not. To justify that, it is often argued that if a defendant has committed similar unreported crimes, the disclosure of his identity encourages people to come forward. But of course, the converse argument applies. If the accuser has made false allegations before—perhaps not even at a legal point, but in an employment context—no similar means are open to the

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

defendant, which would encourage people to come forward and say that that has happened before. It is loading the dice against the accused, who is nearly always a man, of course. I wish that the men in this place would occasionally wake up and realise that the dice is being more and more heavily loaded against them.

There have been two references to the injustice perpetrated when people serve enormous lengths in prison and are proved at the end to be innocent, although I accept that the Bill might not be the right vehicle to tackle that. The Stephen Downing case was mentioned. There was another case, the name of which eludes me—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): Robert Brown.

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed. That case came to light only recently.

I am sure that the Minister will understand that if people who have been convicted persist in denying their guilt, they are deemed not to have addressed their offending behaviour and therefore not to have satisfied a necessary criterion for release. That means that the small handful of people who have been wrongly convicted and who face substantial sentences have no hope while they persist in their innocence. Although I accept that there is no quick and easy solution, because we do require people to address their offending behaviour, that rule needs to be reconsidered because we have had not one but two cases in which people have served huge sentences, and in Stephen Downing's case it was 27 years.

The Bill contains a measure to release criminal records to juries before a verdict. That is an extremely unwelcome development. The circumstances in which it can happen at the moment are limited and are especially relevant when a co-defendant might be prejudiced if the information is not available. However, the proposed widening of that rule will have extremely dangerous implications. Juries on the whole are diligent. Like many other hon. Members, I have sat on a jury. I was involved in a series of trials in the Crown court and remember that we were told not once, but twice to disregard things because they should never have been said. We may have been saintly and tried as hard as possible to ignore those comments, but we had heard them.

In one case, a damaging piece of information was slipped in by a clever lawyer. We found out that although the man before us was pleading not guilty, a co-defendant had pleaded guilty. It was not the sort of crime in which one could be guilty and the other could be not guilty. They had either both done it or neither had done it. The judge told us to disregard the comment, but we knew. In our deliberations thereafter, no matter how hard we tried to carry out an academic exercise in weighing up an argument without that information, it came up time and time again. Only a jury of saints and angels could say, "But they still have to prove that he committed this particular crime", and not allow a long list of previous convictions to give weight to their decision.

It is a central tenet of our justice system that someone must be proved guilty beyond all reasonable doubt. When a person sits in the dock, he is innocent of the crime that is attributed to him until it has been proved beyond all reasonable doubt, irrespective of his previous record. If a person has done nine burglaries in the past three years, it does not follow that he is guilty of the 10th. I see the Minister writing and I know what is about to come. If a person has committed acts of domestic violence it does not follow that they have committed the act of which they stand accused.

Suppose, for example, that a man had committed two assaults on his wife, and on the second occasion the judge said to him, "This is a very serious matter and if you come before the law again you will face a custodial sentence." It is possible that if relations with his wife continued to deteriorate, quite understandably in the circumstances, she might be tempted to say, "I am going to get rid of you for some time. I shall say that you hit me." The jury could then be told that the man was in the habit of assaulting his wife. I submit that it is impossible to maintain the view that somebody is innocent if we load the dice against them by laying open their past offences.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I will, but I want first to respond to a specific point made by the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) which is relevant to what I just said. He said that already, in juries' minds, if good character is not adduced there is an awareness that something is amiss and that the person must have erred before. That is true, but they do not know what that person has done. If a person has a 20-year-old conviction, which under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 is long since spent, they cannot be said in court to have a good character. The jury has no clue as to the seriousness of the offences indicated by the omission of good character. This provision is not at all the same—juries will be given that information.

Ross Cranston: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, but first I must give way to the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), as I promised.

Mr. Kidney: I was struck by the right hon. Lady's example of the jury who, according to the rules, should not have known that the co-accused was pleading guilty to the offence, a fact that was very material to their considerations, as she told us. In view of that, is she satisfied that the existing rules are perfectly adequate?

Miss Widdecombe: No, but there is no need to make them worse.

Ross Cranston: The point is that I said that the jury might know that a defendant had previous convictions, but they might not have appreciated that fact. However, is not the right hon. Lady's point an argument to the contrary, in that it may help the jury to know the specific offences committed by a defendant rather than simply to be left in the dark about how serious or trivial those previous convictions may be?

Miss Widdecombe: No, I do not agree. The burden must be on the prosecution to prove beyond all

reasonable doubt that a particular crime, not a type of crime, was committed by a particular person. That must be the touchstone in determining whether a person is innocent or guilty.

I do not think that one can reasonably put before a jury a long record of similar offences and not expect that to be taken strongly into account, even if it affects only the jury's attitude, because of course juries do not make decisions simply by weighing facts; they are directed to consider the bearing of a person and which version of events they prefer. A certain amount of gut instinct applies in jury deliberations, as I am sure the hon. and learned Gentleman is aware. Once a material fact about previous convictions has been thrown into the cauldron, it is difficult for the jury to lay that to one side and simply consider whether or not the defendant committed the crime in question.

I also submit, in the short time available to me, that this provision is an invitation to sloppy policing. It will allow the police to think that a defendant has a record as long as their arm, so a jury will not be sympathetic and they are more than likely to convict because they will not think that they are doing much damage—the accused is a criminal anyway and is likely to commit another crime at some point.

It must be central to our justice system that one comes to court as an innocent person, no matter what one's past record, and a case is made meticulously, beyond all reasonable doubt and not on the balance of probabilities, that one committed a particular crime. If that principle is not adhered to, we will be giving up a major and important civil liberty.

6.34 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I must confess that until today I had not considered the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) one of life's civil libertarians, but it just goes to show that there is hope of redemption for us all because I enjoyed the whole of her speech. It will not do her any good, but there we are.

The Home Secretary was so emollient that there were times when I wanted to scream. Who put the real Home Secretary into a box, gift wrapped it and labelled it, "Merry Christmas to you all"? What happened to the Rottweiler that eats lawyers for breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner?

I went through the Bill carefully and searched its every clause and subsection for a guiding principle, but I could find none. I then dug deep for any enduring values that might have enthused its progenitors, but there were none. Maybe, I thought to myself, this Bill has been inspired by noble ideas, ancient and modern. Alas, I was disappointed again.

Eventually, the secret behind the Bill emerged in the newspapers. The Bill, so the spin-meisters told journalists, is designed to refocus the criminal justice system in the interest of victims. As Labour Members have said, that is nonsense. The Home Secretary is also reported to have said that the Bill will push up the conviction rate, and that is even worse nonsense. If, indeed, he really wanted to introduce legislation significantly to push up the conviction rate, and I am not advocating this, he would need to abolish our adversarial system of justice and, with it, the presumption of innocence. Let us all pray that he does not read this speech tomorrow.

My complaint about the Home Secretary's approach, and it is a serious one, is that where there is a clash, as there often is in these cases, between utilitarianism and individual rights, the Home Secretary always comes down in favour of utilitarianism. I shall develop that argument in a moment. Throughout the Bill, he wages war on liberty in certain important respects with the determination of the zealot and the understanding of one who has forsaken the scales of justice for the dead weight of popular prejudice.

Let us take, for example, trial by jury. Everyone knows that removing the right to trial by jury, whether in the old plans, the new plans or the plans that will be introduced in the next Session, will lead to more innocent people being convicted, but no one has yet been able to explain to me how convicting the innocent helps the victim. On the contrary, it shows a contempt for victims that beggars belief. It is a cruel deception on victims born of political psycho-babble, of which we get all too much from the Home Office, as we can see from its list of Bills since 1997.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) asked the shadow Home Secretary whether there is a point of principle about jury trials. There is indeed a point of principle about jury trials, which is explained concisely and lucidly by Lord Scott of Foscote in his judgment in Grobbelaar *v.* News Group Newspapers Ltd. and Another—the case of the cheating goalie—when he said:

"Judges have not always in the history of our justice system been seen to be independent of the executive. The independence from the executive of prosecuting authorities has not always been apparent and still today is regarded with some cynicism by some people. So it is not surprising that the role of juries in the criminal justice system is widely regarded as constituting a key and necessary protection for the citizens of this country from unfair and oppressive prosecution."

One cannot get a much better principle than that: protecting the citizen from unfair and oppressive prosecution.

As has been said, the argument about the limited number of cases is not good in logic, and I have a nagging doubt that once we open the door, we may see other such Bills. Of course, we know in this case about the Home Secretary's previous bad character and previous convictions. He is, after all, the person who came before the House barely a year ago and told us that we need not worry because he was going to abolish jury trials only for lesser offences. Now he comes here and tells us that we do not have to worry because he will abolish jury trials only for a few very serious offences. I dare say that following next year's Queen's Speech he will say, "All I have in mind is the abolition of jury trials for middle-ranking offences." The Home Secretary, I suspect, may agree with Lord Thomas Denham, a man of no consequence and little intellect, who said in his judgment on O'Connell *v.* the Queen 150 years ago:

"Trial by jury itself . . . will be a delusion, a mockery and a snare."

Lord Denham, an authoritarian by nature, was concerned, as the Home Secretary may sometimes be, about the fact that juries have independent minds that cannot be controlled by the Executive or judicial elites—thank God for that, say most of us.

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

According to the philosophy of an acerbic 18th century writer of letters, whose identity was hidden behind the soubriquet "Junius":

"The injustice done to an individual is sometimes of service to the public."

Some say that Junius was Edmund Burke, others that he was Lord Shelburne, but I believe that he was our current Home Secretary in an earlier incarnation. Some of the Bill's provisions, including those on admitting prejudicial hearsay evidence and accounts of bad character, including the defendant's previous acquittals, come into Junius's category of causing injustice to individuals in the interests of some unstated higher good. We should challenge the Home Secretary on what higher good he is seeking to achieve in the Bill.

Sadly, the Home Secretary's predilection for the philosophy of Junius was evident in the Anti-Terrorism, Crime And Security Act 2001, in which he paved the way for locking up foreigners indefinitely without charge, trial or sentence. Once a Home Secretary starts to erode civil liberties, it becomes easier to repeat the process and more difficult for people like me to shame him as the perpetrator. If the prosecution is unable to prove its case in a criminal trial, either because it does not have one or because it has been slipshod in marshalling the evidence, there is no better and more unjust way to enable it to secure a conviction than by allowing both a list of the defendant's previous convictions and an account of his bad character, which could deface the principles of fair trial in England and Wales. How the slaughter of innocents in those cases will refocus the criminal justice system in favour of victims is something that my enfeebled mind cannot comprehend. No doubt, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn), will explain it in his winding-up speech.

I believe that civilisation depends on the holy trinity of justice, freedom and liberty. People who, like the Home Secretary, seek to separate justice from freedom and liberty soon find themselves, albeit inadvertently, going down the road of barbarism. I do not know of any Labour Back Bencher who wants to go down that road yet, in a bizarre refutation of conscience and belief, we shall tonight shut out the warning of the director of Liberty, who only accentuated the obvious when he said:

"In years to come as more innocent people emerge after years in prison caused by these plans, we'll wonder how Parliament let this attack on justice get into law."

Only a few days ago, on 24 November 2002, John Rawls—one of the foremost political philosophers of our era—died. His message to the Home Secretary would have been that the loss of freedom for some can never be made right by a greater good shared by others. In affirming the priority of the right over the good, he would tell the Home Secretary that major aspects of the Bill are morally, politically and philosophically flawed, as they are based on the priority of utilitarianism over individual rights. I would simply warn the Home Secretary that if he is unwilling to maintain justice, justice may well be unwilling to maintain him.

6.44 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), who followed me when I made my maiden speech and graciously honoured the conventions of the House by congratulating me. Without any need to apply convention, I congratulate him on his speech—I agree with it very much.

My constituents want serious and substantive measures to punish the guilty and protect the innocent, and will be as puzzled as contributors to our debate by the insubstantial nature of the Bill's provisions on tackling crime. Those provisions appear to be the fruit of an unholy and cynical alliance between tabloid populism—which is designed to sound tough on crime but has no substantial effect on it at all—and modernising zeal, which, in practice, will undermine the liberties that have protected the innocent in this country for centuries.

The Gracious Speech referred to safeguarding

"the interests of victims, witnesses and communities."

It may be significant that no mention is made of safeguarding the innocent. Indeed, I believe that the Home Secretary recently equated wrongful conviction of the innocent with a failure to convict the guilty. My constituents do not make that equation—they recognise that the risk of convicting innocent people is not merely abhorrent but will result in the guilty remaining at large, free to go on committing crime. Ministers foster the belief that few crimes result in convictions because the courts fail to convict—that is why they want to change the court process. In fact, as we have heard, more than 95 per cent. of cases in magistrates courts result in conviction and more than 87 per cent. of cases in Crown courts result in conviction.

The Government want to increase those conviction rates even further, but make no mention of the fact that more than an average of more than 4,000 convictions every year for the past 10 years have been quashed. Innocent people have been found to be wrongly convicted. The Government are not anxious to change that in future—they are not worried that 4,000 guilty people may be at large because 4,000 or more innocent people have been wrongly convicted. In practice, the measures introduced by the Government will undermine the protection of the innocent, which is an important principle.

I do not necessarily oppose change to things such as jury trial or centuries-old rules on double jeopardy, but anything that has existed for a long period and has served us well should be changed only if the change can be shown to be necessary to produce a substantial improvement; if it has been well researched; and if it is clearly well motivated. A number of Government measures, I am afraid, do not pass any of those tests. As the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch said, the Government cannot complain if we refer to their previous convictions. On the matter of jury trial, they have two serious previous convictions and have attempted to remove people's right to choose jury trial in either-way cases.

In the light of that attempt to restrict jury trial, we must evaluate the four measures that the Government wish to introduce, all of which would undermine the use

of jury trial by stealth. First, they want to increase the sentencing powers of magistrates courts from six months to 12 months, although that is accompanied by a welcome quid pro quo that magistrates will no longer be able to refer to higher courts for sentencing. The net effect, however, is to reduce the number of jury trials, the Government anticipate, by 6,000 a year.

The remaining three measures are designed to reduce the use of jury trial in the most serious cases of indictment. The Government propose that defendants be given the option to choose not to be tried by jury. Frankly, it is bizarre of a Government who have previously justified their attempt to abolish the right to choose trial by jury instead of in a magistrates court, with the principle that it is wrong for defendants to have the right to choose jury trial, now to say that as a matter of principle they will introduce choice so that people can choose not to have jury trial in the most serious cases.

The only unifying feature in both instances is, as I pointed out to the Home Secretary—although he did not take the point—that the Government want to move in a direction that will result in fewer jury trials. It is odd that the previous Home Secretary described our system of allowing a measure of choice in either-way cases as wrong in principle, "frankly eccentric" and almost unique in the world. It is now said that he was misleading the House. Far from the system being frankly eccentric and almost unique, we are told that it is almost universal in other common law jurisdictions for there to be an element of choice. It is proposed to introduce that element of choice in trials by indictment.

Should we accept the conversion to choice, welcome it and say that if it works overseas we will accept it? That would be unwise. The conversion is being introduced by those who want to reduce the use of jury trial. There is the danger that once it is introduced, the same arguments that were applied to the right to elect for jury trial rather than the case appearing before a magistrates court will be used in cases where people continue to opt for jury trial rather than trial by the judge. It will be said, "They are merely using it to manipulate the system. There should be trial by judge. That would be more economic, for example."

All the other jurisdictions have entrenched the right to jury trial in their constitutions. They are safe from a slippery slope. According to their constitutions, there cannot be the complete erosion of jury trial. We do not have that protection. Instead, the House is that protection. The House should not start down the slippery slope.

Another measure that the Government propose to reduce the number of jury trials is to give prosecutors the option, if they consider that a case would be too complex a burden on a jury, to ask for a trial without a jury. It seems odd that prosecutors should be made the defenders of jurors' rights and convenience. However, that is the proposal. It gives the prosecutor an incentive to make a case long and complex and the documentation excessive if he or she wants to do without a jury trial and thinks that a judge is more likely to arrive at a favourable judgment.

That is bad because we should be trying to speed and simplify such trials. On page 17 of "Taking Liberties", which is available on my website, a senior judge states:

> "Brevity and simplicity are the handmaidens of justice, and length and complexity are its enemies".

We should not give prosecutors an incentive to make their cases long and complex, especially as in the past four years the Serious Fraud Office has achieved a 92 per cent. success rate in obtaining convictions as against a 57 per cent. success rate in contested trials before jurors generally.

The final measure that the Government are proposing to erode the use of jury trial is to give the court the option, again on the application of the prosecution, to forgo a jury trial if there is a risk of jury tampering. As far as I can establish, the proposal was not even put forward by Lord Justice Auld. He put forward the most comprehensive proposals for reducing jury trial ever previously known short of abolishing juries, but he had not thought of the measure that the Government are putting forward. Presumably, that is because he had not found any evidence that it was needed. Nor have the Government put forward any evidence of the need for it.

It means that effectively judges will say, "These are the sort of people who might tamper with juries. Therefore, I will not give them the protection of a jury; I will judge them myself." That is not likely to encourage respect for the law. Would it not be better to say that if there is such a risk, let us consider the option of giving juries anonymity rather than doing without juries?

The Government's measures are all moving in one direction, which is the decline in the use of juries. They are mistaken in wanting to move in that direction because juries are not only the best method of trying cases but the only method that we have as citizens, apart from our vote, in participating in government and our system of justice. About 187,000 people a year participate in juries. That is a good thing and something to be encouraged and increased, not diminished. When Tocqueville was analysing democracy in America and Anglo Saxon countries and saying why it was so important, he said:

> "The jury is above all a political institution. The jury plays an incredibly important part in forming popular judgment and improving people's natural understanding of the law."

I believe that we reduce its role at our peril.

I move on to double jeopardy. The two arguments in favour of diminishing the use of the rule are that the evidence of DNA could be available and the evidence of confessions post-conviction could be used. It is important to understand that neither case will apply to any offences committed in future. Only retrospective offences will apply. In any offence committed in future, DNA will be available at the first trial. If it is not brought up then, it will not be a justification for a second trial.

Confessions after conviction will no longer occur if we do not have the double jeopardy rule. We are talking about changing a rule to bring about convictions for offences that have already occurred and not increasing in any way the likelihood of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.56 pm

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): It is a pleasure to be able to welcome some limited parts of the Bill. I do not want to pick them out individually, but there is the abolition of magistrates courts' right to commit for sentence. That is long overdue and ends the

[Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews]

iniquity of one court deciding on guilt and allowing another court to pass sentence. There are some parts of the Bill that are good and some that are bad, but in truth not that bad. In that I include the rules for the admission of previous convictions. It is with great trepidation that I disagree with my good and hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). If we make allowance for the deplorable drafting of clauses 84 to 92, it appears that what is postulated in the Bill is not very different from the rules that we already apply in criminal courts.

In a criminal case, it is often an enormous release to put our form in. The way in which we run a defence is often so gravely inhibited by not being able to do so that it can be a significant and positive disadvantage. To say to a jury, "Yes, I've done it four times before, but I didn't do this one. I'm only here because I've done it four times before and the Old Bill picked me up," is not a bad defence, especially if there is not much else to say.

There are parts of the Bill, however, that are not just bad, but are conspicuously and dreadfully bad. The provisions that are an assault on jury trial represent the most serious infringement of fundamental liberty that has come before Parliament in recent history. They are substantially greater than the mode of trial provisions, and I shall echo what my hon.—and learned—Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch said. There is a savage irony. When we were fighting mode of trial Bills 1 and 2 to the death, we were told repeatedly by the Home Secretary that our opposition was ill founded because they would apply only to the less serious offences in the criminal calendar. Now that the Government have been beaten to a standstill twice, they are attacking the beast from the other end. We are told that only the most serious offences in the criminal calendar will be decided by the judge. In making such provisions, I fear that the Government show a savage ignorance of the centrality and essential nature of the jury in our adversarial system. The provisions will undoubtedly bring judges into serious disrepute. In their current form they are impossible to apply in the trial process, and they will result in many cases being successfully brought in Europe. Apart from that, they are fine.

Lady Hermon (North Down): For many years, non-jury trials have taken place in the Diplock courts for serious terrorist offences. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman is not implying that judges have been brought into serious disrepute in Northern Ireland because of those trials?

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: No, I am not. I acknowledge immediately the special circumstances that apply in Northern Ireland. The hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not get into an argument about Diplock courts, which are a different matter.

The centrality of the jury in our system cannot be overstated. It was said recently that jury trial does not go back to Magna Carta—it has formed part of our criminal justice system since well before then. It has been suggested that it dates back to 1855. That is false and misleading. On the contrary, in 1855, people were allowed to opt for summary trial, not jury trial, and either-way offences were created. Jury trial, which was the only mode of trial for centuries, did not always result in acquittal. It has not been a soft option. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch—to whom I shall not refer again—will know, because he is named after the famous battle, that the bloody assizes in the west country were conducted by means of jury trials. Doubtless the Home Secretary would thoroughly approve of those assizes.

The great benefit of jury trial is not simply that it is fair and perceived to be fair, and that it involves the citizen in the process of justice, but that it is profoundly modern. It is one of our most ancient rights and liberties, but also the most modern. How many institutions do we seek to modernise by bringing in the ordinary citizen to participate in running them? It is our permanent aim to bring the citizen in to health, education—and, indeed, politics. Yet that has happened in the law for nearly 8,000 years. Jury trial is therefore our most modern institution. The citizen is empowered, and thereby ennobled.

Our adversarial system means that the jury is vital. We are an adversarial people. Like the court, the Chamber is an adversarial arena. That is the way we do business. The Government decree, and they are opposed—not necessarily from the Conservative Benches. Governments should be opposed. We do business in our courts in the same way. We do not have an inquisitorial system. I suspect that the judge to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) referred was really saying that we do seek the truth in our criminal justice system. In our adversarial system, the state brings its case, which it must prove. If it does not prove the case, that is the end of the matter.

How can the state bring its case in front of someone who is its agent and employee? The principle of our jury system is that the state brings its case, but must prove it in front of the citizen. To suggest that one can create an inquisitorial system by simply ripping out jury trial is the precise equivalent of claiming that one can remove the wheels from a car and thereby create a boat. The checks and balances that are implicit in an inquisitorial system are absent from the system that we operate. Judges cannot sit as judges of fact as well as of admissibility, fairness and law.

The change is unnecessary. None of us who has laboured in jury trials in serious fraud cases has the slightest doubt that juries understand perfectly well the issues involved in serious fraud. That is almost always because the question of whether serious fraud has been committed is not an issue, and the case is a therefore a whodunnit. Juries cannot be surpassed for defining who done it.

Jury tampering and nobbling are rare in our system, because it is almost impossible to corrupt an entire jury. That is the strength of the system, and the reason for having 12 people. Corrupting, bullying, bribing or intimidating 12 people is almost impossible. We have an incorruptible judiciary and we are unique in the world in being able to say that. We have the worst system in the world—except for all the others.

One of the reasons for the incorruptibility of our judges is the jury system. There is no point in attempting to bribe, bully, cajole or intimidate judges, because they

have nothing to do with the findings of fact at the end of a trial. However, if we allow judges to sit alone, they will become the subject of bribery, bullying and intimidation. Of course, 99.9 per cent. will resist, but if one goes, the whole system that we value in this country above any other institution will be at risk. There will be strong judges, who get a reputation for permanently favouring the Crown, and weak judges, against whom the accusation will be levelled that they are buyable and bent. Before we know where we are, our whole criminal justice system will be brought into disrepute and disarray. Hon. Members must defend our system.

Of course the changes will not work. Nothing has been thought through. What happens if a judge is told that a jury has been tampered with and the prosecution places an application before him? It will be heard in secret because of the public interest immunity rules. If the judge, after hearing the application in secret, decides that there is a risk of tampering by one defendant out of, for example, 10, will all 10 lose the right to jury trial? Will we have two trials under two different systems for the same offence? The judge cannot try the case. If he does, the trial will be rendered a nullity by Europe, because the judge and the prosecution are privy to information that is not available to the defence. That applies to every application for PII in any trial.

I have reached the end of my time, and I have not yet mentioned double jeopardy. We lawyers have an odd vested interest if we are against the change to the double jeopardy rule, which will double the number of trials available for us. However, we are against it for the same reasons of liberty that I have outlined. Let me end by saying that one cannot reduce human wickedness by reducing human liberty. That has never been done in history. Totalitarian states, where liberty is completely curtailed, may reduce crime, but they do so by the immediate equation of transferring wickedness from the individual to the state.

7.8 pm

Lady Hermon (North Down): I must confess that I have lost track of the number of criminal justice measures that have come before the House in the past 10 years. I would dread being a law student who had to sit through a criminal law lecture and try to keep up to speed with what has happened. I should also hate to be a practitioner or member of a police service who was trying to keep abreast of all the criminal justice legislation.

Will the Under-Secretary confirm in his winding-up speech that that useful hard-working institution, the Law Commission for England and Wales, which has existed since 1965, has consolidation of criminal justice legislation near the top of its agenda? That would hugely benefit all of us, especially practitioners who have to apply such legislation. The Law Commission's website states:

"The Government has said that it sees the enactment of a Code as an important part of its plans to modernise the criminal justice system."

I would therefore welcome the Under-Secretary's confirmation that codification of the criminal justice system is a top priority.

It intrigues me that criminal justice is not a devolved issue in Northern Ireland. Our Assembly is suspended at present, but criminal justice is still not a devolved issue, and has not been for a considerable time. It has remained here at Westminster. Will the Minister explain why the Bill does not extend to Northern Ireland—and, indeed, why the Hunting Bill that we discussed yesterday does not do so? I should perhaps put it on record that I am probably not speaking for all my colleagues when I ask for the Hunting Bill to be extended to Northern Ireland.

I am exceedingly concerned about the cost of implementing the Criminal Justice Bill. In an interview in *The Times* yesterday, Lord Falconer was asked what the financial costs of the Bill would be. He replied:

"On current assumptions it will require £1.6 billion over six years."

Fighting crime involves putting police officers on the streets of our villages, towns and cities. If even a fraction of £1.6 billion were directed towards recruiting more police officers, it would help in the fight against crime. Tinkering with our criminal justice legislation will not.

When I say "tinkering", I am referring specifically to two aspects of the Bill that worry me considerably. The first involves double jeopardy. The Minister will be aware that schedule 4 lists 30 very serious offences which, it is proposed, should become exceptions to the double jeopardy rule. At the same time, we are considering the Extradition Bill, which is also the responsibility of the Home Secretary. I am sure that the Minister will be familiar with clause 12 of that Bill, which is headed, "Rule against double jeopardy". It states:

"A person's extradition to a category 1 territory"—

I will not go into that subject now—

"is barred by reason of the rule against double jeopardy".

There are no exceptions to that. Will the Minister confirm that the one hand actually knows what the other hand is doing, and that either there will be 30 exceptions when it comes to extradition cases, or the double jeopardy rule will remain intact for all purposes and all reasons?

Furthermore, the 30 crimes listed in schedule 4 of the Criminal Justice Bill—including robbery, armed robbery, rape, murder and manslaughter—are all very serious. In our media-driven culture, it is inevitable that all cases involving those crimes will have been given great media attention and will be out in the public domain, particularly when the defendant has been acquitted. For the Court of Appeal to make an application for a retrial, it would have to certify that fresh evidence was both "new and compelling". I am extremely troubled by the definition of compelling evidence, as set out in clause 65(3)(c). The clause states that evidence is compelling if the Court of Appeal concludes that

"it is highly probable that the person is guilty of the offence."

When we couple the media attention that has been given to a high-profile case, on acquittal in the first instance, with the conclusion of the Court of Appeal that it is "highly probable" that the person is guilty, how in heaven's name can the Minister convince the House that the defendant can be guaranteed a fair trial?

On my second point, I am sure that the Minister will be familiar with the work of Professor Sally Lloyd-Bostock. It is a matter of regret to me that this learned academic is not a constituent of mine, but perhaps we

[Lady Hermon]

can recruit her to come over to Northern Ireland. She is presently working for the university of Birmingham. Before that, she worked in the Oxford university centre for socio-legal studies. She was commissioned to carry out research for the Home Office in 1995 into the effects on magistrates and juries of the disclosure of previous convictions. In her more recent research paper, headed "The Lord Chancellor's Department: Research 2000", Dr.—now Professor—Sally Lloyd-Bostock concluded:

> "The results showed clearly that the magistrates' ratings of likely guilt were significantly affected by information about the defendant's prior record . . . Most magistrates thought that neither magistrates nor juries should learn about previous convictions until after the verdict, and felt that the information was dangerously biasing."

Given that that learned professor is an expert in this field, it ill behoves the Government to set aside research of this quality, carried out by someone who was commissioned to carry it out by the Home Office in 1995 and, more recently, by the Lord Chancellor's Office. I ask the Minister to address the points raised in that research.

I would like to pick up a couple of points made by other hon. Members. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) rightly drew attention to the fact that what increases our constituents' confidence that crime is being successfully fought is the visibility of police officers on the streets. He mentioned the number of police officers on bicycles. I am not simply asking for the police to be put back on bicycles, although that would be helpful. There is no doubt that, with crime rates rising, our constituents need a sense of confidence that the Government intend to tackle crime. That involves recruiting more police officers, and the visibility of the police officers is the key.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) made the valid point that an awful lot of young people should be kept out of the court system and not put into jail, and should instead have to make restoration to the public for whatever crime they have committed. I would draw to the Minister's attention the restorative justice schemes that have now been built into Northern Ireland's criminal justice legislation. We have just had a major review, and the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 went on to the statute book in July. About one third of that important piece of legislation was dedicated to youth justice, and particularly to accredited restorative justice schemes.

Let us consider the difficulties that we have had in Northern Ireland with paramilitary violence, including the so-called punishment beatings, which, in one extreme case, involved the crucifixion of a young man. Having had his legs broken, he was nailed to a fence through both hands. We have seen appalling crimes by paramilitaries, both loyalist—I have to say that loyalists are utterly ruthless—and republican. They carry out a type of justice in their own right, in which they beat up young people for joyriding and other antisocial crimes. We have tried to deal with this by introducing restorative justice schemes. In my constituency we have an exceedingly good scheme up and running on the Kilcooley estate in Bangor. Those schemes involve the perpetrators of the crimes of vandalism, joyriding or intimidating elderly folk—I could go on and list many more—making reparation to the older person or other victim, and saying sorry. Those are accredited schemes, and I draw the Minister's attention to the possibility of building into future legislation, if not the Bill, restorative justice schemes, which have worked in Northern Ireland when they are accredited.

7.19 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), and I begin with the same point: we have had a proliferation of criminal justice laws in this country since 1984. Sadly, a lot have not stood the test of time, so it will be interesting to see whether the Bill suffers a fate similar to the majority of that legislation or proves more lasting.

I draw attention to a couple of points that will give the Bill a lasting nature, at least in certain areas—the inclusion of the principles of sentencing and the establishment of the Sentencing Guidelines Council, which is an important development for the future. Furthermore, a Bill has begun its life in the other place that will unify magistrates court and Crown court structures and which, equally, will bring significant change. So the package that we shall deal with in this Session contains lasting elements.

I begin my detailed comments by referring to jury trials. It might be helpful to point out that this country uses three classifications of offence. Summary-only offences, by their very nature, do not involve jury trial, as they may be tried only by magistrates summarily. On either-way offences, the defendant has the right to choose either summary trial before a magistrate or trial before a jury in the Crown court. On indictable-only offences, the defendant gets no choice and must be tried before a jury in the Crown court.

I set that out to show the difference between this Bill and the previous Bills through which the Government attempted to make changes to jury trial. The mode of trial Bills aimed at those either-way offences and provided that, instead of the defendant having the choice of where to be tried, the court would say whether that person could be tried by jury.

I remind the House that I was fanatically opposed to that proposal on principle, and I spoke and voted against the Bill that was introduced in this House to give it effect. I was overlooked for service on the Committee, but I returned to the issue on Report and even tabled an amendment, which some Members will recall. It is a great delight to me that the Government have abandoned that way of proceeding on trials and have introduced in this Bill my amendment on magistrates not committing people to the Crown court for sentence if they have dealt with the trial themselves. I feel happy about the Government's attitude to the Bill, although a couple of Members have had difficulty with accepting yes for an answer, even though the Government have said that that is not their intention and it is not what they are doing through this legislation.

I am happy with the changes that have been made there, but there is worry around the House over those offences that are indictable only, but for which the Government propose some change to jury trial. It is worth saying a word about them. On long and complex cases, the matter involves degree rather than principle, because there would be a danger of a jury losing the

battle—losing the thread of what they are there to do because of the sheer weight of the proceedings—owing to a war of attrition in only a small minority of cases. That would occur, I hasten to add, only because of the tactics of the parties to the trial and not because of any difficulty for the jury in coping with complex facts and situations. I entirely agree with those Members who said that jurors are sensible people who can take in a lot. Therefore it follows that I am talking about exceptional cases in which it is right that there should be no jury trial.

The same goes for jury tampering. Surely it is unacceptable to the House that somebody could get an acquittal by tampering with the jury. Obviously, the response normally stops short of saying that there will be no jury to try a certain case, as we can protect a jury and ensure that anyone caught tampering with it is treated as one who has committed a serious criminal offence; and we can limit the number of cases in which a judge has to say, "There is no way that we can have a fair trial with a jury because of the attempt to interfere with that jury." Again, a small number of cases would be involved, but being able to give such a response would be useful weapon in the judge's armoury.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman will have noted the comments on the difficulties that would be likely to arise in practice when a judge continued to hear a case after a jury had been discharged because of tampering. I suggest that, in reality, it would be necessary to start again. He may also agree that, in reality, tampering involving 12 jurors would be unlikely, although it is likely that such a jury would be unable to return a verdict. However, if adequate protection were in place and supplied for the retrial, especially if there were a fear that a previous jury had been tampered with, the chances are that justice would be properly done with a jury. There would be no need for a judge to sit on his own.

Mr. Kidney: The hon. Gentleman's points are contradictory. I agree with and accept the first, which is that it would be difficult for a judge to continue the trial knowing what the judge knows, as he or she would be prejudiced. I do not agree with his second point, however, as there would be few cases in which the judge said, "No amount of protection and no amount of retrial is satisfactory for the conduct of justice in this case. I believe that it needs no jury and a judge-only trial." That may happen, but only in a small number of cases.

The third consequence of the Bill for judge-only trials would arise if the defendant chose such a trial. I spent all my time in the debates on the previous Bill arguing that the defendant's choice should be upheld, so I find it difficult to disagree with the Government on that point now, as they have come round to my view. Disagreeing over that would be an unusual choice, although I see that such events could arise from time to time.

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. He refers to upholding defendant choice—whether he should have jury trial or not—but the Government have included a rider that that choice will be denied in certain cases. Does not that in some way negate their argument, which is, "We are offering you a choice between two systems that we consider to be equally justified—it is up to you."?

Mr. Kidney: May we return to that in Committee? I understand the point but, equally, I understand the Government's worry about some people appearing to have a cosy relationship with judges—they do not need a jury because they will get off if they know the judge.

I want to include a footnote on jury trials in either-way cases, as some provisions, which nobody has objected to tonight, would reduce the number of such trials—again, very modestly. The first would extend magistrates' power of sentence from six months to a maximum of 12. Magistrates would turn away fewer cases that they would have sent to Crown court for trial and keep them for themselves. That would reduce the number of jury trials in itself.

If the provision on a defendant requesting an advance indication of sentence survives to the statute book and if magistrates agree to give such an indication, that would convert some defendants to staying with the magistrates rather than going to Crown court for trial. That, too, would reduce the number of jury trials. For the same reason, custody plus might tempt some people to stay in the magistrates court. Interestingly, there has been no controversy in the House about a smaller number of jury trials resulting from any of those measures.

I hesitate to step into tonight's other controversies. The double jeopardy proposals are very much a response from the whole country to DNA being discovered as a reliable test that almost certainly provides proof positive of someone's guilt of an offence which could not be proved previously because such technology was not available. It was said earlier that this is probably a passing change that involves a few cases in which DNA evidence is available and helps to secure a conviction that could not be secured before. I am happy with that analysis, although none of us can foretell the future or what scientific advances will be made after today. That may mean that the provision remains valid for many years, even after those few DNA cases have been mopped up by the provision.

Tonight's other controversy is the introduction of the defendant's bad character. Interestingly, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) takes no objection to that one. I am happy about that, because I shall take no objection either, provided that the safeguards are right. That matter should be hammered out in Committee.

Clearly, we have been introducing evidence of a defendant's bad character in cases for over a century. A common-law rule and two Acts dating from 1865 and 1898 have permitted it in some circumstances. Nevertheless, we can surely ask from time to time whether the current rules are adequate. I do not think they are, and I think we are entitled to change them slightly if that is what we believe is right in order to ensure fair trials as between prosecution and defence.

The Bill gives us an opportunity to rehabilitate community sentences as a genuine alternative to prison, and to reduce the appallingly large prison population. That means, however, that we must make the community options robust. It does not help us if the media can report that fines need not be paid, and it does

[Mr. Kidney]

not help us if nothing happens to people who break the conditions attached to community sentences. The Government are right to pay attention to such issues, although extra resources will of course be required. The hon. Member for North Down asked for all the resources to go to police officers, but some should go to, for instance, the National Probation Service, so that it can supervise community sentences and their conditions. Otherwise, people may often break the conditions, which will bring the service into disrepute. It will also mean that more people are sent to prison, because that is the only thing that will satisfy the public mood.

I want to say something about what is, in a sense, a local issue. When I met local magistrates and their clerks to discuss the Bill, I was very pleased with their response. They like the extra sentencing powers that they will have—both the powers relating to imprisonment and the wider range of conditions they can attach to community sentences. They also like—subject to the detail—the proposal for a unified system for magistrates courts and Crown courts. That, I thought, was a positive response. Stafford currently exceeds the national average for fine collection, but the magistrates would like the Government to continue their financial support for fine enforcers so that they can maintain that good record.

The magistrates commented that recent media reporting of inadequate arrangements for fine collection had affected their ability to collect fines. People believed newspaper reports that the payment of fines was now optional, and did not pay. That is an interesting message for reporters.

My last point, in fact, concerns reporting. Since when has it been right for most cases heard in my local magistrates court to go unreported by the local media? I think the reporting of cases is part of the fair administration of justice: people should know which members of their community have been to court, and have been convicted. That is the whole point of the saying that justice must not only be done, but be seen to be done. Let me please the Society of Editors by asking the Government not to overlook the need of reporters to be able to report cases. There are substantial obstacles preventing journalists from doing their job in magistrates courts—an issue that I may be able to pursue in more detail if I am fortunate enough to be a member of the Committee on this occasion.

7.33 pm

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Bills of this sort worry me hugely. Like the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), I see no philosophical underpinning for many of the proposed changes. That does not apply to most of the legislation with which we must deal.

The Bill is supported by both Labour and the Conservatives, and of course it contains much that is good. Nevertheless, ending the double-jeopardy rule, allowing hearsay evidence and the admissibility of previous convictions constitute huge changes to our legal system, and, as far as I can tell, they are being proposed for reasons of administrative simplicity rather than on the basis of a deeply held conviction that they are right. They are not about securing justice.

These measures do not form part of Labour's traditional view of justice, or of the judicial system; nor do they emanate from Conservative principles. Indeed, I believe that Conservative principles clearly state the opposite. F.A. Hayek—who has had a profound influence on much Conservative thinking over the past 30 years—pointed out that ancient, and therefore sometimes bafflingly obscure, traditions, tenets and principles had evolved over the centuries as a result of hundreds of thousands of instances of experience, and that the cumulative knowledge gained from those was far beyond the capacity of any one human mind. We may not even understand the reason for a particular tradition until it has been abolished, when the errors and catastrophes that it was designed to avoid start to occur again.

That does not mean that rules cannot evolve. Of course they can evolve and change, particularly through specific precedents in the Court of Appeal. That does not, however, mean the wholesale change proposed in the Bill. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) said in a briefing to *The Independent* in May 2000, ending the double-jeopardy rule would be

"a serious blow for justice in this country".

He said that Britain's "unbreakable" tradition that all citizens are equal before the law and innocent until proved guilty would be "seriously damaged" if the rule was scrapped. He added

"It is a reform I cannot and will not support."

So where do these measures come from? They certainly do not come from philosophical belief, but nor, it seems, do they come from experts and practitioners in the legal profession. We have heard from members of that profession in the Chamber today, but both the Bar Council and the Criminal Bar Association strongly oppose the measures to end double jeopardy. According to their briefing,

"There is a real risk of harassment from the state and press where both believe that the acquitted defendant should be retried . . . There is a real risk that disappointed investigators, particularly in high profile cases may well wish immediately to recommence investigations after an acquittal, particularly if there is pressure from the media, victims or politicians. Those with previous convictions known to the investigating officer would also be a target. Officers with a personal animus against an accused may wish to pursue him despite an acquittal."

If these measures do not stem from philosophical belief and are not demanded by the practitioners, they can only have come from that source of ideas that parties can draw on only when in government—Home Office civil servants, bless them. I fear that once again we are being presented with a Bill based on administrative convenience, with no regard for the historic safeguards that formed the rock on which our freedoms stand. It is a rock that has been chipped away by both parties with increasing speed over the past few years. This is yet another Home Office Bill that deals only with the immediate symptoms, and does nothing to tackle the roots of crime.

The real problem that the Government should be—maybe are—seeking to address in the Bill is the problem of rising crime. Whatever Government figures may suggest, there is no doubt that crime is rising. Britain now experiences more crimes per 100,000 of the population than the United States, Italy, Germany and

a host of other countries. The Government may from time to time produce figures that show something else, but I believe that the fact that we have dealt with 12 criminal justice Bills since 1997 speaks volumes.

The question is, how do we stem the rise in crime? Clause 126 sets out "Purposes of sentencing", which it says are punishment, reduction of crime including deterrence, protection of the public and reparation. I consider deterrence overwhelmingly the most important of those four principles, but if prison is to be a deterrent sentences must be of appropriate and sufficient length. Over the past 30 years prison sentences have become shorter, initially as a left-wing experiment to test the validity of prison but later because, under both parties, there was an attempt to control the ever-growing prison population as crime continued to rise. For example, the maximum prison sentence for burglary is 14 years, but the average sentence is just 22 months.

As a libertarian Conservative I strongly believe in the maximum freedom of the individual. I believe in keeping the number of laws, particularly criminal laws, to the minimum necessary to preserve that freedom. Once a person breaks those laws, however, he should be subject to severe penalties. I believe that the increase in crime over the past 30 years is largely due to the increasing leniency of sentencing, and I am optimistic that the Home Secretary agrees.

For many habitual criminals, a prison sentence is merely an occupational hazard rather than a life-changing catastrophe. Eighteen months in prison is a risk worth taking; eight full years is something else.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I find my hon. Friend's argument compelling, but he has introduced a mechanistic solution to what did appear to be a problem relating to the way in which the bulwarks that society is built on are being undermined. Which is more important, the failure of society to support and educate those who might commit crime, or the failure to punish them sufficiently after the crime has been committed?

Mr. Gibb: My hon. Friend makes a good point about recidivism and rehabilitation in prison, but the important point about the poor recidivism rates in this country is that the sentence itself is not a sufficient deterrent.

I welcome the fact that the Bill contains many provisions to increase maximum sentences, but a lot of discretion will still be left to judges. My concern is that the Bill may well discourage courts from passing further increases in prison sentences. The US has demonstrated beyond any doubt that raising the level of sentences leads to falling crime. For example, in the US, prison sentences for murder are, on average, three years longer than in England; sentences for rape and for robbery are four years longer; and sentences for assault are almost three years longer. Sentences for burglary are two years longer than in England and Wales. The consequence is that burglary rates in the US have declined dramatically since the mid-1980s—from about 75 burglaries per 1,000 households to just 28. Violent crime in the US has fallen year on year since 1994, to the lowest level ever recorded by 2001. In 1994, there were 51 episodes of violent crime per 1,000 population; by 2001, the figure had fallen to 24.

If we in this country are to impose severe penalties on those who have committed crimes, however, we need to be sure that our judicial system is as infallible as humanly possible. We need in place every safeguard possible to avoid errors. We need principles such as the inadmissibility of previous convictions, so that we can be absolutely sure that a jury is not prejudiced in its duty to examine objectively the facts put before it. We need to keep the carefully constructed and evolved set of rules that govern the use of hearsay evidence, to ensure that what the jury is hearing is absolutely what was said. Sweeping away these safeguards will lead to an increase in the number of unsafe convictions, many of which will be traced back to this legislation. Magistrates courts already find 72 per cent. of those tried guilty, and Crown courts find 76 per cent. guilty. As the *Financial Times* commented recently:

"the number of miscarriages of justice highlighted in recent decades does not suggest that the courts err on the side of gullibility."

There must be no shortcuts on the way to prison. Once a person is convicted, they should serve a sentence that is commensurate with the crime committed. If the state takes short cuts to get a conviction, the reputation of the judicial system will suffer as people lose faith in its ability to convict only the guilty. Notwithstanding the measures in the Bill, the consequence of that will undoubtedly be a reluctance to impose long prison sentences, because of a vague feeling that convictions are perhaps unsafe. That in turn will mean that conviction and punishment will continue to fail to provide the deterrent necessary to bring rising crime under control. In other words, a Bill designed ostensibly to help cut crime will actually result in crime continuing to rise.

I believe that the Bill is fundamentally and profoundly flawed. It will fail to deliver what the public want—less crime—while promising to do the opposite. It will fail to ensure that criminals serve sentences that deter them and others from committing crime in future. The public expect such measures, but I fear that they are not what the Bill will deliver. Instead, it will damage the reputation of the judicial system, and above all it will be responsible for a rise in the number of unsafe convictions and the perpetration of deep injustice.

7.44 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): The problem with speaking late on in a debate is not only that most of the good arguments have been made, but so have most of the good jokes. I should begin by declaring an interest—these days, it has to be a vested interest—in that I am a partner in a firm of solicitors.

There are so many aspects of this Bill on which one could comment that the debate could go on for a very long time. With that in mind, I shall seek to address the three salient issues that have troubled Members today, the first of which is, of course, trial by jury. Underlying our comments has been the assumption that every criminal offence can be tried by jury, but as we know—and as my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) wisely pointed out—many offences are summary only, and do not have jury choice. It is only in certain bands that such choice is available. I am committed at least to maintaining the existing bands, so that a defendant retains the choice of being tried by jury.

[Mr. Alan Hurst]

I accept that the two Bills that came to a sorry end in the previous two Sessions were much more wide ranging than the current proposal. One could argue that the latter is pragmatic—that we are seeking to tidy matters up and to help out jurors, so that they do not have to deliberate for too long, and so that we can create a family friendly jury system. However, I am not certain that juries were ever family friendly. Some things in life are by nature quite hard, and the preservation of some of our essential liberties is sometimes a hard task to follow through in its entirety. The fact that jurors may sometimes be inconvenienced when a trial goes on for a long time may not be a sufficient reason, therefore, to allow a further ebbing of the current jury trial system. On the face of it, such a suggestion seems practical and relatively harmless, but therein lies the danger. When something seems harmless, matters creep forward, but when there is an outright onslaught—such as we witnessed in the previous two Bills—it is easy to condemn and to say, "We are not going down that route."

The question of how to deal with the intimidation of a juror has been well explored and answered fully by other Members, but I would go a little further by arguing that we should consider extending jury trial. In essence, trial by jury has been on the defensive for years. The recent Bills that went the way of the frailty of flesh were not in fact the first attacks on jury trial. Over time, various offences have lost the right to elect trial, and have become summary only. I would argue that one category in particular should have the option of trial by jury: allegations of assault or attack on a police officer or other persons in a position of public trust. I say that because those who are charged with such offences should be judged by their fellow citizens. In other words, cases involving victims who are employees of the state should be judged by the citizenry at large. Legislation passed in the 1960s specifically exempted the assaulting of police officers from those categories involving trial by jury, unless it suited the prosecutor to make the charge of actual bodily harm.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Does the hon. Gentleman think that magistrates tend to be too deferential towards, or too believing of, police officers?

Mr. Hurst: That view has been current for many years among those who practise in the criminal courts—prosecutors and defenders alike. For that very reason, in cases where police officers or other public officials are the victims, it is even more important for the defendants to have the right to elect jury trial.

Prosecutors get a very bad press these days, but in the main they are wily people. In the past few years, it has become the practice that, where the injuries on the victim clearly constitute actual bodily harm, trial by jury can be elected. The prosecutor or the police may well decide to make the charge of common assault, because by so doing they will deny trial by jury. It could be argued that that subterfuge is an insult to the victim. The victim has clearly been assaulted—they have suffered actual bodily harm—but the defendant is charged with common assault, which used to be regarded as the most trifling of matters. Perhaps we need to look again at the question of which offences are summary, and which are either-way. There needs to be an adjustment back in favour of jury trial, rather than continuing on the road to excluding it.

I shall touch briefly on the question of double jeopardy. We humble solicitors in the magistrates courts do not often deal with great cases, at least not with their final stages, although I know that some learned and hon. Members have done so. However, it is possible to see the grave difficulty that could arise from the proposal in the Bill. It has been argued that we should be allowed to reopen cases in which evidence based on later scientific advances, such as DNA testing, had not been available. We were told that protection and safeguards would be put in place, so that the information would not percolate down to the second trial jury.

However, there are newspapers in foreign countries such as Scotland, the Republic of Ireland, France and so on. People who travel will be able to read in lurid detail about a trial, as they allegedly did about the Duke of Windsor and Mrs. Simpson. People who travelled abroad knew about that case, whereas those who stayed at home did not. Those of us who live near Stansted know that everyone now travels abroad, and that similar information would be widely spread.

Even if people did not travel so widely, there is no doubt that titbits of judicial and legal gossip would be peddled on the internet. Few jurors would be able to approach a case fresh, saying that they knew nothing about it. They will know about any such case, as it will be notorious.

If we adopt the proposal in the Bill, there will be no verdict of acquittal, but of "not proven, yet". Essentially, the ending of the double jeopardy rule would mean that all cases that did not result in a guilty verdict would be considered to be "not proven, yet". That would remain the decision until the state decided to open up the matter again, with the leave of the courts.

Like other hon. Members, I shall touch on the matter of character and previous convictions. I admire the confidence of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews). It is no trouble for him to brush aside the fact that a client may have a number of convictions. I concede that there may be times when that would be the right thing to do, tactically. Generally, however, as the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) noted, most jurors are likely to say, "If he's done it before, why not this time?"

For example, a person with previous burglary convictions might be charged with, say, drink driving. The proposal in the Bill would mean that that person's character could be attacked. What about the difficulties arising from a person's demeanour or dress? If the person charged with drink driving arrived in court with a briefcase, the prosecution could say that he should have a striped jersey and a bag bearing the word "swag", and that he was a burglar trying to delude the court into thinking that he was a clerical worker.

We can go down a ludicrous road and make it almost impossible for a defendant's character not to have a bearing on a case. If that happens, the balance will shift heavily towards conviction. That may be the purpose of the change. However, the balance will also shift in favour of trial by judge alone. If a person faces the risk

that all of his past life could come out before a jury, he may well opt, if the case is one for which it is permitted, for trial by judge alone.

For those reasons, I hope that it is clear that I have my doubts about some of the important parts of the Bill. The evil to be remedied may not be sufficient to justify the evils of the remedy. I am concerned about the Bill. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and other Ministers will think hard and long about these matters as the Bill passes through the House.

7.54 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Like many of those hon. Members who have spoken before, I accept the need to reform the criminal justice system, but not at the expense of increasing the risk that innocent people will be convicted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) has outlined the three problems that especially concern Liberal Democrat Members. The same concerns have been expressed by hon. Members of all parties, in particular about the need to retain trial by jury.

The three main issues have been discussed pretty thoroughly and, as the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) said, by this time of the evening there is some repetition of the points to be covered. I shall therefore look at other issues, but I do not in any way belittle the importance of the three issues that are of such great concern.

I welcome some of the proposals in the Bill. In particular, I welcome the recognition that the rehabilitation of offenders is a major goal of sentencing. I look forward to further developments in terms of restoration and reparation, and I welcome the comments made by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon).

In a general sense, it is important to go beyond what is being said about crime and examine some of the potential outcomes. We need to get right the perspective and balance involved in being tough on crime and its causes. All hon. Members share the aim of controlling and reducing crime, but an overwhelming emphasis on being tough on crime has had unintended consequences that have exacerbated existing problems and created others. In saying that, I realise that I am rather disagreeing with the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Braintree.

Although the Lord Chief Justice and many other key figures have publicly recognised that we should send fewer people to prison, and that short prison sentences generally serve no useful purpose, it seems that the phrase "tough on crime" has merely come to mean that more people are locked up. There are more than 72,000 people in prison in this country, and more than half of our prisons are overcrowded. Attempts by the Prison Service to make prison a constructive experience are being seriously hindered. Reoffending rates are still as high as 60 per cent.—although I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn), will tell me that they are falling—and the rates are even higher for juveniles and young offenders.

On 30 September this year, there were 2,633 children locked up in 25 jails in England and Wales. Young girls are being held in adult prisons, despite a commitment to remove all those under 18 from prison by April 2000. In both instances, there are huge issues concerning the distances from home at which those young people are being held.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Would the hon. Lady care to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), who spoke about the situation in the US? Over the past few years, longer sentences have led directly to a decrease in crime there. What is the hon. Lady's response to that?

Mrs. Brooke: I have a coherent argument, from which I shall not digress. However, when we talk about shorter sentences, we are talking about sentences that are of less than 12 months. I would need much more specific information about the length of the sentences involved before I responded to the hon. Gentleman's question.

Last week, the Howard League for Penal Reform won a judicial review against the Home Office. The High Court decided that the Children Act 1989 applied to children held in prison. Today, I saw for the first time the press statement issued by the Home Secretary, and one sentence leaped off the page at me. I was somewhat horrified. It said:

"The court has ruled that one sentence of our policy document needs to be corrected to reflect this."

The matter is very important, as this was an historic judgment. To be fair to the Home Secretary, I should add that the statement goes on to say that there is deep concern and that many things need to be improved.

We are talking about reforming the criminal justice system, but what are we doing to improve the treatment of children? The criminal justice system should treat the children who come before the courts as children whose behaviour has been unacceptable, rather than as criminals who happen to be children. The Bill is sometimes not clear about whether its provisions would apply to minors as well as adults. That problem will need much scrutiny.

For example, mention has been made of the definition of bad character. I am not sure about whether that applies to minors. I would also like the alcohol treatment requirement to be applied to minors, but that is not entirely clear. It seems unbalanced that under-18s can be eligible for drug testing and treatment but not for alcohol treatment, but we know that alcohol is an enormous problem among young people.

I always like to welcome the many positive initiatives in our local communities that the Government have introduced. I know that some people have concerns about proposals for parent orders and that there are questions about them, but research shows that they have produced very good results. Similarly, there are questions about referral orders, but we need to consider the research.

Individual support orders will accompany antisocial behaviour orders. As I have said many times, I dislike the idea of having a stop measure alone, without accompanying measures. I will be interested to see what is involved in an individual support order.

Being tough on crime has the connotation of locking more and more people up. It costs the taxpayer a great deal of money and, in certain circumstances,

[Mrs. Brooke]

it reinforces criminal behaviour. At least one newspaper report has suggested that the changes proposed in the Bill could result in having more than 100,000 prisoners before the end of the decade. That would cost an extra £2 billion a year on top of the £3 billion a year that the Prison Service already costs us.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Brooke: I should like to make progress.

Some proposals in the Bill could have advantages, such as that to introduce a new indeterminate sentence for serious violent offenders. In very exceptional circumstances, and with certain caveats, that could have advantages, for example, it would enable an offender's progress to be regularly reviewed during a prison sentence so that he could be released if and when it was safe so to do. However, it is important that there is ultimately a court decision on that offender.

In principle, I welcome the new custody plus sentence, which will ensure that short-term prisoners are subject to supervision on release. At present, short-term prisoners receive little in the way of rehabilitation while in prison and are not under supervision when they leave. Not surprisingly, they have a high rate of reconviction and are responsible for much of the high-volume crime that is so troublesome and distressing. However, if custody plus sentencing is to be successful, it must be backed by resources to fund probation service supervision and efforts by voluntary agencies to help with accommodation, employment and mentoring. That is crucial to prevent reoffending.

I recently raised with the Department the issue of adequate funding in relation to early release with tagging. I was given the impression that the money was being spent. However, a number of agencies and organisations share my concern about resources. Indeed, it will take time to recruit and train sufficient probation officers even with adequate resourcing. The Howard League for Penal Reform suggests that the proposal should be deferred until it can be delivered properly. That would be a shame because it is a good proposal, but it shows the strength of concern about the need for probation officers to be in place to make tagging work properly.

There is a risk with the custody plus sentence in so far as the courts may find it an attractive proposition for offenders who currently receive community sentences. It is crucial that the sentencing framework strongly dissuades courts from passing short-term prison sentences as opposed to a straightforward community sentence. There are opportunities to develop excellent practices across the country with community sentencing. We need to avoid a situation in which more people end up in prison because they have defaulted on a community sentence. To my mind, having a tough community sentence means having a good one that works—people stay on it and it leads to a reformation of behaviour.

I have some doubts about the proposed intermittent custody sentences. There is an attraction in the argument that offenders will be able to maintain jobs, family ties and education. The burden on society is less and there are positive contributions. However, an offender considered for such a punishment will not be perceived as a threat to society. I wonder whether it is right to put such people into our already overcrowded prisons, creating extra administrative burdens and burdens relating to travel. Will it be a workable proposal?

The proposal to empower magistrates courts to pass prison sentences of up to 12 months could also prove to be a mixed blessing. It will reduce waiting times on remand if offenders who would otherwise have been committed to the Crown court are dealt with by magistrates instead, but there is the possibility that magistrates may pass prison sentences of nine or 12 months where the Crown courts might have imposed a community sentence or a shorter prison sentence. We must be very sure about our guidelines.

I believe that it is important to have consistent leaderships at all levels to support a reduced use of custody in appropriate circumstances to make sentencing truly make sense. I am excluding serious and dangerous offenders from my comments, because I agree with other hon. Members that imprisonment should be a penalty of last resort when no other sentence is adequate for the protection of the public and the severity of the crime. It is so important to develop well-supported, worthwhile community sentences with the objective of being smart on crime. Above all, we need to be effective on the causes of crime by tackling them with better educational, housing and employment opportunities and well-structured youth programmes. These issues must not be forgotten when changes are made to the criminal justice system. The early intervention through sure start is a major breakthrough and we are beginning to see excellent work with crime and disorder partnerships and the youth offending teams. However, there is so much more to be done, and we must not forget that while we are debating the details of the Bill.

8.7 pm

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): I would like to turn the focus of the debate on to the victims and communities suffering from crime, as that does not seem to have been addressed so far. Those communities and people, in working-class and deprived areas, face crime on a daily basis. They face crime committed against their families, themselves and the wider community. They will understand and support the measures in the Bill. Those are the people for whom I wish to speak today.

Those people understand implicitly the comments of the Home Secretary when he said recently that when the criminal justice system works badly, everyone suffers. He said that at the moment, too many offenders escape justice and cases drop out at every stage of the process, often because of court practices that need modernising or because of tactical manoeuvres designed to disrupt the justice process and secure acquittal of the guilty. The fundamental principle remains that the prosecution must prove its case, but that does not mean that the system should enable a defendant to obstruct justice by inaction or by abuse of the system.

The people with whom I am concerned understand that only a fifth of the cases taken up by the police result in conviction. They know that the criminal justice

system is letting them down. It is to them that we owe a duty to improve the system and to improve the quality of their life and security, which is impaired by crime every day.

I support the measures in the Bill with very few reservations. I will comment briefly on only a few because of the time constraints.

Clause 3 allows for street bail, which should give police officers greater flexibility in dealing with offenders. A Library research paper noted that if only 10 per cent. of arrests were dealt with in that way, 390,000 patrol officer hours could be saved—equivalent to 200 police officer posts. That potential alone should recommend the clause.

Clause 5 will extend the detention time limit for any arrestable offence to a maximum of 36 hours. That period applies only to serious offences at present. Although I am not fully convinced of the need for the proposal, I am prepared to accept the contention of the Association of Chief Police Officers that the initial detention period may provide insufficient time for the investigation due to delays elsewhere in the custody process; for example, when intoxication renders a suspect unfit for interview, the provision will be helpful.

Clause 23 deals with conditions on bail before a charge is made. I concur fully with the conclusion of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, which states:

"We accept that a power to impose conditions on bail before charge is a necessary and logical part of the move towards charging by the Crown Prosecution Service."

Clause 84 is one of the most controversial elements of the Bill. It will allow evidence of a defendant's bad character to be admissible automatically in a range of specified circumstances. I take a simple view of that matter—as will my constituents. Most of them cannot understand why a person's record is not revealed automatically, and I agree with them.

Many of my constituents have heard criminals outside the court boast about their criminal record. What is good enough outside court should be good enough in court. No one has thrust a criminal record at such people. They gain their CV of their own accord by breaking the law, so my constituents and I believe that their full CV should be available to the law when they appear in court.

Although I should like to refer to many other clauses, I shall speak briefly on double jeopardy and then on trial by jury. It would be completely intolerable if the murderer of a child was acquitted and subsequently DNA evidence became available. My community could not support that and nor could I. I do not understand the principle involved. If somebody commits a heinous crime and evidence—especially DNA evidence—crops up later, why should that person get away with their crime? Why should not the state have a second bite at that cherry?

If such people are acquitted, it is because they have lied to the court. Why should people be allowed to benefit from lying to the court? My constituents cannot understand that and nor can I. If people have lied to the court and new and compelling evidence has been uncovered, we should have a second chance to hear the case.No one should benefit from lies. No one should escape the consequences of their crime.

The proposals on trial by jury are not a complete assault on the jury system. The provision is small but positive and deals with lengthy and complex issues. They may involve intimidation of jurors, terrorism cases, gangsterism or organised crime. If juries are intimidated, it is right and proper that cases should not fall by the wayside or be affected by such actions.

Finally, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on the reasoned and reasonable way in which he introduced the Bill to the House. I wish him and his team every success in steering the Bill to a successful conclusion.

8.15 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): May I point out to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) that middle-class communities are just as entitled to the protection of the law and that they feel the impact of crime as severely as other groups? Of course, I recognise that crime makes the greatest impact on working-class and deprived communities and we should bear that in mind at all times.

The Bill is good in parts, but it has no fundamental underlying principle, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) pointed out. I welcome some of its provisions, which give me hope, but I regret others. I also regret that there have been some omissions.

I welcome the proposal that the disclosure of previous convictions should become easier. I do not share the view that a jury cannot be trusted with that information. As I said during the debate on the Gracious Speech, for many years an underlying failure of those of us who rule or who are elected to this place has been that we do not trust the public with information to which they are entitled and that we would expect to receive.

I also welcome the changes in eligibility for the avoidance of jury service. We can hardly criticise juries for being incapable of taking on board the information that they are given, whether it relates to previous convictions or to difficult fraud cases, if those who are more capable, at least by education or profession, find it easy to escape their civic responsibilities for jury service.

I welcome those two provisions, but I have a greater number of regrets. I regret the proposed reduction in eligibility for jury trial. The Government have not yet made their case. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have observed, the Government began by attacking jury trial from one direction and are now attacking it from another.

Although I accept that some cases are especially difficult or time consuming, it cannot be impossible to empanel a jury that is capable of devoting enough time and energy to its civic responsibility. I respect the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) and I listened carefully to his arguments, but I am still unable to understand why he supports the change.

There are several omissions on which I invite the Minister to comment. One of the omissions is very narrow, but I feel it particularly in my constituency, which, as the Minister will know, has three prisons, one of which has an enviable record in the treatment of sex offenders. However, it also imprisons people from the Channel Islands, which have a different judicial process.

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

The Channel Islands do not have the same safeguards on release as those for people imprisoned in this jurisdiction. The arrangements for the supervision of prisoners released from Albany who have served sentences imposed by Channel Islands' courts are different. That is a matter of concern to some of my constituents. They fear that those prisoners, when released, can remain in my constituency or in other parts of the United Kingdom without supervision. That supervision would be definitely imposed on those who have been convicted in this jurisdiction.

The second issue on which I hope some changes will be made as the Bill progresses through the House and the other place is that of pleas in mitigation. Those in the legal profession, whom the Home Secretary likes to malign from time to time, deserve every bit of the Home Secretary's opinion of them where they exercise the greatest inventiveness with the least possible evidence to demonstrate to judges and magistrates why a convicted defendant should not serve an appropriate sentence.

I am sure that judges and perhaps many magistrates will say that they can see through the arguments put by the defending solicitor when he comes up with a host of stories about how the criminal has perhaps suffered a deprived childhood or has just made up with his girlfriend—and they do—or perhaps has found a job and that any kind of custodial sentence would mean that the job would be lost. However, a great weakness in the whole system is that the truth or accuracy of those assertions is not tested in court. All that the solicitor has to say is, "I am instructed that these are the circumstances in which my client finds himself." The judge or magistrate must judge entirely for himself, without any evidence, whether those claims are accurate.

A third omission, on which I should like further work to be done, is that of unduly lenient sentences. Many hon. Members will perhaps be surprised to hear that they, the prosecution and the victims of crime have only 28 days to refer a case of an allegedly unduly lenient sentence to the Attorney-General for action. I argue not that 28 days is too short a period, but that more information should be made available, particularly to the victims of crime, as to their powers to take back such matters to the Crown Prosecution Service or the Attorney-General.

The failure of judges to impose what are seen as reasonable sentences is perhaps one of the greatest irritants to the public. They see that the police have taken the trouble to secure the evidence, the CPS has taken the trouble to prosecute and the courts have provided a conviction, yet the judge is convinced for some reason or other that a short rather than a lengthy sentence is appropriate.

I have dealt with such a case in my constituency this week. It involves someone who died after being intentionally kicked by a drunken man who had made threats of killing and had intimidated other witnesses. He received a two-year sentence. I am pleased to say that I have had the opportunity to refer the case to the Attorney-General.

The Bill fails to deal with a huge setback to the effective treatment of life prisoners: the recent judgment about the Home Secretary's powers to set a tariff. Perhaps Ministers intend to deal with that by some means or other in the Bill, but I believe that we should reverse the judgment. There is no means to deal with the issue effectively other than to give back to the Home Secretary the powers that he had before that judgment. I do not wish to be told that that is an unexpected or unwarranted effect of the Human Rights Act 1998. The Government are responsible for that Act and, if necessary, they must admit that it was wrong.

I also hope that the Government, having dealt with many minor changes, will now develop some serious measures to tackle crime and to defend the innocent. Those measures must deal effectively with the causes of crime, one of the most significant of which is the drugs culture. Another of those causes is poor and inadequate parenting, a third is human greed and folly, and a fourth is the simple failure of many people to control primitive urges. Underlying the latter two is something that, all too frequently, we fail to spell out to our constituents and to others—that there is a link between cause and effect.

At the risk of resorting to anecdote, I shall tell the story of someone in my constituency who has now been evicted from her council house by the Medina housing association. I congratulate the association on that eviction because her children persistently offended neighbours. Her argument was that they were only children, and that it was not her responsibility. It is, of course, her responsibility, and the Minister agrees that it is. Far too many people are beginning to feel that not only are they not responsible for the acts of their children and grandchildren, they are no longer responsible for their own acts. Only when we address that and re-establish the link between cause and effect will we truly succeed in conquering the causes of crime.

8.26 pm

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this important debate on an important Bill. I shall concentrate on parts 10 and 11 of the Bill, which, as we know, contain some of the most controversial measures. They would abolish two long-standing principles of common law by which the rights of the accused have hitherto been protected: the double jeopardy rule and the rules governing the admissibility of evidence of bad character in criminal proceedings.

At the outset, I want to set out the analytical framework that guides me as I approach those two proposals. It is made up of just three basic principles, but I believe it to be robust. First, the purpose of the criminal justice system is twofold: not just to protect the innocent from the guilty but to protect the innocent from conviction. Secondly, the criminal justice system must therefore permit evidence to be adduced by the prosecutor if, but only if, the prejudice done to the defendant is justified by the probative value of that evidence. Thirdly, we should prevent evidence of that probative value from being admitted to the court only if that is justified by some other public interest of compelling importance. With those three basic principles in mind, let me look first at the rule on double jeopardy and then at the rules on the admissibility of evidence of bad character, and thereby come to a conclusion on the Government's current proposals.

As the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) said, the rule on double jeopardy is ancient, dating back some 800 years in our common law tradition. I agree, therefore, that it is hardly a rule that we should discard lightly and without deep reflection guided by the principles that I have described. I must say, however, that a lot happens over eight centuries. Eight hundred years ago, we did not have the advantage of contemporary forensic science. No second trial all those years ago could have brought forth previously missed evidence, capable of proving the identity of someone from a spot of blood too small for the human eye to see. All of that has changed. Forensic scientists are now capable of assisting the judicial process in ways that would have been wholly unimaginable to our forefathers. First came fingerprinting, and then genetic fingerprinting—DNA testing. I must tell the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden that progress will continue. It does not stop now. There will be corneal mapping and facial mapping. All sorts of different scientific advantages and advances will be available to future generations.

Those technical advances can bring forward compelling evidence of probative value that could not have been adduced when the double jeopardy rule was first established. When such evidence can prove conclusively the innocence of someone accused of crime, it is admissible because of that probative value, and because the innocent should not be convicted. Likewise, when such evidence can prove conclusively the innocence of someone previously found guilty of a crime, it is admissible, so that an appeal against conviction can succeed. Indeed, when such evidence can prove conclusively the guilt of someone for the first time accused of an offence, it is again admissible, and quite properly so. Its probative value demonstrably justifies the prejudice that would be occasioned to the defendant.

We must therefore ask ourselves a fairly basic question. What on earth is the compelling public interest reason that demands that when exactly the same evidence of identical probative value can help prove the guilt of someone previously found innocent of a serious crime, our criminal system must by operation of law ignore it? The reason cannot be for fear that a second trial can never be fair, because we already allow second trials and we know that they can be fair. It should never be for fear of sloppy police investigations. That would be a truly appalling basis upon which to frame the legislation of this country.

Surely to goodness, the reason cannot be for fear of oppression by an over-zealous prosecutor. That made sense 800 years ago when the rule was first established, in an age of trial by torture and mediaeval monarchs. Then, the rule had genuine civilising purposes. It was to protect the citizen from the oppression of the state and to prevent the mediaeval monarch from dragging his opponents repeatedly to the court, subjecting those citizens to the stress, ordeal and expense of repeat trials. Then we did not have the Human Rights Act 1998 and the police and criminal evidence procedures that we have now to protect against the abuses of processes. Now we have protections against such oppression.

Quite simply, the march of time has done away with the justification for double jeopardy—when judged against the guiding principles—through advances in science, human rights law and criminal procedures. If the criminal justice system fails to catch up with those changes, and if, for no good reason, it fails to allow such evidence to be adduced, it will fail to achieve one of its two principal purposes. It will fail to protect the innocent from the guilty. That will bring the criminal justice system into disrepute.

Mr. Grieve *rose—*

Mr. Stinchcombe: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to finish my remarks? I know that hon. Friends wish to speak.

If the criminal justice system fails to catch up, the parents of raped and murdered sons and daughters will be told by scientists that the villains—the people who committed the crime—are known and have been identified, but are walking free.

I want to apply the same consistent principles to the Government's second proposal—to abolish the rules that prevent evidence of previous bad character from being admitted save in exceptional circumstances. Does that proposal meet the tests of principle that I have set out? I have to say to my hon. Friend the Minister that the answer is a little less clear.

Those common law rules have been developed by judges over the centuries precisely to apply the three principles by which we should be guided. The very reason for the common law prohibition on the general admissibility of evidence of past convictions is that such evidence can be massively prejudicial to the accused, while having absolutely no probative value at all in respect of the offence with which the accused is currently charged. In lay terms, proving someone was a naughty boy before does not remotely mean that he has been a naughty boy again.

The common law therefore requires more than the existence of a past conviction before it can be admitted in evidence. It generally requires more even than conviction for the same offence. Indeed, admitting evidence of that past conviction would be even more obviously prejudicial to the accused, without necessarily raising the probative value of the fact of that past conviction one little bit. What the common law requires before a past conviction can be admitted in evidence is something beyond the fact of that conviction. It requires something additional and something sufficient to raise the probative value of that conviction, so that it justifies the prejudice that would be caused to the accused.

It could be that the past conviction was for an offence that was "strikingly similar". That would admit it in evidence. The common law recognises the additional probative value of that fact. It could be something different, as the leading House of Lords case makes clear. However, there should be something to increase probative value before the conviction can be admitted in evidence. I speak as a lawyer, and that seems to be good law. It is in accordance with the principles that I have set out. However, the Bill would do away with that common law and replace it with a new extended statutory code, whereby numerous preconditions for the admissibility of the fact of the conviction are set, including, for example, whether the conviction was for an offence of the same description as the one with which the defendant is now charged. That inevitably means that all such convictions might routinely be admitted in

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evidence without anything to raise their evidential value. That is precisely what the common law has been developed to prevent, because it would be unfair to the accused.

That in turn raises a question of fundamental principle, which I hope my hon. Friend will address. Do the Government want the courts to admit evidence of past convictions even if the probative value of the convictions does not justify the prejudice to the accused? I do not believe that that is the Government's intention, but if it is, I simply disagree with them. If it is not their intention, however, I cannot understand the benefit of this part of the Bill.

Indeed, there are risks in introducing the extended statutory code in place of common law. One of the benefits of common law over statutory codes is that it is flexible. It is capable of developing to meet new circumstances when the words of legislation are fixed. If we continue to take this route in what is otherwise a good Bill, we could end up removing flexible rules—designed by judges over countless years to meet the three principles by which we should be guided, and are guided in other parts of the Bill—and replacing them with a rigid code, possibly incomplete, whereby evidence might be adduced even though its prejudice to the accused outweighs its true probative value. With the greatest respect, I suggest that if we did that, we would not much improve the existing criminal justice system.

8.36 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): It is a great privilege to take part in the debate. Unlike many hon. Members present, I am not a lawyer. I am not necessarily proud of that, unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). I recognise that lawyers are valuable members of society. They dispense justice and ensure that victims are afforded protection. Nevertheless, I am a lay person and speak with perhaps a little trepidation.

I have twice served on a jury in the Old Bailey. In the past few months alone, I have twice been a victim of crime when I suffered from theft and criminal damage. MPs do not live in another world from their constituents; we live in it alongside them and experience what they experience.

I am convinced that in emphasising law and order in this legislative Session, the Government are addressing the public's No. 1 concern. From talking to my constituents and seeing them in my advice surgery week by week, and from the information that I have gathered from the survey and polls that I have conducted extensively in my constituency, I know that their No. 1 concern is crime, antisocial behaviour and the fear of crime. Notwithstanding the many problems that we have to tackle in our public services and elsewhere, my constituents say to me time and time again that crime and antisocial behaviour is their No. 1 concern. So I understand why the Government have emphasised doing something about it.

I was struck by the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). He said that in tackling the problem the emphasis should be on apprehension. He said that 80 per cent. or so of crimes are undetected and do not get anywhere near the criminal justice system. We should remind ourselves that that is not the tip of the iceberg—that would be putting it too strongly—but a vast mass of crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour is committed from which our constituents suffer daily. Sadly, such behaviour never gets near the criminal justice system because, perhaps, the police are not there to prevent it, there is no evidence or our constituents are too scared to give evidence to enable due process. To coin a phrase, we should be concerned about apprehension, apprehension, apprehension. That will have the greatest effect for constituents.

On prisons, my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) cited interesting evidence on the experience in the United States of America, to which I referred in an intervention, where there is a direct connection between increasing prison sentences and the reduction of crime. We should look at that evidence carefully and try to establish whether there is indeed a causal link between the two factors.

My hon. Friend was also right to point out that although the average sentence passed by British courts is 14 years, on average only 22 months are served. That is a cause of great concern to our constituents. Time and again, we hear people say that a criminal was sentenced to so many years in prison but is out after a much shorter period, often only a matter of months.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) pointed out in an intervention, the decline in crime in this country in the mid-1990s was directly related to the increase in the number of prison sentences and the length of those sentences. That also has lessons for us as we face these serious problems.

I am delighted to see the emphasis in the Bill on rehabilitation in prison. Obviously, it is extremely sad and regrettable that people commit crime, and we all regret the distress caused to our constituents as a result. However, once the offender has been identified, the question is how we can reform his character to make sure that he does not go on committing crimes.

The other day I heard evidence about prisons in Merseyside. One, which is run by Group 4, has one of the highest rates of rehabilitation work among prisoners, providing effective education in a structured programme throughout the day. That was compared with similar prisons in the area, where prisoners do not have the same opportunities for study and work and for improvement, largely because their schedules are arranged pretty much for the convenience of the prison warders. I ask the Minister to look into the practice in different prisons and different management regimes to see whether we can learn from best practice and export it to prisons throughout the UK. All prisoners should have the best possible chance of improving themselves so that they do not commit crime when they come out.

It is excellent that the Bill contains measures to focus on drug rehabilitation in our prisons. I cannot believe that I am the only Member of the House who is astounded by the amount of drugs available to prisoners. That is something that I cannot understand and I do not accept, and I do not believe that our constituents accept it. We know that drugs are rife in society and that they are responsible for some

80 per cent. of the crime committed on our streets. However, it is wholly unacceptable that convicted criminals can continue their drug habit when they go to prison—often, we are led to believe, with the connivance of the prison officers, because being able to control the prisoners makes their own lives easier. I urge the Minister to do whatever is in his power and that of the Home Office to make sure that drugs are not freely circulating in our prisons. We certainly need to concentrate on that problem.

I was struck by the remarks of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), who went through the characteristics that prisoners tend to have. We know that they tend to come from low-income backgrounds and areas of high unemployment and that they are likely to have experienced bad housing. Those are all issues that we need to address, and the Government are trying to do that. That is probably the part of their programme that relates to their slogan about being tough on the causes of crime, and that is right.

However, I hoped the Liberal Democrat spokesman would include in that category family background and parenting, which were rightly touched on my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). I was talking to a sergeant in Dunstable police station the other day about that subject, and he suddenly looked at me and said, "Now I think of it, not one of the 12 top criminals in the Dunstable area has a conventional family background." We can argue about cause and effect, and I agree with many Government Members that poverty, bad housing and unemployment lead to family breakdown—there is a vicious circle—although that is not the case for many families. However, we must get real—the Government must address seriously the things that it can tackle. Initiatives like sure start are excellent, but much more needs to be done. We need a national debate focusing on responsibility in our schools, and on the relationship between parents and children in families. Again, my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight discussed that.

My own constituency does not qualify for sure start despite the fact that it has significant pockets of deprivation. However, I commend Homestart, an excellent charity in Leighton Buzzard, as well as the community link project of the Baptist church in Houghton Regis, which I visited last Friday, on its excellent and worthwhile work with parents and young children.

I very much identify with the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset about the need for juries to be local and accessible. He painted a picture of justice gradually retreating from some of our smaller towns and being focused in larger centres, where it was dispensed more professionally by district judges and so on. That has a strong resonance in my own constituency—Leighton Buzzard has lost its magistrates court, and witnesses and victims must make a long and difficult journey by public transport to court in Luton. How many witnesses will not come forward if they cannot get to court because travel is too difficult, or because they have to take too long off work to give evidence? Justice must be local to be effective. I urge the Government to look at the closure of magistrates courts throughout the country. If they restore them to local communities, that will help them to achieve their objectives.

As for double jeopardy, where there is clear new evidence, the Government's proposals make sense—I agree with the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) on that. However, the presumption of innocence is an important fundamental tenet of English law. Getting rid of the double jeopardy principle may contravene the European Union's charter of fundamental rights, a matter that has been raised previously by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), and we need to look at that.

8.48 pm

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this interesting and important debate. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe), I was going to concentrate on two key areas of the Bill that may delay us in the Committee—if I have the honour of serving on it. I shall deal in passing with one of the most contentious aspects of the Bill—jury trial. The Opposition spokesman seemed to be in great difficulty when he dealt with that issue, which leads to me to wonder what is behind the questioning of the Government's reasons for changing jury trial, as set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) appeared to posit an equivalence between the lay magistracy and jury trial, but anyone who has practised in the courts will know that the opposite is true. Defendants elect for jury trial because they want to get away from lay magistrates. It is nonsensical to say that we are denying people's right to appear before their peers within the magistrates system and the jury system. I wonder why the right hon. Gentleman is seeking to make that link; it is not a real link.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about professionalisation of the magistracy—the deputy judges. When I practised in the lower courts many years ago, the defendants whom I came across were happy to appear before stipendiary magistrates. They were dealt with better and faster. Stipendiary magistrates understood cases, and defendants trusted them more than they trusted lay magistrates. Again, I question the right hon. Gentleman's logic.

It has been said that there is no theme in the Bill and that it is a sort of Churchillian pudding. I strongly disagree with that. There is a simple theme, which is about addressing the rights and responsibilities of the criminal justice system so that it focuses more on the rights of the victim. Talking about the number of Criminal Justice Bills is a cheap debating point. There may be one or two more than we would like, but we cannot abdicate our responsibility to get the system right. That is what the Bill is designed to do, and I welcome it. Broadly, that is what most Members are saying.

It has been said that the measure is a populist Bill designed to make a headline. I do not understand that. When my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary introduced the Bill this afternoon he dealt with some of the issues in an attractive and helpful way. On sensitive issues—those of crime and disorder—the Government are encouraging debate about the fundamentals of our criminal justice system. It is wrong-headed to argue that the Government are seeking to be populist while

[Stephen Hesford]

encouraging a debate on what might be seen as a difficult issue for them; no doubt the Opposition would say that in terms of delivery, it certainly is difficult.

My right hon. Friend mentioned enforcement, and talked about seeking the truth during the trial process. I welcome that suggestion. I reject the suggestion of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), who said that the trial process is not about seeking the truth. It should be. Some of the measures set out in the Bill are about redressing the balance of the process so as to do just that. The process is not a philosophical game or a tug of war, to determine who is best on the day. It must be more sophisticated than that. Some of the measures proposed in the Bill address that problem.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Hesford: No; I am sorry, but I will give way on another occasion.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned enforcement. I have in mind two of my constituents. Mr. Yeardsley lives on a working-class housing estate at Woodchurch. He was assaulted more than two years ago and was awarded compensation by the courts. The defendant still has not paid the compensation to that elderly gentleman, who comes to see me regularly with a look that is heart-rending. To use an American term, he says that he cannot have closure. He says, "All I can think about is this toerag"—that is the word that he uses—"who assaulted me. He is still out there and he has still not paid his dues."

The second constituent is a serving police officer who was assaulted in the course of his duty. He was awarded compensation, and is still waiting for it. He got in touch with me and asked, "How can I trust the system?" The Bill reconnects the system to those whom it is supposed to serve.

The Bill is courageous. The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), who is not in her place, mentioned an article in *The Times* yesterday. It was a good, short write-up of the some of the points that we are debating. *The Times* also contained an interview with Lord Falconer, who spoke plainly about the reasons for the Bill, and for entertaining such difficult issues. He said:

> "The criminal justice system is not effective and needs reform. About 20 per cent. of recorded crimes are brought to justice, 25 per cent. of offenders commit offences while on bail, 48 per cent. of prosecution files are not properly prepared, 30,000 trials a year are abandoned because witnesses do not turn up, and more than 50 per cent. of defendants who are sentenced to custody or community penalties reoffend within two years."

That is a sorry catalogue.

Many parts of the Bill are welcome: street bail, live links in criminal proceedings, the prosecution appeal against early termination, disclosure, drug rehabilitation requirements, widening jury service to pull in the middle classes, and conditional cautions. I suggest to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that we should make breaching the conditional caution an offence, so that the system does not go straight from breach of caution to dealing with the original offence. There could be a halfway measure, which would be only a summary offence and might help to maintain the integrity of the caution process without burdening the system downstream.

It has been said that lawyers do not like double jeopardy, but I am sure that most hon. Members received the same Law Society briefing as me, and the Law Society now supports the change. Justice, which is not a right-wing organisation, also supports the provision. It says:

> "this is particularly necessary to deal with the effectively short-term problem of the development of DNA and other scientific testing."

Other hon. Members made that point.

I support the Bill's provision on bad character. The Law Commission also broadly supports it in its report, "Evidence of Bad Character in Criminal Proceedings", published in October, which said:

> "The Commission believes that all the rules on admissibility of bad character should be contained in one regulation"

and:

> "there is currently too much confusion in the current law."

The provision would help to codify a complicated area of law, as has already been suggested.

The Times yesterday also included an interview with Dame Heather Hallett, a High Court judge.

Ross Cranston: It was very interesting.

Stephen Hesford: That is true. She said that she had been trying a murder case involving a multiple stabbing—81 stab wounds—and a severe head injury. The defendant was convicted, but the jury did not know that the man was a knife user and a beater of persons. The judge postulated that it might have helped if the jury had known that. That is sort of case that we have in mind, and I commend the Government on the measure.

If the Bill becomes law in roughly its current state, it will reconnect the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, witnesses and the public.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I now have to announce the result of Divisions deferred from a previous day.

On the motion on the Convention on the Future of Europe, the Ayes were 282, the Noes were 12, so the motion was agreed to.

On the motion on Estimates 2001–02, the Ayes were 412, the Noes were 39, so the motion was agreed to.

[The Division Lists are published at the end of today's debates.]

I must also inform the House that a Bill will be brought in upon the resolution in the name of the Financial Secretary relating to Estimates 2001–02. I understand that a Minister will present the Bill at the conclusion of proceedings on the Criminal Justice Bill.

Criminal Justice Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be read a Second time.

9.00 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I speak as a minority participant in tonight's debate, in that I am a non-lawyer. Following the speech of the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), I must tell him that I agreed with about 85 per cent. of what he said, and with every word that he said during his first three minutes. That will therefore cut down the length of my contribution, which should assist my colleagues.

The Home Secretary said that the Bill formed part of an end-to-end reform of the criminal justice system. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have had the good grace to mention projects such as sure start. Important projects such as that and the Children's Fund are all critical to this end-to-end reform. I am sure that I am not the only one who gets letters week after week from constituents facing antisocial behaviour in their communities. Tonight I want to talk specifically from the point of view of the victims. That is the right end of the telescope through which to look, in the context not only of the Bill but of the whole of the Government's programme.

Yobbish behaviour is undertaken by a very small group of people; it is not the norm. Most young people do a tremendous amount of good in our communities, but that small group must be dealt with more severely within the framework of the criminal justice system. The hon. Members for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) and for South-West Bedfordshire both talked about the role of parents, and in that respect I agree with them. From the small beginnings of antisocial behaviour, all the way through to major criminality, we need to consider the point of view of the victims first. That means that we need to give the police the powers to deal with issues at the investigative stage, and the courts the powers to play their part.

I mentioned a particular case in an earlier intervention. An 83-year-old lady in my constituency, who is registered disabled, has over the past couple of years had her house and outbuildings pelted with air gun pellets, had windows broken and so on. When she bravely confronted the perpetrators, all that she received was verbal abuse. She now lives in fear in her property and, despite having lived there for 25 years, is now considering moving home. The police have been called on a number of occasions, but under current legislation they seem powerless to put an end to the activities of those young terrorists—because that is what they are—who are making her life a misery. We need a framework of law to address such cases. The new sentencing policy will, to use its catchphrase, put "sense into the sentencing". Ensuring that the punishment fits the crime and the criminal is important at this stage, in relation to the kind of behaviour that we all see in our constituencies. New provisions affecting juveniles in this Bill and others are equally important.

Another case involves a local man who was the victim of a violent assault. This case particularly illustrates the need for an end-to-end revision of the system. The sole witness to the crime was terrorised into withdrawing his statement, and as a result there has been no prosecution. My constituent, who has suffered not only physical hurt but real trauma, has now had salt rubbed into his wounds by the attitude of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, which treats him as nothing but a nuisance. Its attitude is simply, "You cannot be traumatised unless you have had time off work." This man is a professional who has stuck at his work—he is a schoolteacher. He has gone through a great deal of personal distress, but he is being told that he cannot be compensated for his trauma because he did not take time off. Is that the message that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary wants to send out? I am sure that it is not. We need end-to-end reform.

The Government must take a tougher line on criminality, and the Bill will help to achieve that. Referring back to that particular case, knowledge of previous convictions will convince people and perhaps make it easier for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to satisfy the court of the validity of the evidence that they can bring before it. If it would not jeopardise any future prosecution, I would name the perpetrators of that crime. We all live in relatively small communities, and because of anecdotal evidence built up from casework, we often know who the perpetrators are. We need a measure to help the process.

I particularly welcome the Bill's proposals on reforming the double jeopardy law. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, apparently, once a person has been tried and acquitted of a serious offence, there can be no retrial unless compelling new evidence comes to light. That is wrong, for reasons that have been clearly enunciated tonight. The consideration of the matter by some of our Oscar-winning colleagues in the legal profession is entirely false, and we must consider it from the victims' point of view.

I admired the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe), who referred to DNA and other evidence and hit the nail on the head. As time goes on, we shall see developments not just in DNA technology, but across the panoply of the forensic armoury, and we cannot predict where those will end. We must create a framework within which scientific advances enable us to adduce evidence from things that would previously have been discarded, and we must be able to retrieve those things and put them back in use if they might fundamentally alter the outcome of any logical analysis of the evidence that has been gathered.

That will be difficult to achieve. One could argue on the one hand that the system ought to be based only on information gathered at the time or, on the other, that the great problem is deducing what evidence will be of use in the future, when different analytical techniques begin to emerge. We need a framework that enables us to move forward as the science develops.

In my capacity as patron of the charity RoadPeace, and chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on justice for road traffic victims, I am delighted to see steady progress being made in relation to crimes on the road—in particular, in relation to focusing on the victims' point of view. Time and again in cases that I have dealt with in that capacity, we discover that issues of intent—for instance, in the case of a drunk who did not intend to go out and kill—result in rather bizarre

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

sentences. In a range of areas, logic would produce a solution different from that offered by our current system.

My plea to the House, and to my hon. Friend the Minister, is that we should review our criminal justice system root and branch and ensure that it is a victims' justice system. The reform is long overdue; the system is much in need of change to ensure that it has the public's confidence and provides the justice that victims deserve. The reforms proposed today will create a justice system that supports and informs victims, respects and protects witnesses and delivers justice on behalf of victims, defendants and the community. That is what the House should be achieving.

9.09 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): Like many who have spoken today, I have no legal qualifications. I speak as chair of the all-party group for abuse investigations, which has been examining procedures employed by the police and other parts of the criminal justice system when investigating historic complex sexual abuse cases. The Home Affairs Select Committee recently—this year—inquired into the conduct of such investigations, and produced its report a few weeks ago. Its recommendations support the concerns of the all-party group, and I hope that the Bill will be developed to enable it to respond positively to those 23 recommendations.

My comments will be made in the context of my knowledge of the way in which sexual abuse inquiries are conducted in the United Kingdom. I am deeply concerned about the fact that the current criminal justice process has led to the conviction of innocent men, many of whom will die in jail. Thousands of men have been identified as sex offenders in the UK in the last four years. Many are arrested and many are charged. Many cases are dropped. A few men are acquitted, and many are convicted.

The evidence advanced in such cases consists of the verbal recollection by an individual of events that may have taken place up to 50 years earlier. The accusers are normally convicted criminals who are in prison, on remand or on parole. Witnesses who may be prisoners are interviewed, in prison or at home, many times while the police try to obtain a statement that will pass muster as far as the CPS is concerned. I have evidence of men being interviewed 13 times in 10 different prisons.

Witnesses in such cases may be "worked" by the police for up to five years. Meanwhile, the accused is damned to a never-ending torture, waiting to be called to court—or, in some cases, the investigation is dropped the day before the case is due to go to court. Many witnesses subsequently claim huge amounts in compensation, typically £40,000, and there is a consensus that the availability for compensation corrupts the integrity of the process and the police inquiries.

While I welcome the changes in the regulations relating to the management of suspects, I am deeply concerned about the absence of a comparable system for the management of witnesses, particularly vulnerable witnesses such as prisoners who have a unique relationship with the police. They may well comply with the desires of the police, but to gain personal advantage rather than to ensure a just outcome. The case of the Birmingham six led to the establishment of protocols for the management of physical evidence. I want comparable arrangements for oral evidence, when merely the recollections of individuals can cause men with unblemished characters to be sent to jail for up to 18 years.

I am acutely aware that the definition of disclosure varies from judge to judge. Any attempt to reduce that variation would be welcomed by all prosecuting and defence solicitors involved in such cases. Many solicitors believe that innocent men have frequently been found guilty because evidence has not been made available to them as it is in other cases.

As for indictment without a jury, some legal teams representing men who say they are innocent of sexual abuse crimes want such cases, which are very emotive, to be heard by a judge and panel. I understand why that is desirable. All of us who have seen press reports produced before such cases go to court can well imagine the impact that has. However, I think that addressing the inadequacies of police procedures, and also reviewing the discretion of the press, would obviate the need for trial by judge.

I cannot agree with the proposal concerning double jeopardy. My experience of such cases suggests that although some men are acquitted, the police have formed a view of them. I believe that they will continue to trawl for further witnesses until they get their man. I suppose I could accept double jeopardy in some circumstances, but my confidence in the police has been badly eroded.

As for evidence of bad character, a witness's bad character is a positive benefit, as the prosecution normally asserts that the witness has a bad character because of the abuse that he or she has suffered. I cannot comment on the validity of such statements, but I believe there is a strong argument for allowing the defence to determine the validity of witnesses, many of whom have serious mental health problems or convictions for perjury. Indeed, this proposal has been considered by the Attorney-General following the collapse of the Damilola case. I hope that it can be considered again during this Bill's passage. Bringing into court a victim who is not fit to give evidence is an abuse of the victim.

I want three further matters to be considered in the Bill. I want full declaration of intent with regard to the claiming of compensation, and a complete ban on payments to witnesses. Compensation in any payment form invariably corrupts the outcome of a case. I want anonymity for people who are accused of sex abuse crimes. Hundreds of lives have been ruined, and even where suspects are found innocent, they never recover from the damage caused by these accusations, and their families and children continue to suffer. Lifting anonymity following a conviction would still allow the victims to advance complaints.

Most importantly, I want the terms of reference of the Criminal Cases Review Commission to be changed, so that it is able to consider cases that it currently cannot. At the moment, the CCRC's terms of reference allow it to refer cases back to the Court of Appeal only if a

technical error has been committed during the conduct of a case, or if new evidence has been advanced. However, there is never new evidence in such cases, and technical failure is very difficult to establish. The CCRC's terms of reference should therefore be extended to enable cases to be referred on the basis that there has been a miscarriage of justice. Unless this change is introduced, many men currently in prison who are believed to be innocent will die there.

9.16 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I begin by placing on the record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy), and to his opposite number, the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), whose astute management of business allowed every Member who wanted to speak to get in. That success is a tribute to their skills. I also hope that the Procedure Committee will revisit the question of putting the list of speakers on the back of the Speaker's Chair, so that colleagues do not have to endure the agony of not knowing whether they are going to be able to speak. However, that issue is for another day.

At times, today's debate reminded me of going to a soccer match, reading the report the next day and wondering whether one actually attended the match. I thought that I was here to discuss the Criminal Justice Bill, but I discovered that it had already been commandeered by some of the usual suspects, the rounding up of whom we have talked about in another context. Perhaps they could be described as the civil liberties lobby. Some of them are born again Conservative civil libertarians, which is wonderful to see. The lawyerly representatives of producer interests were out in force, along with those who are rightly preoccupied with some of the vital, if esoteric, issues of high legality: double jeopardy, hearsay, previous convictions, and so on.

I want to try to retrieve this Bill, and to return it to some of its original purposes and perspectives. For the great majority of my constituents, such high drama is meaningless. Instead, they have to cope with the daily dramas caused by lesser offences and antisocial behaviour—activities that rarely, if ever, go before a jury, and which still less elicit stirring defences of ancient liberties. Nevertheless, such activities degrade and impoverish the ordinary life of the community. The civic liberty of those ordinary people has long been lost, but their condition goes unremarked by a legal elite that has robbed them of their law, just as certainly as—I am afraid—we have occasionally distanced them from our representative democracy. They will judge this Bill by its determination and ability to reduce vandalism, graffiti, shoplifting and domestic theft, the stealing and abandoning of cars, and street brawls. They want this Bill to reduce the ugly, un-neighbourly behaviour that they see and hear around them: litter, noise, foul language, and alcohol and other drug excesses. They want this Bill to provide faster and more efficient justice. They want to be assured that the same small core of repeat offenders will not be left endlessly at large in the community, unpunished and unreformed. They want the Bill to ensure that witnesses are not intimidated and that trials are not delayed by bureaucracy and procedural trickery sometimes masquerading as civil liberty. They want the Bill to provide clear and consistent sentencing, not because they are vindictive but simply because they want to have the confidence that the criminal justice system is working for them.

The law—our law—must be repatriated to those people. It must address the reality of their lives. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary should make no apology for that. We all know him to be an honourable and affable man, but he should not back down easily on some of the proposals in the Bill. We do not want a repeat of what happened with the mode of trial proposals, with people able to pick and choose their preferred type of trial. That does not go down well on some of the estates in Nottingham, North. Neither do we want the Home Secretary to back down in the way that happened when chief constables were able to decide which Government policies they would like to implement and which they preferred to put on one side.

I am afraid that that pick-and-mix legality has no place in tackling some serious problems that do not involve esoteric, philosophical musings about civil liberties. The problems about which I am concerned are to do with the liberties of my constituents on my estates. Their concerns need to be addressed, and the House should not follow its tendency to go in for lawyerly debate and discussion. That leaves most people cold, and deeply dissatisfied with a criminal justice system that does not deliver for them.

Not only must justice be seen to be done, it must be understood to be done. Those are the tests of the Bill proposed by constituents in my relatively tough area of Nottingham, North. I hope that they will get new hope from the Bill. They will welcome the promise, in the forthcoming courts Bill, of better support and protection for victims and witnesses. They will welcome the commitment in this Bill to greater clarity and certainty in sentencing. The Government cannot do too much to make sentencers explain exactly what a sentence means and to correct the widespread perception that a prisoner released to serve the second half of a sentence in the community is, in effect, getting out early.

When we reach the portion of the Bill devoted to sentencing, I hope that the Government will make sentencers distinguish clearly between a sentence's different purposes, and ascribe an element of a sentence to each purpose. For instance, they would have to say that so much of a sentence was for punishment, so much for deterrence, and so much for restitution or rehabilitation. With long sentences, I hope that the Government will consider allowing sentencers to set educational targets as part of the rehabilitation element.

Although it is welcome, in isolation the Bill cannot solve the problem of offending behaviour, in my constituency or anywhere else. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary recognises that, and is carrying through the approach set out in the White Paper, which dwelt on the importance of the multiagency and interdepartmental approach. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend has decided not only to look at the criminal justice system in its entirety, but to strengthen its relationship with other agencies that aim to reduce offending in the community.

That can be seen most obviously in the proposals for drug-related offending and for the supervision of dangerous offenders in the community. However, as has

[Mr. Graham Allen]

been noted by hon. Members of all parties, just as important are the sure start schemes that work with children under five years of age, and the vigilance of health workers, health visitors and primary school teachers, who must institute early remedial action.

It is a tragic waste that agencies and professional experts so often come together only after someone has offended. Society must be prepared to intervene earlier. Again, that will cause some screams from civil libertarians, but we must look at the possibility of intervening earlier, with the fullest possible professional assessment and support, before a crime or tragedy happens. The cost of delay—to the individual involved, the child, the growing human being and, above all, the wider society—is incalculable.

My right hon. Friend will know how much the success of the Bill depends on issues that are outside it. The impact of Government economic success, not least in creating jobs for young people, has been one of our foremost crime prevention measures. The need to be clear about the role of the police and the deployment of record numbers of officers is irrelevant if they are not on our streets and seen to be doing their job. The Home Secretary needs to reconsider how we get chief constables to operate under their operational responsibilities in a way that reflects the collective desire of the House to see community policing work.

I am delighted to see in his place my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, who has responsibility for drugs. Another part of a co-ordinated approach has to be a national education policy for drugs education. It cannot be left to chance or to isolated and sporadic if well meaning efforts, but must be co-ordinated nationally. We will stand condemned if, by the end of our second term in office, we do not have a national roll-out of a drugs education policy. I look forward to my hon. Friend's statement later this week.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will know from his experience in education that a major element in preventing offending is to engage local communities in education—not only children but people of every age. It does not simply mean cracking down on truanting, although that it important, but giving the whole community the belief that education is the pathway to ambition and personal prosperity. Unfortunately, for reasons that no one has analysed, young people in my constituency do not have that belief. My constituency sends fewer youngsters to university than any other in the UK. We are looking at that, and I ask my right hon. Friend to keep that interest in education because of its connection with reducing offending.

This is a long and ambitious Bill. Certain parts of it are destined to be failures; indeed, we have had failures in all previous efforts made to reform the criminal justice system. It follows a series of Bills that have attempted to address these problems. Once again, a failing of our institution in tackling crime is to ignore the front-line professionals and the public who could help us with some of the answers. That is why I am sorry that the Government did not submit the Bill to pre-legislative scrutiny. None the less, I pay tribute to the brief and brave effort of the Home Affairs Committee to give us some background on the Bill. However, I am afraid that that is not as adequate as having proper online scrutiny which would have produced a better Bill.

The Government and the House would have been enriched by ideas and comments from the front line—people in neighbourhood watches, front-line staff in the police, probation and court services, victims and witnesses. We could have put right straight away areas of practice that will need further legislation, rather than struggling in Committee in our ritualised way.

We have denied the public the understanding and ownership of these much needed measures. Instead of being the culmination of a national debate, these necessary and welcome measures feel hasty and imposed and will need to be revisited. I hope very much that the Government will learn this lesson and that any future Bills of this nature that are amenable to genuine public consultation will be consulted on early, so that when we come to our formal processes, we will make better law. I commend the Bill and hope that it finds safe passage through the House.

9.29 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): First, I have to declare an interest as a barrister. However, speaking for myself, this has been the most interesting Second Reading debate that I have ever attended in the Chamber because of the sheer diversity of views. I am sure that one of the reasons for that was the way in which the Home Secretary set the tone for the debate in presenting the Bill. The contributions that I heard were all illuminating and suggest that a great deal will be able to be done in Committee, a point that I will return to later.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) set a tone that was slightly different from that of other contributors, as he admitted himself. His speech provides a good starting point. He said, rightly, that he hoped for great things from the Bill but accepted that many connected provisions, which would ensure its success, had not been included.

The hon. Gentleman is right. We are legislating on only one aspect of the criminal justice system. Many of the concerns that he raised, which I have no difficulty in sharing—especially as regards the anxieties of his constituents—cannot be solved by the Bill because it relates only to that percentage of those who commit offences who are arrested and brought before the courts. The vast majority are not.

A point that the hon. Gentleman may want to bear in mind is that as all human systems are fallible, we have to accept that, however well-intentioned we are, many of the sentences or ideas that we come up with often do not work. Only a few days ago, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn), in answer to a letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), explained how drug treatment and testing orders were working.

We discover that between October 2000 and 30 September 2002, 9,042 orders were made, but it is accepted that in just one six-month period during that time, 2,175 breach proceedings were instigated, and that only 902 cases resulted in termination of the order for failure to comply. If that is extrapolated over the two-

year period, it suggests that those extremely well-intentioned provisions are not working. We need to bear that in mind when considering how to reassure the public.

I hope that I shall be able to do justice to some of the many contributions to the debate.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): May I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that his assessment of the nature of addiction and of how it can be dealt with under DTTOs needs a little more analysis?

Mr. Grieve: I did not cite those figures as a criticism; I know that the Government were well intentioned when they introduced the orders. However, the letter gives cause for concern as to whether the system, which was designed to ensure that offenders were kept off drugs by regular treatment and testing, is working. It rather suggests—*[Interruption.]* I do not want to get into a dispute with the Minister. We cannot get away from the fact that the figures suggest the contrary—that a good idea has not worked.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) expressed serious concerns, especially on previous convictions. I hope that the Government will bear those points in mind. I shall try to return to them later.

The hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) made an interesting speech, one of the few that was broadly supportive of the entirety of the Government's position. Two points arose from what he said in what was a civil lawyer's speech. What shone through it was the belief that criminal cases can be solved on the balance of probabilities by throwing everything into the pot and expecting that elusive commodity called the truth to emerge. A similar belief underpinned comments made to me by Lord Falconer. However, I do not think that the court system can ever be like that.

On the contrary, we all seek the truth. Doubtless we shall find it on the great day of judgment, but until then we should be very wary of running around in search of the truth and, in the process, blinding ourselves to the fact that it may be more sensible not to do that but to ensure—as our criminal justice system does—that in any given case we are sure of a person's guilt before we convict him. The hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) made that point with great force.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) made a most powerful speech. I hope that her comments, taken with those of my hon. Friends the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), will highlight the fact that it is possible to believe that one should be tough on crime while not wishing to see injustice perpetrated in trying to arrive at that position. That underpins our philosophy. I dare say that it underpins the philosophy of many hon. Members who have contributed this evening, but we cannot get away from that point because a totalitarian system will never deliver justice. It may fill the prisons, but there will be many innocent people in them.

That point was also well made by the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). I was interested in his comments about prejudicial hearsay—a very complicated issue on which the Bill will require extremely close scrutiny, although I accept that there may be circumstances in which it is proper to relax the current rules on hearsay.

I wish to refer to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley). I very much enjoyed his defence of the jury system, not just because it delivers proper results—it produces as good an assessment of guilt or innocence as we can get—but because it involves the participation of the community in the criminal justice system and underpins our liberties in doing so. It ensures that our system of justice does not pitch the state against the person, but in fact involves a condemnation that comes from those in the community who have heard and assessed the evidence.

The jury system is an immense advantage in our system of justice, but the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North seemed to like the French inquisitorial system. Well, I am half French; I know France well. The French newspapers cannot be opened without reading about one scandal after another involving miscarriages of justice brought about by the over-zealousness of inquisitorial magistrates, backed by their extensive powers and, in fact, by the lack of an adequate jury system to safeguard defendants. I would not wish this country to follow that example.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) made some very important comments on restorative justice. Of course much of that is outside the scope of the Bill, which highlights our great need to address the issues that go to the root of crime, rather than simply being obsessed with procedure or easy fixes.

I was also pleased with the comments on jury trial made by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), but I was not persuaded by his views on jury tampering. Where are the cases? Where is the evidence of the cases that relate to jury tampering? I have not yet come across them to determine the extent of the problem.

The hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) made a speech calling for caution, which I welcome in relation to the Government's proposals. I was interested in the robust speech made by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh), and I fully accept that crime has become a major problem for our constituents irrespective of whether they live in middle-class areas or inner cities. I assure him that when I open a speech on crime to my constituents or any new audience, I simply highlight the fact that the view that crime has risen exponentially and is a real problem is not some derangement. *[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary has just arrived back in the Chamber, so perhaps he will finish hearing what I have to say.

In the 1940s, there were 600 robberies per annum; there are now 95,000. There were 55,000 burglaries per annum; there are now more than 800,000. At one stage, the figure peaked at 1.3 million. That is an exponential rise, especially as the population of this country has risen only by about 14 million in that period. Those comments have as much relevance and application to Conservative Governments as to Labour Governments, but they should remind us to be very wary of quick fixes.

I should mention my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who called for local justice. I did not have a chance to intervene in

[Mr. Grieve]

the speech made by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe), but he will find that I will have a chance to deal with at least one point that he made in the remarks that follow.

Let me turn to the main issues in the Bill. First, there are some good things. I am delighted with part 6 and the speeding up of procedure. I agree that there are vested interests that stand in the way of that, and I have no truck with them whatever. At least one of those vested interests, however, in my experience as a barrister, is the judiciary. We cannot avoid the fact that some of the delays in the criminal justice system are due to professional judges. I have had direct experience of that, and we must tackle that as well as the activities of lawyers.

I am also pleased about the sentencing provisions, although I would hope for some reassurance from the Minister. Sentencing plus and sentencing minus are key reforms. I had always understood that they would accompany the raising of the magistrates' sentencing powers. If it is suggested that magistrates' sentencing powers are to be raised without sentencing plus and sentencing minus being introduced at the same time, however, I fear that we will see a massive increase in the prison population, and that the system will not be in place to deal with it in the manner that was envisaged in the Halliday report.

Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, linked to those two things, which I agree must go together, must be the resources—almost as soon as the Bill becomes law—so that custody plus and custody minus can be implemented? A resource implementation of five or 10 years hence is clearly ludicrous if magistrates courts are to have real alternatives to custody.

Mr. Grieve: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right. I cannot see how this centrepiece of the Bill, which is in many ways its key part, will work if there is a dysfunctional system in which the parts have not been brought together.

Much has been said about jury trial, but I want to make one or two further remarks. The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) in an intervention seemed to be right. I do not understand the criticism of jury trial and the reason why we are to get rid of it, as it seems that the Government have answered their own question in the Bill. It sets out to suggest that people may opt for trial by judge alone as an alternative that the state sees as identical in quality to jury trial, yet it puts in caveats to deny it to certain categories of individual to provide public reassurance. If the Minister thinks carefully about that issue, he should incline to the view that the jury trial proposals should be dropped.

Similarly, it was suggested that long trials would be a problem for jurors. It was also suggested, which surprised me, that we should be concerned if trials were broken up. My experience as a barrister is that the best service that judges ever do in trials is to order the severance of indictments. Far from leading to bad justice, that means that issues are discussed much faster, and if, at the end of the first trial, someone is found not guilty, the prosecution tends to think long and hard before proceeding with the second, and if it does not succeed on the second, it thinks long and hard before proceeding with the third. That is a great cost saving, and if the defendant is convicted on the first, he is sometimes willing to plead guilty to the indictments on the second. I therefore do not accept that argument.

Mr. Allen: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that some of the esoteric legal games about which he is talking are the very things that drive witnesses away from participating in the process? The longer the delays, and the more options that are available, the easier it is for defendants to get at witnesses. That is not only prevalent in gangland cases but in the case of abandoned cars, antisocial behaviour—indeed, right across the board.

Mr. Grieve: I appreciate the strength of the hon. Gentleman's feelings, and we can certainly look at the matter carefully in Committee, but he has not understood my point. I disagree with him entirely that severance of indictments by judges to have short trials on discrete issues leads to any of the mischief with which he is concerned.

Further detail and careful consideration are needed on the rules on hearsay. In relation to double jeopardy, we have centred on scientific evidence and the question of DNA. A meeting that I had with DNA experts only yesterday, however, suggests that it may be of much less use than we think, because the conditions in which scientific samples were collected in the 1960s and 1970s properly raise issues of contamination that may make subsequent DNA analysis worthless. We should be wary of getting carried away with the idea that there is a quick fix. However, I accept that double jeopardy should be examined carefully.

I shall wind up my remarks to give the Minister a chance to reply, but I make a final point. We have had a good debate. If the Home Secretary's words are true, I am confident that, in Committee and subsequent stages, the Bill can be improved and turned into a worthwhile monument of the House's endeavour. However, I make a simple plea. It is all too easy to trivialise the issues and to play to the gallery. The Prime Minister's remarks at Question Time today did not encourage me in the view that the measured approach that we have adopted today will survive if there is genuine debate when matters are raised that are contrary to what the Government are trying to achieve. There are good things in the Bill, and we can make a positive impact. However, if we get carried away with rhetoric, we will fail the country and the criminal justice system.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): I begin by declaring an interest: I am not a lawyer. However, I agree entirely with a lawyer, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), when he described this as an excellent and considered debate. I will do my best in the time available to respond to as many points as possible. Where that is not possible, I shall write to hon. Members.

Although this a complex and lengthy Bill that will keep us occupied for many happy and occasionally disputatious hours in Committee, it is important to keep

in sight the purpose of these green pages. The purpose was set out clearly by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in his measured opening speech, and by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) when he said at column 289 on 17 July 2002, "The system needs reform." I agree. That is what the Bill seeks to do. It seeks reform to make the criminal justice system work more effectively in the search for truth.

Dr. Desmond Turner: There is one problem that the Bill does not currently address. More than 200 children under two are either killed or seriously injured every year in their homes, and only about a quarter of those cases result in prosecution of any kind. Can my hon. Friend assure me that that point will at least be considered in Committee?

Hilary Benn: I am happy to assure my hon. Friend that we will consider that point although, currently, it is not directly covered by the Bill.

The reform is about trying to increase confidence in the system and about developing and making available a range of sentences, including effective community penalties. It seeks to do all this in a way that upholds the fundamental principles of presumption of innocence and the prosecution having to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt.

The right hon. Member for West Dorset conjured up a vision of the queue before the custody sergeant. It is an issue with which we should be concerned but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) pointed out, clause 3 on street bail will, I hope, shorten that queue. The proposal has been widely welcomed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, referred to amendments to the PACE code. We are happy to consider the arrangements for parliamentary approval and guidance for time limits on custodial bail.

I say to the hon. Members for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) and for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) and to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) that I welcome very much their welcome for the new sentencing structure—custody minus and custody plus. We have to ensure that it is properly resourced. I also welcome the theme that has run through a number of speeches on the importance of rehabilitation.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) asked about Northern Ireland, and whether some of the provisions will be extended there. For example, those on disclosure, double jeopardy and prosecution appeals will be extended there and others could be so extended if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland wishes. A review of sentencing is currently going on in Northern Ireland, and I agree very much with the points the hon. Lady made about the importance of restorative justice.

The Bill will in part help to tackle the issues addressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). His eloquent words expressed the anger, fear, bewilderment and even sometimes the tears of my constituents who stand before me not understanding what is happening. They cannot cope and cannot understand why they have to live their lives in the way that they do.

Three main issues occupied hon. Members. The first was trial by jury. We propose to amend the principle of trial by jury in a very limited number of cases. One or two hon. Members used the phrase "a slippery slope". I think it is more a friction incline. We have changed our mind on mode of trial, a fact acknowledged most eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney). The mode of trial proposals, which we are not proceeding with because we have listened to the arguments, would have removed jury trial from about 20,000 defendants a year. The proposals in this Bill will affect perhaps fewer than a hundred cases a year. The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) asked, quite reasonably, about the extended sentencing power for magistrates, and mentioned 6,000 fewer jury trials. Notwithstanding that change, defendants will retain the right, if they wish, to opt for jury trial in either-way cases.

There are only two motivations for the proposed change: one is to protect jury members from the burden of long complex trials, a point acknowledged by the Select Committee in its report today and the second is to protect the integrity of our legal process from those who attempt to subvert it. In the light of some speeches, in particular by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) and the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, I simply ask the House to consider whether our proposal is a fundamental assault on the principle of jury trial, or are there, as the Select Committee reasonably said in its report, "cogent reasons" and "cogent arguments" for change in two specific sets of circumstances?

Simon Hughes: Does the Minister accept that there are reasonable arguments, although he might not yet have been persuaded by them, for finding ways in which we enable people to cope with complex fraud cases more easily? Juries could be found and we would not have to cause inconvenience to people who would find a long trial difficult. There are alternative ways to deal with the problem, which do not involve removing jury trial. Will the Government reconsider that?

Hilary Benn: I am much persuaded by the comments and experiences of judges who have tried to use the system in some of the longest running fraud trials. The Maxwell case has been mentioned. Blue Arrow is another example. Those judges have expressed great frustration about the difficulties of trying to accommodate the wish to include all the evidence and the pressure to separate bits of it so that juries can cope. The Government's fundamental concern relates to the burden on individual jury members and the damage that that does to the principle of representative juries.

The second issue relates to double jeopardy. The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) asked who came up with the idea of making changes to double jeopardy. The change was recommended by the Law Commission, Lord Justice Auld, the Home Affairs Committee and, dare I say it, the 2001 Conservative party manifesto, not a source of advice that I would usually pray in aid as a guide to policy, but I am happy to make an exception in this case.

We are worried about miscarriages of justice. That is why the safeguards are in the Bill. However, it is because we are concerned about miscarriages of justice that we

[Hilary Benn]

want to change the law on double jeopardy. If the purpose of justice is to acquit the innocent and bring the guilty to account—and it is—then why not put compelling new evidence before a jury for the reasons set out passionately by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West? Of course the ultimate safeguard—the real answer to the question of whether such a trial can be fair—is the jury: we must trust the jury.

Thirdly, I turn to previous convictions and bad conduct. I recognise the fears and genuine concerns expressed about the impact of the proposal. However, anybody who reads what Sir Robin Auld had to say about the issue, particularly about his own reluctance in this matter, which he acknowledged in his report, will see that the current system is not clear and does not make sense. The Law Commission said:

"The present law suffers from a number of defects . . . they constitute a haphazard mixture of statute and common law rules which produce inconsistent and unpredictable results, in crucial respects distort the trial process, make tactical considerations paramount and inhibit the defence in presenting its true case to the fact-finders".

In his opening remarks, the right hon. Member for West Dorset expressed surprise that we are proposing to allow the admittance not only of previous convictions but of previous acquittals, and I simply point out that that is already the case. Paragraph 287 of the explanatory memorandum, which refers to the case of Z, says that

"the House of Lords held that there was no special rule that required the exclusion of evidence that a person had been involved in earlier offences, even if they had been acquitted of those crimes, provided that that evidence was otherwise admissible."

On previous convictions and previous conduct—I think that this is the answer to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe)—the key safeguard is that on application by the defendant under clause 84(3) the judge will have to be satisfied that the probative value of that evidence outweighs its prejudicial effect. In other words, the judge must ask whether admitting the evidence would adversely affect the fairness of the proceedings. If so, it would not be admitted. Again, the ultimate safeguard remains—the jury. We should trust the jury to weigh the evidence in those cases.

Mr. Grieve: I am mindful of the comments made by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) who said that he did not think that the rules would change very much. Yet the way in which the Government have gone on about them, particularly to the media, suggests that they make a fundamental change in procedure by allowing juries to know about previous convictions. It has to be one or the other. I think that the Bill will allow serious changes to take place unless, of course, judges, in their discretion, simply make sure that those changes are mitigated, and that is not what I understood the Minister to be trying to achieve.

Hilary Benn: The Bill aims to achieve much greater clarity and consistency in the way in which that evidence is admitted, but that process is subject to what must, in light of the concerns that have been expressed, be the ultimate safeguard—the judge making a judgment.

Another reason why the debate has been so good is that we have clarified the fundamental arguments and I look forward to those being taken forward in Committee. However, I hope that the House will recognise that this is not an argument with the legal profession; it is not about undermining fundamental principles and it is not about tilting the scales of justice against the accused. I do not believe that treating victims better means treating defendants any less fairly.

This is about the 30,000 trials a year that never take place because witnesses are intimidated or are too frightened to turn up. It is about processes leading to better-prepared cases and swifter hearings. It is about putting relevant evidence before the court so that it can judge the facts and discover the truth. It is about better protection for our constituents from dangerous offenders. It is about new community sentences that will help to rehabilitate. It is about looking, for the first time, at the effectiveness of sentences in preventing reoffending. It is ultimately about trying to rebuild confidence in the criminal justice system. Those sound to me like pretty good principles. In the end, this is about changes that I hope will make a difference to the lives of the people that we represent because we are seeking to reform the system, and for that reason I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 67.

Division No. 19] **[9:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, rh Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian

Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Phil Woolas

NOES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit

Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Sir Robert Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Criminal Justice Bill:

Committal

1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on 27th February 2003.

(3) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

(6) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Keith Hill.]*

The House divided: Ayes 345, Noes 58.

Division No. 20] **[10:12 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter

King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Phil Woolas

NOES

Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Burnside, David
Cash, William
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fallon, Michael
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hawkins, Nick
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
Malins, Humfrey
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Angela Watkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Criminal Justice Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown by virtue of the Act, and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which by virtue of any other Act are payable out of money provided by Parliament.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

ESTIMATES, 2001–02

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the resolutions agreed earlier this day: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Paul Boateng, Dawn Primarolo, Ruth Kelly and John Healey do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) BILL

Ruth Kelly accordingly presented a Bill to modify limits on non-operating appropriations in aid set for the year that ended on 31st March 2002: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 11].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

POLICE

That the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Codes of Practice) (Statutory Powers of Stop and Search) Order 2002, dated 11th November, a copy of which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

That the draft International Development Association (Thirteenth Replenishment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

MODERNISATION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ordered,

That Mr. John Taylor be discharged from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons and Mr. Andrew Mitchell be added.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Food Supplements

10.28 pm

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): I wish to present a petition from my constituent Mr. C. Foster, signed by 340 of my constituents and others supporting the campaign for choice in natural health products. I understand that the petition forms a small part of a national petition that has so far collected nearly 1.1 million signatures. It reads as follows.

"The Petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the proposed European Directive on Traditional Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitions therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Tenancy deposit schemes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

10.30 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am very grateful to be given the opportunity to discuss the topic of tenancy deposit schemes, because it is of great relevance to many of my constituents in Cambridge.

The idea of securing an Adjournment debate on this topic arose as a result of my visiting Anglia polytechnic university to hold one of my regular student advice surgeries. While I was there, I spoke to Emma Gray, the education and welfare officer at the student union. She told me that unreturned deposits are a major worry for many of the students that she sees.

There are more than 8,000 registered APU students on the Cambridge campus alone. The university has only 836 bed spaces under its direct control—in its halls of residence, or in the shared housing that it manages—so nine out of 10 students at APU are living in accommodation in the private rented sector. Although unreturned deposits are a major problem for APU students, they are much less of a problem for Cambridge university students who, for the most part, are accommodated in colleges, or in houses owned or rented by the colleges.

The APU accommodation office has 650 landlords on its books, with whom there is an agreement to advertise accommodation within the campus, and to try to resolve any problems. APU students would expect to pay about £80 a week for a bed-sit or a room in a shared house. A standard deposit is about four times this amount: £320 per student. A shared house with four or five students will therefore collect a deposit of between £1,200 and £1,600—a sizeable sum. This money is usually very important to the students, because they may be relying on the return of their deposits to secure a deposit on the next rented accommodation.

Another problem is that APU has a very high proportion of students from abroad—international students, as they are known. At the end of their studies, such students are usually keen to get back home as quickly as possible. They do not want to hang around to argue with their landlord about the return of their deposits. Many landlords therefore enjoy a windfall at the end of the tenancy, and there is a greater chance of that happening if they delay handing back the deposit.

I would readily agree with those critics who say that an 18-year-old student living away from home for the first time may not be the ideal tenant, but many young people are responsible and will look after their accommodation well. I think it true that most tenants will respect the property, particularly if they have clear contracts that make specific mention of the standards of cleanliness expected on relinquishing their tenancy. However, the current system is weighted in favour of the landlord, and the non-return of deposits for no good reason is a problem to which the student or other tenant appears to have little redress.

The most common reason given for keeping all or part of a deposit is for cleaning after students have vacated the premises. I was told of one student who, although he had repainted his room in the original colour, was charged for its being painted again. The student was of course outraged; he felt that that was a way for the landlord to make any claim that he liked, without providing proof that the work actually took place, or that it cost the amount specified. On being asked to produce invoices from the cleaning contractors, the landlord was unable to do so.

An international student had part of her deposit kept back. The landlord had provided what the student felt was a magic number for the cost of cleaning that took place after the student had left the premises. In fact, the landlord listed all the cleaning that had taken the place, and how much it cost. When the student returned to visit the premises, she found that the landlord had done none of the cleaning or repair of fixtures that he said he had done, and for which she had paid.

Such complaints are very common. My local citizens advice bureau receives an average of five complaints a week about non-returned deposits. Because of the high proportion of students in my constituency, the complaints tend to be clustered around the beginnings and ends of terms, when students change their accommodation. Those figures suggest the scale of the problem in Cambridge, but about 20 per cent. of tenants nationally have the same problem with deposits that are not returned for reasons that they do not consider to be completely fair.

It is important to note that many reputable landlords run a professional and fair service in providing accommodation. One landlord was especially commended by my local CAB for putting deposits in a separate account and paying them back, with interest, on the day that tenancies ended. The three main professional bodies are the Association of Residential Letting Agents, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the National Association of Estate Agents. They require members to hold deposit money in a separate client account. I am pleased to say that those bodies also e-mailed me to tell me that they all strongly support the tenancy deposit scheme.

The tenancy deposit scheme was introduced as a pilot by the Government in 1999. When I applied for this debate, I did not know that the Government were on the point of publishing a consultation paper, but I have since found it extremely useful. It is called "Tenancy Money: Probity and Protection" and from it I learned that two schemes have been piloted.

The first option is the custodial option, which requires landlords or agents acting on their behalf to place a tenancy deposit in a ring-fenced account operated by the Nationwide building society. When disputes occur, the independent housing ombudsman promptly decides who is entitled to what proportion, and instructs Nationwide to pay each party accordingly.

The second option is the insured option, which enables landlords or agents to hold the deposit during the tenancy if they take out an insurance policy with an accredited insurance company. In the pilot scheme, that company was the CGU guarantee society. In a dispute, if the independent housing ombudsman determines that some or all of the deposit should be returned to the tenant, the scheme insurers are instructed to arrange speedy payment. The insurers then ask the landlord or agent to reimburse that sum within 10 working days. Both schemes seem very good, and there has been much satisfaction with their operation.

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

The Government so far have spent £490,000 on the pilot schemes, and a further £300,000 has been allocated to extend them for a further two years. The tenancy deposit scheme has been quite expensive for the landlord and agents who have participated. Although the target was to attract 1,500 landlords and agents covering 30,000 tenancies, only 102 landlords and 74 agents had joined the tenancy deposit scheme by June 2002.

I am sure that that has nothing to do with the quality of the scheme or the way in which it has been handled by the independent housing ombudsman. All the arrangements appear to have been made very satisfactorily, and the schemes have been greeted with a high degree of satisfaction from participants. However, it is probably not surprising that there has been a lower take-up than anticipated. The good landlords will join and are probably already operating a reasonable and fair system. Of the 650 landlords used by APU's accommodation office, around 250 operate some kind of tenancy deposit scheme. Those who do not join obviously do not like surrendering control of deposits and probably do not see the need for it—they are the landlords with whom students have the most difficulty. In many cases they probably deliberately use the deposits as a source of extra income to which they are not entitled.

From the students' point of view there is a definite need for this scheme and I hope that Ministers will be brave and bold in moving it forward. I know that many of the professional organisations that advise tenants on their legal rights are disappointed that the Government feel that they have insufficient evidence to press ahead with a mandatory scheme at present. I was pleased to read that the Government are to encourage more landlords and agents to participate in the pilot scheme, but in my view a voluntary scheme will founder. I urge Ministers to come forward with some new legislation in this area. There is an excellent opportunity in that the forthcoming housing Bill would offer a perfect opportunity for a mandatory tenancy deposit scheme to be introduced.

If the Government were to be sufficiently brave, the Minister would have the undying gratitude of many of the students who attend Anglia polytechnic university and many of the tenants in my constituency.

10.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) on raising this important issue and enabling the House to examine the new consultation paper, "Tenancy Money: Probity and Protection". The Government launched it less than a week ago, so I also congratulate my hon. Friend for her timeliness in getting the issue on the agenda. It is clearly a matter of particular concern, given the number of students in her constituency, but the problem goes way beyond constituencies that have many student tenants—it affects the entire private sector.

The Government are determined to improve standards in the private rented sector. We see it as part of our plans and policies in terms of the wider housing agenda. A bigger, better private rented sector can help increase choice, flexibility and mobility in housing. Private renting should provide a safe, attractive and cost-effective alternative to owner-occupation or the social rented sector.

Like my hon. Friend, I recognise that most private landlords are well intentioned and anxious to do a good and responsible job, but we need to encourage all private landlords to value their tenants and maintain their properties to a decent standard. Too often we get letters in our mailbags from constituents who feel, rightly or wrongly, that they have been ripped off by unscrupulous landlords. That is certainly the case in areas with a large student population.

Tenants are often afraid that their landlord will retain a deposit unreasonably, and there have been a number of high-profile cases of letting agents misappropriating the moneys of their clients, both tenants and landlords. Many tenants respond to the fear of their deposits being withheld by withholding the final month's rent. That may mean landlords being left without a deposit sufficient to cover any arrears or damage that a tenant may leave behind. So this can lead to a far more widespread and damaging lack of trust and confidence between landlord and tenant than the actual numbers of deposits wrongfully withheld. My hon. Friend alluded to the recent survey of English housing data for 2001–02, which reveals that of households that had a private tenancy ending in the previous three years, 20 per cent. said that part or all of their deposit had been unreasonably withheld.

Today's debate is an important chance to focus on these concerns. They relate to standards of management, especially at the lower end of the sector, and they have to be addressed if private renting is to become more a tenure of choice. The Government are determined to find the right solutions to this complex issue, but it is important that we do so with the full co-operation of landlords and tenants. As my hon. Friend said, for the past couple of years we have supported a pilot voluntary self-financing tenancy deposit scheme operated by the independent housing ombudsman, but, as my hon. Friend also said, it has been only a limited success.

The scheme initially covered five areas: Brent and Camden in London; Brighton and Hove; Birmingham and the west midlands; Norwich and Norfolk; and Merseyside and west Lancashire. However, as larger groups of landlords and agents joined, coverage was extended beyond those areas.

Landlords or their agents have been able to join either a custodial scheme or an alternative insured option—as described by my hon. Friend. Both involve the independent adjudication of disputes. A tenancy deposit may be placed in a ring-fenced account operated by a licensed deposit taker or safeguarded by insurance with an accredited company. The processes involved have worked and there has been a small but increasing number of adjudications, handled efficiently by the independent housing ombudsman.

The pilot tenancy deposit scheme offers a model for safeguarding tenants' deposits. However, the pilot had achieved only one tenth of its target take-up of 30,000 tenancies by last March. That indicates, as my hon. Friend suggested, that if only a minority of the more professional

landlords participate, there is little prospect of a national scheme that is voluntary and self-financing. A voluntary scheme will not cover the majority of tenants' deposits, let alone the minority of unprofessional landlords who misappropriate tenants' deposits.

Earlier this year, my noble Friend Lord Falconer said that more time was needed to assess whether the pilot tenancy deposit scheme could operate as a self-financing scheme. He noted that its slow take-up so far had made a strong case for legislation on tenancy deposits. Government funding of the pilot has continued, but we need to reach a view soon on how effective any voluntary arrangement could ever be, and on whether the case for legislation is already proven.

The most important benefit from continuing with the pilot has been that we have had more time and have obtained more evidence to use in producing the consultation paper that we published last Thursday. We have thus been able to combine a number of elements in the consultation paper. First, there is up-to-date statistical data from the survey of English housing. Secondly, we have incorporated the results of research into the pilot by York university. Thirdly, we took into account the conclusions reached by the Department's auditors on the funding and financial prospects of the pilot tenancy deposit scheme. Fourthly, we used our research of the operation of tenancy deposit schemes in other countries and of other voluntary schemes in the UK. Fifthly, we carried out an economic assessment of the costs and benefits of a mandatory scheme for the purpose of a substantial regulatory impact assessment. Finally, we took on board the views of a steering group that oversaw the operation of the pilot.

The steering group was composed of representatives of landlords, tenants, local authorities and financial institutions. They have endorsed the thoroughness of our project and the way in which we achieved a balance of views based on factual evidence. The deadline for responses to the consultation is 28 February, and I should not like to prejudice its outcome.

The paper addresses the following sets of options. First, there are voluntary custodial deposit protection schemes, linked to voluntary accreditation schemes, with deposit protection through the tenancy agreement. That approach would reflect to some extent the approach currently under consideration by the Law Commission in its reform of tenancy law.

Secondly, there are statutory tenancy money protection schemes, along the same lines as the pilot, with various choices of types of scheme. The choices range from requiring landlords to safeguard tenants by being a member of schemes, such as the pilot, to schemes that are in effect state-run, such as the one operated in New South Wales, in Australia. Thirdly, we have also mentioned the possibility of a statutory bank guarantee scheme such as the one that operates in Belgium.

The present consultation may lead to a mandatory requirement for landlords to be members of a scheme to safeguard tenants' deposits, but we would not, in the long run, expect such schemes to require Government funding. The views of Department's auditors, set out in an annexe to the consultation paper, criticised the administration of the pilot tenancy deposit scheme. More importantly, they could not see how the existing pilot could develop into a self-financing scheme, given its low level of take-up.

Hitherto, membership of the pilot has been free, in essence. The independent housing ombudsman, who manages it, is now seeking the modest charge of £1.02 per tenancy. The Government will continue funding the pilot in the next financial year, as my hon. Friend said, and then, following a decision on the results of the consultation, we shall address the future of the pilot.

As I pointed out earlier, the statistical data showing that 20 per cent. of tenants consider that their deposits were unreasonably withheld, at least in part, cannot be ignored. However, as a regulatory impact assessment included in the consultation paper suggests, the costs of imposing extra costs on the vast majority—as against the benefits for the minority—are finely balanced.

Consultees need to consider whether the scale of the problem is such that legislation is required, and what the consequences of compulsory membership of a scheme to protect tenants' deposits might be. Would the costs, which are likely to be passed on to tenants, be justified? Could we be sure such a scheme would catch the landlords who are the worst offenders?

The consultation paper also covers letting agents, although my hon. Friend did not have time to mention them. As I noted earlier, there have been some high-profile cases of agents misappropriating money belonging to clients, both landlords and tenants.

An annexe to the consultation paper addresses the success of the national approved letting scheme. The government have supported that industry-run voluntary accreditation scheme by funding a free trial for agents who are not members of the professional bodies who set up the scheme. So far, the national approved letting scheme has been a qualified success, but it bears comparison to the pilot tenancy deposit scheme, particularly as it is a voluntary scheme, likely to reach only the more responsible agents. So we are consulting on the way in which letting agents treat landlords' and tenants' money.

My hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not go into further detail, given that we have only just launched the consultation paper, but I certainly look forward to the results that emerge when the consultation ends on 28 February. As she has said, we need to balance the expectations of tenants and landlords and to move closer to our ultimate goal—a private rented sector that is more competently run and more capable of helping to meet housing need.

I would simply add that, yes, we should take cognisance of the concerns expressed by the communities, not just the students, in areas with a high student base, as well as the way in which landlords act in those areas. Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this important issue and in such a timely fashion. She will forgive me if I do not go into further detail and pre-empt the entire consultation process, but it is right to put those concerns before the House. I believe that the Government are making excellent progress on this important issue. I commend our policies to the House, and hope that all those who have any concerns about this issue will play a full part in the consultation process.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

CONVENTION ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

That this House endorses the strategy of Her Majesty's Government on the Convention of the Future of Europe to establish structures for a Union of sovereign member states; rejects the alternative of a federal superstate; and resolves that the Order of 12 June 2002 relating to the Standing Committee on the Convention be renewed for the current session of Parliament.

The House divided: Ayes 282, Noes 12.

Division No. 17]

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, rh Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*

Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

NOES

Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Burnside, David
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Hermon, Lady
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tyrie, Andrew

Question accordingly agreed to.

Estimates, 2001–02

That the limits on non-operating appropriations in aid set for the purposes of section 2 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 for the year that ended on 31 March 2002 be modified in accordance with HC 121.

The House divided: Ayes 412, Noes 39.

Division No. 18]

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Douglas
Ancram, rh Michael
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Byers, rh Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, rh David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs C[illegible]e
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Franccis, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, rh Oliver
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen

Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Wishart, Pete
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Young, rh Sir George

NOES

Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mates, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Stunell, Andrew
Thurso, John
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Question accordingly agreed to.

House of Commons

Thursday 5 December 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Coal Industry

1. **Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): How much financial support has been made available to the coal industry in the current year. [83602]

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): Under the UK Coal operating aid scheme, £14,785,956 has been paid to coal producers since 1 January 2002.

Paddy Tipping: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, and for the help that has been given to the coal industry. Does he accept, however, that the best way to continue to have diversity and security of supply is to make a decision to back the British coal industry, just as a decision has been made to back the nuclear generator, British Energy? Is it not better to have indigenous sources of supply, rather than being dependent on imports of gas? Gas could constitute 80 per cent. of our energy provision by 2020, but 90 per cent. of it will be imported.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. One of the major issues that the White Paper will have to consider is the extent to which we are going to become dependent on imported sources of fuel, as opposed to maintaining our historic self-sufficiency in energy sources. I do not accept my hon. Friend's analogy with nuclear energy. The reason for backing the nuclear industry was to maintain security of supply and the safe operation of nuclear power stations—of course, it would have cost more to close them down than to keep them open. I strongly believe, however, that we should have a UK coal industry, and I hope that what the Government have done in the past, as well as what we shall do in the future, underwrites that commitment in tangible terms.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Does the Minister recognise that most people in the industry believe that it is on the brink of collapse? Will he tell us why we are not going to get, as part of the draft 10-year plan, the maximum flexibility with all three forms of aid available, so that we can combat all the uncertainties that we will face?

Mr. Wilson: I do not think that people in the industry believe that it is on the verge of collapse. That kind of talk does not help anyone, including the people who work in the industry. It is true that, as a result of the run-down of the coal industry and its privatisation in the 1990s, there is now only a relatively small number of deep-mine pits operating. Some of those are threatened by economic circumstances, some by geological circumstances. I would prefer, however, to consider them on a one-by-one basis. Since 1997—and certainly since I came into this job—when we have been asked to help and when it has been practical to do so, we have done exactly that. Let us look at the individual circumstances of each of this relatively small number of pits. The investment aid scheme, which we have had authorised by Brussels, and on which we are now consulting, would be another weapon to use in this battle.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The 450 workers at Daw Mill colliery, some of whom are my constituents, face an uncertain future because of geological difficulties, which could be eased by short-term assistance. Does the Minister accept that the Department of Trade and Industry cap of £5,000 per job is inadequate for that purpose? Should we not be able to devise a more appropriate aid regime? Why cannot we ring-fence some of the generating market for coal fired power stations with clean burn technology?

Mr. Wilson: On my hon. Friend's last point, I have no doubt at all that the future for coal lies in clean burn technology. That is something that I am anxious to promote, both domestically and internationally. On the point about the cap, that was placed on the amount that any one producer could receive. Under the operating aid scheme, UK Coal received an amount up to that cap. I extended the scheme until the end of this year, but, if we were going to extend it further, such an extension would have had to be applied for by the end of October. The difficulties that have arisen at certain UK Coal pits recently are, therefore, not covered by the operating aid scheme. We think that a better avenue to pursue is the investment aid scheme, and that was also the view of the industry in the consultation process.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Minister agree that North sea oil and gas reserves are running out, and that we have a massive balance of payments deficit on our trade? Things are going to get even worse now, with our reliance on imported fuel of one sort or another. Money is being handed out to British Energy, as it has been handed out in the past to UK Coal and to Richard Budge. Does it not make sense to say that we will take over the industry—this small coal industry—for £70 million? That price is minimal compared with the cost of keeping on shoving money into the pockets of the coal owners.

Mr. Wilson: I am sure that my hon. Friend has spotted the dichotomy between the previous request—that we should shovel more money into the pockets of

the coal owners—and his approach, which has the virtue of simplicity. However, his basic point on the increasing dependence on imported fuel is extremely important, whether it is coal or gas. The White Paper must consider all that in the context of security of supply and this country's strategic interests in terms of energy and in the wider sense. I certainly believe that we need, and should have, a continuing coal mining industry. No one on the Labour Benches has anything but contempt for how the coal industry was treated in the decade before 1997. We have had to pick up the pieces and we have shown considerable commitment in doing so.

Liability Insurance

2. **Brian Cotter** (Weston-super-Mare): What recent discussions she has had with manufacturing firms on the cost of public and employer's liability insurance cover. [83603]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): DTI Ministers have had a number of meetings with firms and with business bodies at which the cost of public and employer's liability cover was discussed. I recently met representatives of the Federation of Small Businesses and the Forum of Private Business, both of which raised the issue. My DTI colleagues have met other industry bodies.

Brian Cotter: Bearing in mind the fact that Axa Insurance has today announced that 210,000 small firms are operating without employer's liability, and therefore illegally, will the Minister ask the Department for Work and Pensions to carry out its review urgently, ensure that it covers issues such as competitive practices and consistency of cover, and ensure that firms are given proper notice when the insurance basis is to be changed?

Nigel Griffiths: I will certainly ensure that my colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions are aware of those issues and carry out a comprehensive and effective review.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): I have had discussions with companies in my constituency, mainly building and scaffolding firms which report that their premiums are going up four and five times over a year. That is clear profiteering by the insurance industry, which blames 11 September, but what 11 September has to do with scaffolding I cannot imagine—it escapes me. The industry is using 11 September as an excuse, and unless we intervene to stop this naked profiteering, small and medium-sized firms will go under because of it.

Nigel Griffiths: My hon. Friend makes a good point. On 25 September, my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction met the National Federation of Demolition Contractors, which put points forcefully to him. It is important that spurious reasons are not given for driving up the cost of insurance. We have been working with the Association of British Insurers and the British Insurance Brokers Association to examine how small and other firms can be covered by liabilities insurance and how giving spurious reasons for not providing cover can be avoided.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The position is obviously extremely serious and I am grateful to the Minister for what he is doing, but there are a lot of horror stories out there. What does he say to the Humberside family run steel fabrication business, which is, I believe, in the constituency of the Deputy Prime Minister, that has been forced to make five people redundant and cease trading because its combined public liability and employer's liability bill has increased from £3,600 to £28,000?

I am well aware that the Minister cannot control market forces, but has he spoken to the Chancellor about the huge £300 million increase in the insurance premiums tax take? Could a cap be put on that take and some of the surplus paid back to business? Could not that money be used to provide a pool of employer's liability insurance, backed by the Government—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is far too long.

Nigel Griffiths: I welcome all practical and constructive suggestions, and I have met my colleague the Financial Secretary as well as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on this matter. The House will have been pleased to hear the Chancellor announce last week a review of the employer's liability insurance scheme. The impact on manufacturing and on the type of firm referred to by the hon. Gentleman will be important parts of that review.

Development Prospects (Warrington)

3. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What estimate she has made of economic development prospects in Warrington; and if she will make a statement. [83604]

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): Warrington continues to benefit from the conditions of economic stability, high employment, low inflation and low interest rates, which are the hallmark of the Government's economic policy. The regional economic strategy illustrates the way forward for the whole region to achieve a sustainable and competitive economy.

Helen Jones: As my hon. Friend knows, Warrington needs to create more highly skilled and highly paid jobs. Will he take a personal interest in the Omega site, which is the largest industrial development site in the north-west? Will he also liaise with the Deputy Prime Minister to ensure that the regional planning guidance, which in its draft form would hinder development of the site, will in its final form ensure that we can develop it to create jobs not just for Warrington but for the entire sub-region?

Alan Johnson: I know how important the site is, and I know of the problems that were raised during public consultation on the draft regional planning guidance. I will stay in touch with my right hon. Friend the

Deputy Prime Minister, who I am sure will take those representations into account before formulating the final version early next year.

Energy Prices

4. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): What action she is taking with regard to energy prices for private households; and if she will make a statement. [83605]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Average domestic gas prices have fallen by 10 per cent. in real terms since 1997, and electricity prices by 19 per cent. Customers who switch supplier can, on average, save about £23 on their annual electricity bill and about £55 on their annual gas bill.

Mr. O'Brien: Does my right hon. Friend share my concern for families on low incomes who face a cold Christmas? The £200 winter fuel allowance for pensioners is appreciated by many elderly people, but my concern relates to the future cost and supply of energy. We are warned that gas prices will rise, that nuclear prices will rise and that supply will diminish. The only stable fuel for energy supply is coal. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that the coal industry will be maintained, and that future energy supply will be guaranteed?

Ms Hewitt: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the plight of elderly people, in particular, who face the prospect of a cold winter. The £200 winter fuel bonus that he mentioned amounts to over a third of the annual average fuel bill. We all know from our constituencies how welcome it has been. We will shortly publish the first of the Government's annual reports on the progress of our fuel poverty strategy, but we already know that some 2 million households have been taken out of fuel poverty.

My hon. Friend raised extremely important points about security of supply, to which we will return in the energy White Paper.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I believe that wholesale prices have fallen by 40 per cent. over four years and retail prices by less than 13 per cent. Does that not imply that very large windfall profits are now being earned by the electricity distributors? Whom does the right hon. Lady hold responsible? Has the regulator perhaps been rather naïve in lifting price-capping while competition is not fully effective? Or is the problem that the Government have given insufficient guidance to the regulator to attach priority to the protection of consumers, especially poor consumers?

Ms Hewitt: As I have said, retail prices for electricity as well as for gas have indeed been falling. Industrial electricity prices have fallen by between 20 and 25 per cent. in real terms since the beginning of the reform of the electricity market in 1998. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the actual cost of domestic electricity is a much smaller proportion of the total bill than is the case with industrial suppliers, but we have asked Ofgem to keep a close eye on the operation of the market, and we are already making amendments to the new electricity trading arrangements to ensure that they work more effectively in future.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): If we continue to worship the guru who says that cheap is always best, how long will it be before most of our electricity is generated from imported sources? Will that not leave us vulnerable?

Ms Hewitt: That is an important point. As both my hon. Friend the Energy Minister and I have said many times recently, in the White Paper we will look for the best way of ensuring in the medium and long term that we have the diversity of supply in our electricity market on which security of supply for all our domestic as well as our industrial customers depends.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I congratulate the Secretary of State on having recently exceeded the average length of tenure achieved by previous occupants of her post over the past 20 years.

Does the right hon. Lady agree that energy prices would reflect the environmental costs of energy production more accurately if the arbitrary and burdensome climate change levy was replaced by an emissions trading system, and that such a system would allow both nuclear power and renewables to compete with fossil fuels on fairer terms?

Ms Hewitt: The climate change levy has a very specific function, which we set out clearly when we introduced it, and that is to improve the incentives for investment in new, high-quality renewables. The climate change levy, coupled with the renewables obligation, is indeed strengthening investment in renewables, while at the same time the climate change levy provides an effective and powerful incentive to industrial consumers to improve energy efficiency. I would remind the hon. Gentleman that the climate change levy was introduced following a report by Lord Marshall, the former president of the Confederation of British Industry. We are working with our European partners on the introduction of a European emissions trading system and we shall have more to say on that subject in the energy White Paper.

Industrial Policy

5. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): If she will make a statement on the place of science and innovation in the Government's industrial policy. [83606]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Science and innovation are at the heart of the Government's industrial policy.

Dr. Starkey: Part of the justification for the very large sums of money that the Government have put into scientific research is that scientific research can be exploited for job and wealth creation, but small businesses are notoriously poor at picking up those results and turning them into extra jobs. What is the

Department doing to try to encourage co-operation between small and medium-sized enterprises and university science and technology departments?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point because, despite the outstanding record of some smaller firms, the average performance in introducing a new product on which competitiveness depends is really quite inadequate. Last week, I announced a wide-ranging review of the UK's innovation performance and the results of that review will help us further to strengthen performance. What we are already doing through the LINK programme and through investment in the science base and, for instance, the centres of manufacturing excellence, is to make it much easier for small firms in particular to work far more closely with the science and technology base, and thus to introduce the new products and processes on which their future success will depend.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the commercialisation of science and technology and innovation is crucial to areas such as my constituency in the north-east? Will she therefore congratulate the north-east centre for scientific enterprise, which is based at Durham university, on its success and perhaps even beef up the amount of Government money that it can obtain?

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted to have this opportunity to congratulate that centre on the investment it is making and on its success. I am very pleased to say that my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for small business will be visiting it in a fortnight. We have already in the past few years more than doubled the rate of spin-off companies coming out of the university science base, and I am sure that the centre in my hon. Friend's constituency will be just as successful in future.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In seeking to foster a climate for the growth of science and innovation and in recognising that regulation can be onerous and debilitating on the one hand, or enabling and protective on the other, can the right hon. Lady tell me and the House what assessment she has made of the benefits of the Regulatory Flexibility Act 1980 and the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act 1996 in the United States?

Ms Hewitt: That was a long way of getting to an interesting point about regulation. I take some comfort, though not too much, from the recent report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which investigated the climate for regulatory reform across all industrialised countries. It found that the UK has a much better set of policy levers for bearing down on unnecessary and over-complicated regulation than almost any other country in the world. We have in particular looked at the example of the United States and drawn on the lessons from that and from other countries, including the Netherlands, to ensure that we remain at the forefront of good regulation, because we are determined to sustain the position that the *The Economist* intelligence unit recently identified of having one of the best regulatory and entrepreneurial environments for business in the world.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Given that one aspect of science and innovation for which there is huge potential in Britain is the sustainable energy industry, does my right hon. Friend accept that a bolder and more ambitious target—such as 25 per cent.—is appropriate beyond 2010 for renewable technologies?

Ms Hewitt: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend, in general terms, about the importance of setting ambitious targets for sustainable energy. We shall of course be setting those targets in the energy White Paper, to which I know he is looking forward with great interest.

Trawlermen (Compensation)

6. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): If she will make a statement on the compensation scheme for former Icelandic water trawlermen. [83607]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): Following the 1997 election, the Government made a commitment to compensate former trawlermen who lost their livelihoods as a result of the settlement of the cod war with Iceland in 1976. Thousands of former trawlermen have received compensation totalling tens of millions of pounds.

Shona McIsaac: While I fully accept that the compensation scheme put right a serious injustice, will my hon. Friend put his hand on his heart and tell me whether he believes that further injustices may be being perpetuated because the standards of proof of eligibility are being set so high that many men are being denied the compensation owed to them? Does he feel that a balance-of-probability standard of proof would be better in these cases?

Nigel Griffiths: No, I do not. The independent adjudicator, who arbitrates on appeals, has so far been unable to provide a way of identifying vessels eligible for the scheme, and of preventing unsubstantiated or bogus claims from those who did not trawl in Icelandic waters. Any move away from the evidence that we have accepted to date would be unfair on more than 4,600 former trawlermen who have received legitimate payments.

EU State Aid

7. **Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe): What proposals she has put forward to reform EU state aid policy. [83608]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): We continue to press the European Commission to reform its state aid

rules, to introduce more economic analysis to its consideration of cases, and to streamline its procedures. The Commission is receptive to our objectives and ideas.

Mr. Betts: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. She will doubtless recognise the problems caused to many regeneration schemes by the Commission's outlawing of state aid given through the previous partnership investment programme. While welcoming the interim arrangements made with the Commission, does she accept that there is now a need for long-term, permanent agreements that allow state aid to be given in a way that recognises the importance of public-private partnerships in delivering regeneration in many of our towns and cities?

Miss Johnson: I do indeed. We are pursuing a twin-track strategy on regeneration: we are encouraging the Commission to introduce a new regeneration framework, and in parallel we are supporting effective regeneration schemes under the existing rules. Given my hon. Friend's Select Committee work, he is well aware of that strategy, which includes six regeneration schemes for which approval has already been granted.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): As the Minister knows, one of the ideas inherent in EU state aid policy is ensuring as far as is possible a level playing field throughout Europe in economic affairs. With that in mind, has she any comments to make on the agency workers directive, which her Government signed on our behalf only last week?

Miss Johnson: This is unfinished business, as the hon. Gentleman ought to appreciate. He will also know that, in general, we are at the low end of state aid, and that the Commission regards us as a very good performer in terms of the overall league tables.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): In the context of the loan to British Energy and the necessary approval from the Competition Commissioner, if the Government were to reverse their previous policy of requiring nuclear generators to internalise the costs of radioactive waste management and decommissioning, would that be acceptable under current EU state aid criteria?

Miss Johnson: As my right hon. Friend made clear in her statement to the House on 28 November, the restructuring is based on a proposal for solvent restructuring. That was preceded on 27 November by the European Commission approving the rescue aid that the Government are giving to British Energy. That approval also covers the proposal to fund the company until 9 March next year.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Will the Minister confirm that the £450 million of aid for rural post offices—finally announced to Parliament on Monday after being trailed by Government spin doctors in the middle of October—is not state aid but simply involves the spending of surpluses generated by the Post Office in its profitable years? Does not the need for that aid arise from the Government's mistaken decision to stop paying cash benefits to pensioners and other claimants at post offices, which will cut sub-postmasters' incomes by 40 per cent?

Miss Johnson: That decision has been cleared by the Commission. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that his question is inaccurate, as pensioners who do not want to use the new arrangements will be able to turn to the universal bank, which will cover future payments through post offices. The House will appreciate that 3,500 rural post offices closed in the time of the previous Conservative Government.

Manufacturing Sector

8. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): What support she is providing to the manufacturing sector. [83609]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government's manufacturing strategy that was published in May identified seven key areas of activity for Government and industry that are crucial for manufacturing success. We are taking action in all of those areas to help British manufacturers cope with very difficult global conditions.

Mr. Chapman: My right hon. Friend may be aware that Candy Domestic Appliances, a company that has manufactured refrigerators in my constituency for decades, recently announced its closure. Despite exemplary efforts by the unions and the work force, the company simply found that the pound-euro exchange rate was an uncompetitive barrier that it could not surmount. In the light of that, and of the global restructuring that is in train, will my right hon. Friend say what plans she has to help firms such as Candy, and to sustain a UK manufacturing base?

Ms Hewitt: I was extremely sorry to hear about Candy's decision to transfer production from my hon. Friend's constituency out of the UK. As he is aware, officials from my Department were in close touch with the company and the unions throughout the discussions. We went through the various investment options to see whether the plant could be kept open. I am sorry that that did not prove fruitful.

The Government have set out, in their manufacturing strategy and in the one published by the regional development agency, exactly what we will do to ensure that more of our manufacturers remain competitive. They can do that by improving skills, for example, and in particular by strengthening the links between smaller manufacturers and our outstanding science base. It is from that science base that the new products and processes that are the key to manufacturing success will emerge.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): The right hon. Lady will be aware that, under this Labour Government, hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs have been lost in this country over the past few years. What representations has she made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and what calculations has

her Department made, regarding the effects on employment in the manufacturing sector of the national insurance changes that will come in from April?

Ms Hewitt: Every business leader to whom I have spoken since the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor agrees that it is essential that we put more money as a country into the national health service. The question therefore is not whether we are going to make more money available, but where it will come from. There is general support throughout the country for my right hon. Friend's decision that the costs of that investment in the NHS should be borne fairly, through a 1 per cent. addition to the national insurance contribution from employers, employees and the self-employed.

I note that the Opposition want to go back on that increase in NHS investment. I do not think that that will commend itself to the public any more than most Conservative policies.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Business across the country has welcomed the manufacturing strategy. Among manufacturers, there is qualified optimism about what could happen in uncertain times, but also still a nagging concern about the impact of the climate change levy on industries that are both capital intensive and labour intensive. Will she undertake an industry-by-industry survey of the impact of the climate change levy after 18 months? Will she try and give us an assessment of how the concept of fiscal neutrality is applied in this context? It seems to escape the understanding of many people, who are paying a lot of money and not getting much in return.

Ms Hewitt: On fiscal neutrality, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made it very clear that there is no net gain at all to the Exchequer from the climate change levy, because what is paid by business has been recycled in lower national insurance contributions. It is also worth stressing that any business customer that secures its electricity from renewable sources does so without any payment of the climate change levy and any industrial company that has signed up to one of the energy efficiency agreements gets an 80 per cent. discount on their climate change levy. We are of course working with industry to keep the operation of the levy under review and in particular to see whether the eligibility for those 80 per cent. discount agreements can be widened in ways that would be beneficial to our industry.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Is not the best help that the Government could give the manufacturing sector a cut in the £47 billion of extra taxes that Labour has imposed on business, a cut in the burden of red tape and regulation, a decent transport system, a supply of school and college leavers whose qualifications and skills meet the needs of employers and a Secretary of State who fights the corner of manufacturers instead of criticising management?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense, as he well knows. He has not bothered to refer to the cuts in corporation tax introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, the research and development tax credit—initially for smaller firms, now for larger firms, welcomed universally by manufacturers and worth nearly £500 million—and the substantial investment that we are making after years of neglect in developing skilled scientists, engineers and technicians—one of the most pressing problems for manufacturers. The hon. Gentleman fails to tell the House that we have lower levels of business taxation than Germany, France and Italy—lower, indeed, than 12 countries of the European Union. On all the recent international benchmarking surveys, we have a better regulatory environment than almost any other major industrialised country.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I am sure that my right hon. Friend, as a fellow Leicestershire Member of Parliament, is aware that Brush Electrical Machines has had to reduce its working week to four days in recent times. However, there is good news for the company, if only we can get the assistance of the DTI, the East Midlands development agency and Leicestershire agencies to ensure that there is a shift in production to some new exciting products. Will my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that she will use her good offices, as a fellow Leicestershire MP and as Secretary of State, to ensure that the company gets every assistance to move this exciting project forward, even if that means some cash help as well?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend will understand that the Chancellor does not allow me to bring a cheque book to Trade and Industry questions. However, I readily undertake to ensure that my officials will work with him and with the company to see whether any help can be given, possibly through the regional development agency, to ensure that the exciting opportunities that are opening up to the company are seized and lead to success and further job creation.

Broadband Services (Perth)

9. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the introduction of broadband services in Perth constituency. [83610]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): My right hon. Friend's broadband taskforce involves all the devolved Administrations and the English regional development agencies and is working to increase the availability and take-up of broadband throughout the UK. Scotland is also benefiting from the £30 million UK broadband fund. This has been the subject of consultation with the Scottish Executive.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the Minister for his answer, but he will be aware that great swathes of my constituency of Perth are not covered by affordable broadband and that Scotland lags at the bottom end of the UK coverage league table. When does he foresee a national strategy for broadband roll out in Scotland? Will he undertake to discuss with his Scottish Executive counterparts a national funding package to secure broadband roll out as soon as possible in rural areas such as my constituency?

Nigel Griffiths: One minute—four facts. Scotland receives £4.4 million, the largest single allocation from

the UK broadband fund. There are technology trials in Campbeltown, a rural part of Scotland, totalling £65,500. Establishing a wireless network in the Western Isles is getting £1 million worth of resources. In the hon. Lady's constituency, the DTI is contributing £70,000 to trials in Crieff to ensure the use of electrical means rather than telephone wires or cable TV. Any other Member from any other party would be congratulating the DTI and the Government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot allow that question to go beyond the hills of Perth.

Fireworks

10. **Mr. Harold Best** (Leeds, North-West): If she will propose legislation limiting the use of fireworks to local government licensed events. [83611]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I have no plans to limit the use of fireworks to organised public displays, including local organised events.

Mr. Best: Will my hon. Friend explain a little further why not?

Miss Johnson: One reason is that it would require primary legislation and our current programme does not include such a Bill. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that the Government supported a private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy). Sadly, it was talked out on 3 July 1998, but it would have included provisions such as those referred to by my hon. Friend.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Does the Minister appreciate that many Members have received numerous complaints on the subject of fireworks, especially from people in urban and suburban areas? One of the biggest problems is the level of noise. In my constituency, that affects elderly people and people who keep livestock outside, especially birdkeepers. If the hon. Lady is unable to consider legislation such as that proposed by the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best), is there some way noise from fireworks can be reduced to acceptable levels?

Miss Johnson: I have every sympathy with the hon. Gentleman and his constituents, and indeed all constituents, including my own—all of whom have in recent times suffered from a high degree of noise nuisance from fireworks, as have their pets. The package of measures that I announced on 15 October will do much to cut noise from fireworks, because a ban on air bombs will be effective from January. They are among the noisiest repeating fireworks that are cheaply available and cause noise and nuisance that is completely unacceptable in local communities.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Although I welcome the package of measures, they go nowhere near far enough. Fireworks continue to be sold well after bonfire night. Some fireworks are so powerful that they can blow up telephone boxes. It seems that there is consensus for legislation on both sides of the House, so can we introduce a licensing scheme, with licensed distributors, for the sale of fireworks and stop their sale from shops? Secondly, can local authorities licence events such as parties and celebrations so that there is some control of the whole business? I am sure that there is agreement on both sides of the House for the speedy introduction of legislation to tackle that abuse.

Miss Johnson: I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a degree of consensus, which we welcome. I am also aware that we need to give the measures that I announced some time to take effect, as there will be a lead-in time for the fireworks industry as regards the sale of fireworks. However, in addition to those measures, the Government stand ready to look further at the need to promote quiet communities and to secure safety through other opportunities that may arise in the future.

Liabilities Management Agency

11. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): What discussions she has had with trade union representatives on the implementation of the Liabilities Management Agency. [83612]

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): My officials are in regular dialogue with national officers from all the main unions representing the employees of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., Magnox Electric and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. They have also held a number of meetings with union representatives at site level. A meeting with Sellafield representatives is taking place today.

Tony Cunningham: I very much welcome that, because my constituents in west Cumbria would urgently like a meeting with the Minister. Would my hon. Friend be prepared to meet representatives from west Cumbria, where there are serious concerns about the implementation of the LMA, especially as regards wages and conditions?

Mr. Wilson: I should of course be pleased to meet them. I occasionally meet stewards and full-time officials from Sellafield, both formally and informally, and I should be pleased to discuss the issues and, I am confident, to lay their concerns to rest.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): When the Minister comes to implement the Liabilities Management Authority, is he proposing to transfer historic waste liabilities from British Energy to the LMA? If so, will he transfer with that funds and assets from British Energy commensurate with those liabilities?

Mr. Wilson: That is still an open question and was not part of the arrangements announced last week.

Ceramics Industry

12. **Ann Winterton** (Congleton): What recent assessment she has made of the future economic viability of the United Kingdom's ceramics industry. [83613]

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): The ECOTEC study published in March 1999 is the most recent report on the ceramics sector. This led on to the creation of the Ceramics Industry Forum, which is supported by £3.3million of DTI funding. More generally, departmental officials keep up to date with developments in the sector through regular meetings with ceramics firms and intermediaries covering a wide range of productivity and competitiveness issues.

Ann Winterton: Is the Minister aware that the UK ceramics industry has been better placed than its European counterparts to withstand competition from low-cost importers because of the comparative flexibility of the UK labour market? However, will he address the concerns of ceramics manufacturers in the Congleton constituency, as well as the British Ceramics Confederation, who believe that that slight advantage is being seriously eroded by the incessant imposition of unnecessary and unrelated regulations by this Government, which add costs and reduce competitiveness and will affect future investment and employment opportunities?

Alan Johnson: I accept that the ceramics industry feels that it has an advantage in this country thanks to the splendid policies of this Government. The intelligent question from the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and the answer from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State addressed the issue of regulation. All sectors of manufacturing are, of course, concerned about additional regulations, but they are also extremely discriminatory in terms of the regulations about which we are talking. For instance, employment regulations such as the minimum wage, the right to paid holidays and the right that part-time workers be treated the same as full-time workers do not even register on most manufacturers' Richter scales. Most good employers in this country see such measures as decent and proper terms and conditions for their employees. The problems in ceramics are being addressed through the industry forum, for which the Conservative party was committed to remove funding as part of £300 million of cuts in business support. The industry is taking the issues forward and having an intelligent debate about regulations, which is not always what we hear from the Conservative party.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I dissociate myself from any call that the Government should not be looking at extending employment rights to workers in the ceramics and potteries industries? However, my hon. Friend the Minister is well aware that we cannot disguise the fact that the ceramics industry has faced severe problems, arising particularly out of the global market in which it is operating. It is important that we stick with the agenda of innovation and design. I invite my hon. Friend to visit—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Minister.

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend can invite me to visit; I am just not sure where. *[Laughter.]* She makes an important point about the ceramics industry. The only answer—not just in ceramics but in other sectors—is to add value and to continually innovate, so that we can compete on the same basis as our competitors from Japan, Germany and the United States; not in terms of low pay or low skills but in terms of high added value. I should be pleased to visit Stoke-on-Trent. I was due to visit twice, but the visits had to be called off because of parliamentary business. However, we will rearrange the visit shortly.

Broadband and Television Services

13. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): How she intends Ofcom to ensure universal access to broadband and television services. [83614]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): The Communications Bill currently before the House imposes a number of duties on Ofcom. These include securing availability of a wide range of television and radio services of high quality, calculated to appeal to a variety of tastes and interests, and securing these throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bryant: BT maintains that it is forbidden by competition law from rolling out broadband services in my constituency in areas such Treorchy and Ferndale unless it can prove that it is not subsidising doing so and that it has got 600 people signed up in the constituency. If that is true, is competition law an ass in this area? If it is untrue, will the Minister tell BT to get its act together?

Nigel Griffiths: I would appreciate it if my hon. Friend could supply me with the details, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has set up the UK broadband taskforce, with a co-ordinator in each region and each devolved nation to ensure that public expenditure on broadband has the maximum impact on its availability. I will certainly draw the issue that he raises to the attention of the co-ordinator in his area.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

The Minister was asked—

Women (Public Life)

33. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What steps she is taking to encourage more women to enter public life. [83637]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): We have introduced legislation on women's representation that allows all political parties to take positive steps to increase the number of women who hold elected office.

With the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women, I have been holding events all around the country for women who are interested in public appointments, and I am glad to say that the vast majority of the women who have attended those events now intend to apply.

Helen Jones: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer and for the work that she has undertaken on this issue, but may I ask her also to open discussions with many local councils to encourage them to hold their meetings at a time when more women can attend? In particular, may I ask her to pay attention to encouraging more women from deprived areas to put themselves forward for appointments in public life, so that we get a proper spread of representation throughout the country?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with the points that my hon. Friend makes. Where public bodies hold meetings in London, it is a matter of course to pay travel and child care expenses, but I agree with her that local councils and, indeed, regional bodies need to consider this issue, particularly if they are to ensure that they benefit from the skills and experience of women in low income families.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Will the Minister look at the person specifications for many of those public bodies, which do not sufficiently value the experience of interacting with public service that almost every mother, for example, in the country has? Will she encourage Departments to consider specifically what experience of public services people who apply for appointment to public bodies have?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. A great deal of the skills that we need on public bodies includes common sense and the practical daily experience of bringing up a family and using public services. That is increasingly what those who make such appointments are looking for, but I will certainly draw the issue to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends who are responsible across Government for those appointments.

34. **Mr. Andy Reed** (Loughborough): What progress she has made in increasing the proportion of women appointed to public bodies. [83638]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I have already referred to the programme of events that my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women and I have been holding. I am delighted to say that 2,000 women have already attended those events. On 11 September, we will launch a practical guide that will help more women to find out about public appointments and apply for vacancies.

Mr. Reed: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will she further explain those regional seminars? Has she been able to ensure that women from ethnic minorities from her own city—Leicester—and from Loughborough, of course, have taken part in them? We want people from ethnic minorities, particularly women, to come forward. Will she ensure that the specific needs of those groups are taken into account?

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted to respond to my hon. Friend's question. I recently attended one of those events in Leicester with 200 women from black and Asian communities from Leicester, Loughborough and further afield, all of whom were extremely eager to seek appointment to public bodies and had an extraordinary range of energy and experience to offer. Any headhunter would have been proud of them, and I have no doubt that, in the next year or two, we will see many of them taking up vacancies on public bodies.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): The initiatives that the Minister describes are all very welcome, but the number of women on public bodies has increased by only 2.7 per cent. since Labour came to power. We may compare that with other countries, such as Iraq. In the United Kingdom in 2001, the percentage was 34 per cent., but Iraq surpassed that figure in 1990. By 1998, the figure for women in the public sector was 40 per cent. The Government have set a target that women should hold 45 per cent. to 50 per cent. of the public appointments made by Departments by the end of 2005. In the same briefing, however—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not like to interrupt the hon. Lady, but she is supposed to be asking a supplementary question.

Ms Hewitt: I think that I have got the gist of the question, although I must say that I would not have chosen Iraq as my exemplar of equal opportunities. A regime that employs professional rapists in its military hardly seems to me to be an exemplar that any hon. Member would wish to quote.

The hon. Lady is, of course, right that we still have a great deal of progress to make in this area. Since becoming Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, I have been able to appoint, on open competition, Barbara Mills, Gwynneth Flower and Eve Pollard to the Competition Commission, Margaret Prosser and Angela Risley to the Low Pay Commission, Marisa Cassoni and Rosemary Thorne to the board of the Post Office, Barbara Thomas to the board of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and Catherine Mitchell to the energy advisory panel. We are, therefore, making progress, and my Department has a target to ensure that between 45 per cent. and 55 per cent. of appointments made each year will be women.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): As my right hon. Friend is aware, many women in our communities are doing excellent work, and those skills should be recognised by public bodies. Those women are working, for example, on the new deal for communities, in neighbourhood renewal zones and on regeneration projects. Will she consider instituting an accreditation scheme so that the skills that those women acquire are recognised by the public bodies to which they should be applying?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the extraordinary experience that women, particularly those who are involved in neighbourhood regeneration,

could bring to bear in local councils and in a much wider range of public appointments. I am wary, however, of the idea of a new accreditation scheme, as I think that that may complicate matters further. What may be more valuable—I know that she will want to assist in this—is ensuring that every public body that is seeking new appointees recognises the value of that neighbourhood and community-based experience.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): One of the problems with the crime of domestic violence is unduly lenient sentencing, as seen in the Court of Appeal this week. Can the Minister tell us what measures the Government have taken to increase substantially the percentage of women at all levels of the judiciary to help restore women's confidence in the criminal justice system?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Lady makes an extremely important point, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General has been enormously active in ensuring that outrageously lenient sentences in such cases are appealed by the prosecution and that the judiciary, male and female, are aware of the seriousness of this crime and reflect that in the sentences that they award. Of course, my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has been taking steps to ensure that there is a much higher proportion of women on the bench, which will certainly help to overcome the problem of lenient sentencing.

Greenfield Report

35. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): When will she publish the Greenfield report on increasing the involvement of women in science. [83639]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): On 28 November, I published the report by the noble Baroness Greenfield, which contains a number of proposals for improving the recruitment and retention of female scientists and engineers. I warmly welcome Baroness Greenfield's report. We will study it carefully, and we will respond in due course.

Dr. Starkey: I too welcome the report by Baroness Greenfield, and I urge other Members to try to get copies of it. May I suggest that, yet again, this report on improving the representation of women in science and engineering has concentrated on women in research, and particularly on women in research in the universities? I suspect that that is because of the availability of data. The scientific work force is much wider than that, and includes all levels of representation in the private and public sector. Will the Minister investigate ways of getting better data on women's representation throughout the scientific work force, and examine ways of improving women's representation throughout it?

Ms Hewitt: I am glad to be able to tell my hon. Friend that I have already commissioned research that will give us a much better understanding of the number and percentage of scientists, engineers and technologists employed right across the private and public sectors. There is an important point behind her question. About 40 per cent. of the men who have science, engineering and technology degrees are employed in related occupations. Only about 25 per cent. of women with similar degrees are so employed, and about 50,000 women with science and relevant degrees are not employed at all. Therefore, a vast pool of talent is out there if only we and business can tap into it.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business of the House for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 9 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Extradition Bill. Followed by proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill. Followed by proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill.

TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the European Parliament (Representation) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER—Motion on the retirement of the Clerk of the House. Followed by a debate on European affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER—Debate on DEFRA issues on a substantive motion covering agriculture and the environment.

FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 16 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Hunting Bill.

TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill.

WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER—Consideration in Committee of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill.

THURSDAY 19 DECEMBER—Motion on the Christmas recess Adjournment.

FRIDAY 20 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The House will return after the recess on Tuesday 7 January. I commend to hon. Members the handy pocket calendar produced by the Clerks of the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear. Hear."] For the first time, it sets out the dates in full for a parliamentary Session.

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House not only for the business for next week but for the news about the handy pocket calendar. I am sure that it will be essential for us all.

Will the right hon. Gentleman please clarify exactly what the mysterious debate on Thursday 12 December will be about? So far, we are in the invidious position of not knowing what it will be about. We know that it will be about DEFRA, so can we have a guarantee that it will, at least, cover such vital issues as flooding, CO_2 emissions, domestic waste and the like? Can we have clarification; otherwise it will look like just another case of "defracation"?

Yesterday in PMPs—[HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] Prime Minister's porkies. Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) asked the Prime Minister about the drugs tsar and asked specifically:

> "what has happened to him and his targets?"

The Prime Minister first waffled about extra finance and increased spending, at which point *Hansard* records hon. Members asking "What about the tsar?" There was no reply from the Prime Minister.

Matters then got worse. The Father of the House, no less, asked about a curious episode involving the Iraqi football team and FIFA. In his response, the Prime Minister said:

> "I would not say that we had better information than FIFA. But leaving aside that incident".—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 905-6.]

At that point *Hansard* records, *"[Interruption]"*, and no wonder. If the Prime Minister, when he reluctantly appears in the House once a week, refuses point blank to answer questions from myself, my hon. Friends or, indeed, the Father of the House, can we please have a re-run of Prime Minister's questions after this session each Thursday in an attempt to get some proper answers out of him?

Mr. Cook: I have a high regard for the right hon. Gentleman. However, given the pun that he inflicted on the House, it will soon be time for him to take his Christmas recess—and preferably he will not return with puns that have come out of crackers. Those are the worst ones of all.

I do not see any mystery about next Thursday's motion. I am repeatedly asked by hon. Members on both sides of the House to hold debates on agriculture, the environment and foot and mouth. It is right that we should have a full day's debate on those topics and a full motion will be tabled in good time. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that those Members who wish to raise the subject of foot and mouth, for instance, will be competent to do so under the terms of the motion.

The drugs tsar is capable of speaking for himself. I would not dream of entering into that particular debate.

On FIFA, although there appears to be a difference of evidence between those who played in the Iraqi football team, those who have managed to leave Iraq confirm that the incident in the dossier did happen to them, while those who remain in Baghdad continue to insist that the Hussein family is made up of perfect gentlemen, and that they have no complaints. I know which of the two I choose to believe.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The Leader of the House will be aware of the great deal of public concern about the strange sequences of bungled butlers' cases. He will have noted that the Prime Minister yesterday implied at column 902 that the Crown Prosecution Service is investigating that. Can the Leader of the House arrange for a statement from the appropriate Law Officer on who is conducting the investigation? Is it an internal one or is it objective on either side? What is its remit and the time scale?

The Leader of the House will also be aware that, on suspension, the Northern Ireland Assembly had 28 Bills awaiting consideration. Those are now coming to this House in the form of statutory instruments and are jumbled together in threes. As they are to be considered in a Statutory Instrument Committee Upstairs, they cannot be amended. Is that a satisfactory way to ensure proper scrutiny? In particular, is it not curious that staff

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

in the Stormont Assembly, who would usually ensure that the Bills are in a proper form, are being retained on full pay and twiddling their thumbs?

Mr. Cook: On the question of the collapse of the butlers' trials, I have no first-hand personal cultural experience of employing a butler and do not know many people who have. The hon. Gentleman will have heard that the police have provided for an inquiry into their handling of the case. Indeed, I heard Lord Harris discussing that this morning. On the CPS, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that he expects it to learn the lessons and to do so quickly. Whether it is necessary to have a review to learn those lessons, I would not wish to say, but I hope that the CPS will reflect on the substantial sums of public money that were laid out on both trials. That must perplex many of my hon. Friends whose constituents come to them because they cannot obtain legal aid to assist them in much more important issues.

On the Northern Ireland Bills, let us be realistic. There are enormous demands on the time of the Chamber and the House. I am pleased that by Christmas we will have had Second Readings of 17 Bills in this place and in the second Chamber. That is probably a record in the interval between the Queen's Speech and the Christmas recess and it shows the substantial progress that we are making. Within the limits of the pressure of Bills that it is necessary for us to introduce, we will obviously try to do all that we can in relation to our duties for scrutiny in Northern Ireland. But none of us is pretending that this place can be a satisfactory substitute for the Northern Ireland Assembly. That is why our efforts are focused on doing all that we can to ensure that the Assembly is restored. I hope that those who are in politics in Northern Ireland will assist us in that objective.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The Leader of the House will have read about the latest bullying of the inspectors by the White House yesterday, when it demanded "multiple, simultaneous, aggressive inspections". With this weekend's deadline for the Iraqis to produce their list of weapons or weapon materials due, can we have a debate early next week so that the House can vote on whether it wants to support the dangerous warmongers in the White House or to join with the rest of the world in seeking a non-military solution?

Mr. Cook: We have recently debated Iraq and I am perfectly confident that we will have other debates on it. However, it is very important that we proceed with our legislative programme in the remaining two weeks before the Christmas recess.

On the UN inspectors in Iraq, I have full confidence in Hans Blix, whom I had the privilege of meeting when I was Foreign Secretary. I have told the House that I believe he will do the job with great independence of mind and great thoroughness, given the nature of his technical and diplomatic background.

It is worth recalling that at present barely a quarter of the total complement of the inspectors has arrived in Iraq. I am confident that as the complement builds up, so will the number of inspections.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): The Transport Act 2000 gave local authorities the right to introduce congestion charges. The Secretary of State for Transport appears, with good reason, to be getting cold feet about that. Given the likely public outcry, and the outcry from business that will face additional costs in January in London, will the right hon. Gentleman find time early in the new year for the House to debate the implementation of congestion charging in London under the Government's legislation?

Mr. Cook: The House has provided the legislation under which congestion charges have been brought forward in London. The scheme for London is the responsibility of the Mayor of London. As we have repeatedly stated, it is important that in bringing forward a scheme, he seeks to achieve consensus and consent from the people of London, and ensures that the scheme will result in a better transport system for London. It is the mayor's scheme, not the Government's scheme. I would not wish to give the mayor the satisfaction of debating every proposal that he makes.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): Will the Leader of the House try to find time for a discussion about the plight of British passport holders travelling in the illegally occupied Palestinian territories? My wife—one of those people—has been virtually arrested four times in a week, and told by the Israeli armed forces that the holding of a British passport is worthless for people of Palestinian origin. I have discovered through our excellent diplomats who are working in the area that this is a situation faced by every British citizen of Palestinian origin. My right hon. Friend will accept from me—I know that he knows this—that it is one of the mysteries of the age that important countries like ours allow Israel to get away with things that no other country would conceivably be allowed to do.

Mr. Cook: In fairness, I should say that my colleagues at the Foreign Office complain robustly if there is any example of a British passport holder being harassed by Israeli authorities. As for the general thrust of my hon. Friend's question, I entirely agree with him. All British citizens are entitled to equal respect and equal attention, both by the British Government and by every other Government. British citizenship is blind on the issues of race or ethnic origin. That is absolutely right, and we are proud of our multicultural diversity. We must insist on the same rights of respect for all our citizens, whoever they might be, from foreign Governments.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): As the Leader of the House was in his normal place on the Government Front Bench during question time yesterday, he will have noted the confusion after the Prime Minister's answers to questions about university finance and top-up fees. It was to such an extent that in today's newspapers it is suggested that the Prime Minister has backed down. Yet the Secretary of State for Education and Skills says something that is quite the opposite. There is total confusion.

May I ask the Leader of the House, on behalf of students and parents in my constituency and elsewhere, to arrange for the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, or better still the Prime Minister, to come to the Government Dispatch Box to clarify the situation, rather than hiding behind a suggestion that some time in February, perhaps, a decision will be reached?

Mr. Cook: Early in the new year—possibly in January—a White Paper on the review of funding of students in higher education will be published. The right hon. Gentleman is asking for someone to come to the Government Dispatch Box to announce the results of that review before we publish the White Paper on the review. I know that this will probably be a vain plea, but I would invite the House to be more mature on this matter. There are a number of options to be debated, and it is right that these options should be put to the House and the country for debate. It is the start of a process. We should not start now to rule out specific options on the basis of closing down the process before it has even begun.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): In view of yesterday's public statement from the chief executive of the Strategic Rail Authority, will my right hon. Friend clarify the role of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and Members of this place in deciding where investment in our railway system should go?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has rightly and properly drawn on the Strategic Rail Authority to try to ensure that the right priorities are set for the railway industry and that we get to grips with some of the major investment projects, such as the west coast main line, which have not been successfully taken forward by those who were in charge of them previously. We are putting a substantial sum into the 10-year programme, of which investment in the railways is a part. Responsibility for that rests entirely with the Secretary of State for Transport, who is accountable to the House. Everyone in the rail industry recognises that it is an advance to make the Strategic Rail Authority more hands-on, so that it can be in the driving seat and provide more leadership in the industry.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I understand the response that the Leader of the House gave the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on Northern Ireland Orders in Council, but may I have an assurance that if faults are found in those orders after they are passed, there will be opportunities, either in a forthcoming Northern Ireland Assembly or in the House, to amend them quickly? May I also plead for a debate in the House on Burma, so that its ethnic population and the Burmese rural community can have a sense of peace and provision at Christmas time?

Mr. Cook: I am very sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's reference to the situation in Burma. When I was at the Foreign Office, I had the privilege of visiting one of the refugee camps in Thailand for people from Burma. I was deeply moved by the dignity and patience of people who were obliged to flee and by the tales of the very real brutality which had forced them to walk for days over the mountains to escape, including that of one man of 83 who was a former veteran with our own forces in the last war. We owe a debt of gratitude to those people for assisting us in the war. We will continue both to remember their plight and, as the Government are doing, to put pressure on the Burmese Government to improve and change their ways.

On the issue of Northern Ireland, I am sure that if there are any faults in the orders, we will hear about them. Indeed, I suspect that I personally may hear about them on a Thursday morning. Should any such problems emerge, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is ready to rectify them.

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): My right hon. Friend will be aware that after business questions there will be a statement on the local government settlement, which makes detailed and complex changes to the financing of local government. It will be difficult for Members to make detailed comments without having had the time to study the settlement. Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate in the House so that when Members and their local authorities have had a chance to look at it, we can make studied comments on the changes?

Mr. Cook: It is customary for us to debate the local government settlement some time after the statement, and I fully accept that many hon. Members will wish to express views on it. In fairness to the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, who will be making the statement this afternoon, I should tell the House that he asked me last week to provide notice of it during business questions. Having been given advance notice, hon. Members could be here to talk about the impact on their local area. I know that my right hon. Friend is keen to make sure that he maximises communications with the House, for which he should be respected.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Chancellor of the Exchequer was pleased to pray in aid of his estimates and statistics the endorsement of the National Audit Office. I mention that, because I wish to ask for a debate on Government accounting standards. When it comes to accounting for Network Rail's £21 billion contingent liability, the Chancellor rejected the very source of advice prayed in aid of his Budget assumptions. We should therefore have a debate to ensure that the Government are not indulging in any more Enron-style accounting practices.

Mr. Cook: On reflection, I think that the right hon. Gentleman will feel that he did not find the right way of making his point. Nor does it assist the House to appear to imply that the public accounts are in any way irresponsible or false in the way that Enron's were. Were such an idea to gain currency, the right hon. Gentleman would be the first to admit that it would have a severe effect on his constituents and everybody else's, because it would reduce confidence in those accounts. The accounts are presented professionally on the advice of professional statisticians, and I see no reason to disagree at all with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's judgment on Network Rail.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I note that my right hon. Friend announced that the Regional

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

Assemblies (Preparations) Bill will be considered in Committee of the whole House. Has he considered whether it might be for the convenience of the House that at least part of the Hunting Bill should be considered in Committee of the whole House?

Mr. Cook: As my right hon. Friend will be aware from his long and distinguished service in the House, the reason why the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill comes back to the Floor of the House is that it is a constitutional measure, and, by convention, we deal with important constitutional issues on the Floor of the House. The Hunting Bill does not necessarily or naturally fall into that category, but I hear what he says and I shall discuss it with my colleagues who represent the Department introducing the Bill. We should not lose sight of the fact that the Government deserve credit for bringing the issue before the House so that it can make a decision. At whatever stage, whether in Committee or Report, there will be an opportunity for the full House to take part in that decision.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Can the right hon. Gentleman find time for a debate on the derisory Government funding of children's hospices and, in particular, of the Little Havens children's hospice in my constituency, which receives less than 2 per cent. of its income in Government support? We could also debate the Conservative manifesto promise of providing 40 per cent. Government support for children's hospices. Does he agree that that is a more appropriate funding level?

Mr. Cook: I shall happily look into the particular case to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I fully understand that it must be a matter of immediate concern to his constituents. On the broad issue, however, we are frequently struck by the fact that we are faced outside the Chamber by Conservative demands for reductions in spending and taxation, but inside the Chamber we hear only demands for further spending. At some stage, the Opposition owe it to the rest of us to try to square that circle.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): When does my right hon. Friend anticipate that the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform will report to the House? When will the House have an opportunity to vote on any options that the Committee might propose? Will those options be amendable and is it intended that the issue should be decided on a free vote?

Mr. Cook: We have given an assurance that the issue will be taken on a free vote. That was the basis of my statement last June. Indeed, any motion that we put before the House is, by definition, amendable. My understanding is that plenty of options will be proposed by the Joint Committee, and I am not sure whether it will be necessary to table amendments to provide for any more options than the many with which we will be presented. As to the timing, I said last week that the Chairman of the Committee had given an undertaking that he would report before the winter solstice. The solstice is even nearer than it was last week, but, nevertheless, I believe that the Joint Committee has a programme of sittings that should enable it to meet that target.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): The Leader of the House will be aware that in the days preceding the terrorist atrocities in Bali and last week in Mombasa, certain Governments issued warnings to their travelling public. The British Government did not do so. In the light of the closure of the high commission in Nairobi, will the Foreign Secretary come to the Dispatch Box to explain the situation before more lives are lost?

Mr. Cook: We have taken the decision about the high commission in Nairobi—it may be said that we have done so with reluctance, as we do not welcome the closure of business in any important capital—because of specific intelligence that we received precisely about a threat to that high commission, so it was right, proper and responsible for us to respond. We have received no information about a specific threat to residents in Kenya generally. That is why no specific warning was given.

If we were to be pushed into a position in which, whenever we received a general warning that was not specific, we urged people to close down business in a wide range of countries, we would be doing exactly what al-Qaeda wants us to do. It wants to disrupt business, normal life and commercial success in such countries, and we should not try to anticipate it by doing that for it.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Following the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), does my right hon. Friend agree that Richard Bowker's statement this week is more evidence of the catastrophe of rail privatisation that was inflicted on the country by the Conservative party? Does he therefore agree that we should have a full debate on the Floor of the House on the future of the railways in which we could even discuss the possibility of bringing the whole railway system back into public ownership and operating the state-owned system that works so well on the continent of Europe?

Mr. Cook: I fear that the ambition of my hon. Friend's policy objectives would require more than one day's debate on the Floor of the House, but I would not disagree with his preamble, as what we are trying to do in introducing the additional remit that we have given to the Strategic Rail Authority is to remedy the weak regulation under which privatisation took place. We would not have had to take those steps or have this discussion if privatisation had not proceeded with such haste and been introduced with such incompetence.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Would the Leader of the House agree to our having a debate on social affairs? Yesterday, the Prime Minister said:

"I believe that signing the social chapter was essential in order to keep this country's influence in social affairs."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 898.]

I think that I have missed something, as before the Prime Minister signed the social chapter, we ourselves had complete control. I would be interested to hear about the benefits of the social influence that the Government have gained by signing the social chapter.

Mr. Cook: I have always taken the view that if one is patriotic, one will want British people to benefit from

the same rights as are available to those in our neighbouring countries. I cannot for the life of me see why the British people should be denied the advantage of the working time directive, which will give more than 2 million British residents the right to a paid holiday this Christmas—a right that they never had before. I recall the Conservative party saying before the last election that, if we signed the social chapter, it would cost Britain half a million jobs. Five years on, one and a third million more people are in work than before we signed it. The only people who lost their jobs were the Conservative MPs who opposed our signing the social chapter.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): May I get back to the royal butlers and the aftermath of the collapsed royal butler trials? Many people will be deeply concerned about the affect of recent events on the reputations of senior royals. Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to read early-day motion 281, which I tabled?

[That this House believes all members of the Royal Family who receive gifts from heads of state or heads of government should be invited to enter these in a register updated annually which would be made public, specifying in each case where the gift is located or how it was disposed of.]

The motion respectfully calls for the establishment of a royal register of gifts, which would specify the gifts' location. If they had been disposed of, it would specify when and where. Will my right hon. Friend use his good offices to draw the motion to the attention of those at the palace?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend's concern for the reputation of the royal family does him credit as a staunch monarchist. I read his early-day motion with interest when I studied all the motions this morning and I note the innovative idea that he proposes. I hope that it may be possible for the royal family to consider the proposal in the review that they are currently carrying out. No doubt, it would add some transparency, but it is a matter for the royal family to consider and I am sure that they will do so very carefully.

On the two trials, we should not lose sight of the fact that the questions and lessons that need to be asked and learned perhaps rest more with the public services—the police and prosecuting authorities—than with the royal family.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The Leader of the House will be aware of the impending disaster facing the Scottish fishing industry, in which some 40,000 jobs are on the line. He may also be aware of today's mass rally meeting in Edinburgh, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). Does he accept that the urgency of the situation and the dire consequences for Scotland—the key decision in the Fisheries Council is being taken in December—merit an urgent statement from the Prime Minister to let us know what he intends to do as UK Prime Minister to fight for Scotland's fishing industry?

Mr. Cook: We had a debate on the fishing industry only a couple of weeks ago. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), the Fisheries Minister, has done all that he can to keep the public and the House informed of our attitude. Of course, we fully understand the very deep concern in the fishing community about the proposed reductions. However, the hon. Lady should also express some concern about the state of North sea cod stocks. There will be no future for her community or the fishing industry if there are no fish. Unless we take urgent action on conservation, there will be no fish left. She owes it to her constituents not merely to represent their anxieties in the House, but to provide leadership in the local community to ensure that it is sustainable in the long term.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): May we have early clarification and transparency on the Government's policy on the London Underground public private partnership? Have the Government backtracked on their commitment on an early transfer of the tube to Transport for London? What financial commitments flow from that?

Mr. Cook: What the Government said in the recent statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is that we want to proceed with the PPP. It is precisely because we want work to continue in preparation for the PPP that we have provided the proposed indemnity against court action. However, it would be rather strange for us to transfer the London Underground to the Mayor of London while he is still contemplating court action to prevent the PPP from proceeding.

I would say, as a constituency Member, that I am slightly baffled by the attitude taken by the Mayor of London on this question. I can assure the House that, if the sensible, pragmatic, forward-looking West Lothian district council were to be offered the billions of pounds now on offer to the mayor, it would, by now, have found some way for such a scheme to proceed. If the mayor really has the interests of his people at heart, he should now stop putting delays in the way of this project, and enable us to make the essential investment necessary to improve the London underground.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Leader of the House arrange for us to have a debate on parliamentary answers? Is he aware that I have put a number of questions to various Departments asking whether they would list the funds that they make available to organisations and individual members of the public who might apply for them? Most Departments have given reasonable answers to that question. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills, however, has provided me with this answer: "We do not hold information centrally on all organisations and individuals who apply for grants, or the amounts paid. Therefore, this question could only be answered at disproportionate cost." Is it not ridiculous that the Department cannot tell elected Members of Parliament how it is spending public money, for which it is accountable to the House?

Mr. Cook: I should be happy to consider the hon. Gentleman's question, but, the way I apprehend what he was saying, he was asking about grants to individuals.

[Mr. Cook]

Frankly, I am not surprised that the Department for Education and Skills cannot say what individuals have received financial grants up and down the length of Great Britain. I would be surprised if any Minister were in a position to collate such information—indeed, I am rather glad that they are not. Ministers are there to ensure that the policy directions of their Departments are correct. They should not make individual decisions about who gets money out of them.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the debate in the Chamber on 24 October on the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002, in which the Minister, accepting the world-wide mountain of evidence that white asbestos was dangerous to health, expressed an intention to implement those regulations. It is outrageous, therefore, that the Lords are seeking to annul those regulations this morning. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that, if the Lords make that decision, the regulations are brought back to the Chamber so that they can be implemented directly?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has a long record of pursuing this issue, and he is to be complimented on that. It is certainly a matter that has a serious impact on those who have come into contact with white asbestos. I do not know what the outcome of the hearing next week will be, but I can assure my hon. Friend that it will be considered very carefully and, I am sure, expeditiously, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Notwithstanding the debate due to take place a little later today in Westminster Hall on the third report of the Select Committee on International Development, can the Leader of the House hold out any hope that we might have a debate on the Floor of the House on one of the most important international conferences ever to have taken place—the world summit on sustainable development, in Johannesburg? Alternatively, does he think—perhaps this is a question for you, Mr. Speaker, rather than for the Leader of the House—that the all-embracing omnibus DEFRA debate in a week's time might give us the opportunity to raise these important issues?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to confirm that the debate next Thursday will provide the opportunity for issues relevant to the Johannesburg summit to be raised. It is a debate on agriculture and the environment, and DEFRA was, of course, one of the lead Ministries to go to Johannesburg, so it would therefore be entirely competent to raise those issues in that debate. I am well aware of the interest, both in the House and among our constituents, in the contribution that the Government have made to international development, and I personally take great pride in the fact that we have increased by half as much again the overseas aid budget that we inherited from our predecessors. I will certainly look for opportunities for the House to debate that.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): In view of the confusion that has been created this week in the press and the media over health boards up and down the country, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the fluoridation of public water supplies? A legal case to prove that Strathclyde regional council was in breach of the Water (Scotland) Act 1946 has cost £2 million, and Lord Jauncey said at the time that he thought that fluoride was a "medicinal product". If that were the case, the council would be in breach of section 130 of the Medicines Act 1968, and would need a product licence to provide fluoride. It would also need to have the product passed by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines. Could we find time to debate this matter in the House?

Mr. Cook: I fear—I say this with deep regret—that this might be an issue on which my hon. Friend and I have differing views. I should declare an interest in that I am vice-president of the British Fluoridation Society. Since my days, long ago, as a health spokesman for my party, I have never been in any doubt that fluoridation has a real and significant impact on dental health. As someone who has had more than his fair share of hours spent in the dentist's chair, I would wish to do all that I can to spare future generations that experience.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): May we have a debate on Government abuse of the work permit system? In it, perhaps Ministers could explain to my constituent Toni Prior why her American fiancé, Troy Ridgeway, cannot obtain a work permit—despite the fact that he has gone through the legal process, has a job to go to, a home, and no recourse to public funds—when 1,200-plus permits are available to people from Sangatte who have no known jobs, homes or skills, and have shown their determination to abuse and bulldoze their way through the asylum process.

Mr. Cook: I cannot comment on the case of the hon. Gentleman's constituent—*[Interruption.]* I think it would be deeply improper of me to comment, given the fragmentary information that I have been given in his question. On Sangatte, the one issue that has been raised more than any other in the Chamber over the past couple of months—including frequently at business questions—is the importance of the Government taking action on the number of people trying to come here illegally from Sangatte. We have now secured an outcome in which the camp is to be closed. We shall now no longer have illegal immigrants coming over from Sangatte. Only four arrived through the channel tunnel in the whole of October. Conservative Members cannot have it both ways. They cannot demand action to close Sangatte, then criticise the Government for achieving exactly that objective.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Following the question from the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) about the decision by Sir John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor General and head of the National Audit Office, that the £21 billion loan guarantee to Network Rail should have appeared in the Treasury balance sheets earlier in this Session, will the Leader of the House please find time for a debate on this matter? The amount of off-balance sheet activities that the Chancellor is sanctioning now aggregates to £100 billion or more, which is 10 per cent. of gross

domestic product. This is more than a concern for sad accountants who ought to get out more; it is a concern for the House. We should demonstrate to the public at large that decisions at the heart of our economic strategy are based on professional decisions and not on political dogma.

Mr. Cook: I am not quite sure what point my hon. Friend was making in his closing remark. *[Interruption.]* No, I mean that genuinely. I believe that we have immensely handicapped the investment in our public sector by the way in which we have refused to recognise that the economic activity of investment in our transport system has precisely the same economic impact whether it is done by the public or the private sector. If it is right for Network Rail to invest when it is a private company, it must plainly also be right and economically beneficial for it to do so when it is within the public sector. My hon. Friend should not be putting up barriers against sensible investment in our future transport system, which will be good and efficient and will make Britain more competitive.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the Leader of the House find time for an early debate on the subject of increasing violence between next-door neighbours? I understand that, only recently, a married man living in the Westminster area was viciously mugged by his highly aggressive next-door neighbour after a long-running dispute over something called top-up fees. Will the Leader of the House tell us whether there is any truth in the rumour that the Prime Minister has now officially applied for an antisocial behaviour order against his own Chancellor?

Mr. Cook: I—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer!"] For a moment there, time stood still for me. I think that the hon. Gentleman was trying to be funny—

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Yes, he was.

Mr. Cook: Ah! I am glad to have that confirmation, because there was some doubt on this side of the House as to whether he was so trying. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, if he waits for the review next year, he will find that all neighbours within the Government are in full support of each other.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Further to the question on asbestos from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), if a proposal from a Conservative Front Bencher in the House of Lords on the annulment of regulations that have been debated in the House in Government time and signed into law can be passed, where does that leave us in terms of the process? The regulations on white asbestos are long overdue and we cannot afford a parliamentary ping-pong while people go unprotected.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Get rid of the Lords.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) expresses a characteristically robust view. Clearly, that is an issue of great gravity and of considerable and wide political interest. I am sure that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will take note of our exchanges and whatever outcome there may be next week.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Further to the Leader of the House's disappointing replies on top-up fees to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) and my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), may I reiterate the plea for an urgent clarificatory statement of Government policy? Does the right hon. Gentleman not recognise the fact that, for so long as Ministers continue to argue like ferrets in a sack, doubt will continue to persist as to whether he stands by his statement of 24 April 1997 to Leeds university student radio, to wit, "Tuition costs must be picked up by the state. We are quite clear about that."?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for taking me down memory lane. My interview at Leeds university had slipped my mind, but I shall certainly make a point of reinvestigating it.

Again, I must tell the House that if we are to have a review and if that review is then to provide a number of options, there is no point whatever in the House trying to decide which options should be in and which should be out before the first paper has even been published. It is important that the Government should have the capacity to propose options for consultation for debate, and I think it important that the Government should ask hard questions and be willing, occasionally, to ask themselves tough questions. That does not necessarily mean that the specific tough questions may be those that result in the chosen option, but we should not try to close down a debate before it has even begun.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Will the Leader of the House consider scheduling a debate following yesterday's announcement in Germany that unemployment there has risen to 4.16 million, which is 9.7 per cent. of the working population? Only seven constituencies in this country have a greater percentage of unemployed. Given that we are constantly being told that the euro is a great success, can we have a debate on what failure means?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has strong views on those matters. If I may, I invite him to retain, if it is possible, perhaps not an open mind, but just the chink of a loophole in his mind to accept some new ideas on them when we receive the economic assessment. On the specific question of Germany, if he reviews the matter with German industrialists, he will find that many of them are clearly of the view that the German export industry would have been badly hit had Germany stayed out of the euro.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the Leader of the House find time for an urgent debate on the future of adult placement schemes? I raised the matter in the summer Adjournment debate, I have written letters to Ministers and tabled written questions, but I have not received a single answer. Is he aware that families who take in vulnerable adults and keep them out of the care

[Mr. David Cameron]

system are giving up because they are regulated by the National Care Standards Commission and they have to work through 33 policies and a huge bureaucracy? Why cannot they be regulated by local social services departments, just like foster care schemes and as they were for many years?

Mr. Cook: While it is important to have a local dimension to any inspection system, it is also important that schemes are operating to national standards. I would not accept any criticism of the importance of our having national standards to ensure that adults in care are properly cared for. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of the Secretary of State responsible, who may wish to write to him, but I see nothing wrong with having national standards to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the case of my constituent, Mr. Sandy Mitchell, who has been sentenced to beheading in Saudi Arabia. The legal process is under way in that country. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that time is found for Ministers to keep the House informed of any developments?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend touches on one of a number of very distressing cases that are of real concern to Her Majesty's Government. We have repeatedly made representations on those cases and our consul in Saudi Arabia is in contact. My hon. Friend rightly refers to what one might describe as the opaque character of the Saudi Arabian judicial system, but we will do all that we can within the limits of operating under that system to ensure that the case is represented and to secure fair treatment of Sandy Mitchell and the others who have been accused.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): May I reiterate the request for a debate made by the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins)? In January 2002, the Strategic Rail Authority told my constituents that the West Anglia Great Northern modernisation and enhancement would be complete by 2006–07. Now we are told that it may happen in five, 10 or 15 years, if at all. The Leader of the House must recall that the chairman of the SRA, Richard Bowker, said in January that that plan marked a line in the sand. When will the House have an opportunity to find out what happened between January 2002 and today that means that all those potential rail network enhancements have been thrown out of the window?

Mr. Cook: In fairness to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, he has taken action to try to ensure that we can achieve greater certainty and a greater sense of priorities among the major projects that are necessary to modernise our railway system. The Conservatives, however, suspended virtually all investment during the rail industry privatisation, which resulted in spectacular failures of investment in major lines, so it hardly lies in the mouth of a Conservative Member who supported that privatisation to criticise us as we try to sort out the mess that they left behind.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Following on from the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), there seems to be a widespread and genuine belief that the Government intend not to transfer the tube from the aegis of London Underground Ltd. to Transport for London. Some of us have dealt with the senior London Underground managers and, if for no other reason, we are filled with alarm when we envisage them dealing with some of the sharpest operators in Britain in the form of Jarvis and the others. Can we have a debate, or at least a statement, to clarify the confusion that seems to be generated as to the tube's future?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to do what I can to roll back any confusion that may exist. As I understand the position, there is no doubt that Government policy is to transfer London Underground to Transport for London. The only question that has arisen in the light of the Secretary of State's statement is how quickly we can do that. Plainly, it is difficult to contemplate transferring London Underground when the Mayor of London is still maintaining the possibility of legal action to stop the PPP proceeding. The way forward is perfectly clear and perfectly simple: the Mayor of London has to accept that London needs a modern underground system. It needs investment to secure that, and the way to get ahead with that investment is to allow the PPP to proceed. We must not put the money into the lawyers rather than into the underground.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the Leader of the House make time for the Foreign Secretary to come to the House to make a statement on UK relationships with Iran and afford the opportunity to discuss the abuse of human rights there as well as the execution of women and of prisoners who are politically opposed to the brutal regime of the mullahs? I believe that the matter is urgent, and there are allegations that Iran, too, is acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Cook: Of course, there are human rights abuses in Iran—indeed, the Government have repeatedly condemned and made representations about them—but if the hon. Gentleman wishes to discuss our relations with Iran he should also recognise that there have been elections in which the overwhelming majority of those voting elected for people who want to take Iran forward in the 21st century and who want to roll back the repressive power of the mullahs. It does not help those who want change and modernisation in Iran to confuse their representatives with those mullahs to whom he refers.

Local Government Financial Settlement 2003–04

1.19 pm

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): With permission, I should like to make a statement about local authority revenue finance for England 2003–04.

I am pleased to be able to announce that next year's local government settlement will see total support from Government grant and business rates of £51.2 billion. That is a cash increase on this year's settlement of £3.8 billion, or 8 per cent. It provides substantial real-terms growth in the funding we are providing for local government. The £51.2 billion consists of £24.3 billion in revenue support grant, £15.6 billion in business rates, £4.1 billion in police grant and £7.3 billion in special and specific grants. Today, I am announcing details of the allocation to individual authorities of the £39.9 billion of revenue support grant and business rates. Taken together with the police grant, that represents an increase of 5.9 per cent. cash over this year's allocation.

We announced last year that from 1 April next year we would introduce a system for distributing grant between authorities that would be fairer, more transparent and more just. Members will know that we have taken a long hard look at the grant distribution system. We had no doubts about the need to replace the outdated and discredited standard spending assessment system, but developing a robust, appropriate and fair replacement has been a challenging task, not least because of the many competing claims from different categories of local authority.

We held detailed discussions with local government and those with expertise in this area as we looked at all the current formulae and the options for change. We held 15 meetings of the technical group in just over a year, and many more meetings were held with those with an interest, covering education, police, personal social services and other council services. We then carried out a wide-ranging consultation on those options, including useful seminars and debates in the House in which Members let us know their views. The consultation paper included 47 specific options, and another 52 exemplifications were carried out at the request of local authorities.

We received some 55,000 responses to the options on which we consulted over the summer. More than 1,000 of those came from councils, members of the public, Members of Parliament, business organisations and others with an interest; the remainder were sent in response to various campaigns. Several petitions were also received. I announced the publication of an analysis of those responses earlier today by means of a written statement. Copies of the analysis have been placed in the Vote Office.

To reach a conclusion we needed to balance the pressures, the evidence and the representations. One of the major problems with the old SSA system was that it attempted to take a view on what authorities needed to spend. That was unrealistic and inconsistent with our approach to devolving responsibilities, so we will not continue the arrangement. Notional spending allocations do not imply anything about the budget or spending choices that will need to be made. Councils, in consultation with their council tax payers, should properly take such decisions. The one exception is in respect of the Government's key priority of education: we have said that we want to see authorities pass on increases to schools. In summary, the purpose of the new system will be to distribute grant according to authorities' relative circumstances and relative ability to raise resources from council tax.

The new grant distribution formula will, in the main, no longer rely on past spending patterns. That is one of the main criticisms of standard spending assessments. The new formula will ensure that the distribution of grant is relevant to the circumstances that councils face now, reflecting up-to-date spending patterns where appropriate.

We have worked hard to make the system less complex and difficult to understand. This was never going to be easy. The sheer size of the sums going to local authorities, the wide-ranging responsibilities undertaken by councils and the differing circumstances faced by authorities across England mean that there will inevitably continue to be a degree of complexity in the formulae used. However, we have simplified the structure of the system, which can be summarised as a basic allocation to each authority with top-ups reflecting particular circumstances such as deprivation, high wage costs and sparsity.

The formulae also no longer include the perverse incentives and inadequate indicators that were present in the old system. For example, the old fire formula was based on the number of calls each authority received. That meant they had little financial incentive to improve fire safety and safety education, and so reduce the number of calls. We have tried to remove such anomalies from the new system.

Many Members will have a particular interest in our decisions on the area cost adjustment. We have concluded that pay costs should be recognised within the system, but the ACA has been redesigned to minimise the "cliff-edge" effect. It will in future better reflect the different circumstances in London and the south-east, and the fact that authorities outside those areas have differing pay costs. It will also reflect the needs of areas outside the south-east with high pay costs.

We have also increased the extent to which the system takes account of councils' relative ability to raise council tax, known as resource equalisation. It means that we make a more realistic assumption about average council tax. It does not mean that we reward high spending.

We have made good the promise to ensure that no authority's schools will lose out in real terms from the changes. The new education formula ensures that every education authority's per-pupil allocation will rise by at least 3.2 per cent. in cash terms, well above inflation.

The environmental, protective and cultural services formula has been greatly simplified, and now better recognises the basic costs that all authorities face. We have made some detailed changes to personal social services, simplifying the system so that there is now a single formula for residential and domiciliary care for older people—although as PSS was reformed comparatively recently, these changes are less extensive than others. We have listened to the argument put to us by small authorities, particularly shire districts, that

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they face a fixed "cost of being in business". We have allocated a flat-rate £300,000 element to most classes of authority to recognise that cost.

As I promised, the system will incorporate floors and ceilings to safeguard authorities from excessive short-term variations in grant. For the last two years we have guaranteed that no authorities would receive less grant than they did in the previous year on a like-for-like basis. Councils with education and social service responsibilities did significantly better, of course, and last year we were able to ensure that all councils received a grant increase at least in line with inflation. As Members will know, we have already made it clear that no local authorities will receive a cut in grant next year in cash terms.

The "floors" will ensure that every authority in the scheme gets a reasonable level of grant increase, given the overall distribution and the total level of funding available. To pay for the floors we will impose a maximum on grant increases, and scale back the rises received by authorities between those two levels. I am pleased to be able to announce that I am setting the floor levels so that in 2003–04 all authorities will receive a grant increase on a like-for-like basis well ahead of inflation. That means a real-terms increase in grant for all authorities.

The floor increases in cash terms for police and fire authorities and shire districts will be 3 per cent. The floor for unitary authorities, county councils, metropolitan districts and London boroughs will be 3.5 per cent. To pay for the floor increases we will set a ceiling of 4.9 per cent. for single-service police and fire authorities including the Greater London Authority, 8 per cent. for unitary authorities—county councils, metropolitan districts and London boroughs—and 12.5 per cent. for shire districts. Increases above the floor but below the ceiling will be scaled back by 5.4 per cent. for police and fire authorities, 1.3 per cent. for shire districts, and 4.6 per cent. for authorities with education and social service responsibilities.

As I said earlier, we will phase in the new education formula in such a way that no authority's schools will lose out in real terms. The education formula will incorporate a floor of 3.2 per cent., in cash terms, and a ceiling of 7 per cent. per pupil.

In addition to the increases in funding for local authorities' general grant, we are providing further increases in grants for specific initiatives. Of key importance will be the neighbourhood renewal fund, which will allocate £400 million of grant via local strategic partnerships to help support and kick-start public services in the most deprived areas—£100 million more than in the current year. On a like-for-like basis, local authorities will receive £1.3 billion more next year in special and specific grants.

As we promised in the local government White Paper, we have looked closely at these grants to ensure that ring fencing is kept to the minimum necessary. Members will be aware from the recent announcement on freedoms and flexibilities that the proportion of funding paid to local authorities as ring-fenced grants will, on current plans, be reduced over the three years of the spending review. Excellent councils will also receive additional freedoms from ring fencing. Ring-fencing revenue funding is set to decrease from 12.4 per cent. to below 10 per cent. by 2005–06.

Our plans for next year provide local authorities with good increases in grant. The increases mean that since 1997 we have raised Government grant to local authorities by some 25 per cent. in real terms, compared with a 7 per cent. reduction in real terms in the last four years of the previous Administration.

There could be no clearer illustration of our commitment to supporting and helping local authorities to deliver the strong local leadership and quality public services that local residents rightly expect and that local government wants to provide.

Given the significance of the review that we have undertaken, local authorities have understandably been awaiting today's announcement with some anxiety. Some authorities have been predicting a settlement under which councils will have to make cuts or impose significant council tax increases. I am glad that today's announcement demonstrates that those fears, and the scaremongering from our political opponents about cuts in grants, were unfounded and unjustified. The good increases in funding provided by the spending review, the realistic levels of floors and ceilings we have been able to set, and the decisions we have taken on the distribution of grant to local authorities mean that there is no reason why councils cannot continue to improve services while sticking to reasonable council tax increases. Today's proposals are good news for local government and as such I commend them to the House.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I should like to say a little more than the ritual thanks to the Minister for giving us early sight of the statement. To his great credit, he went out of his way to ensure that all hon. Members have a very clear idea of the changes. I am sorry, therefore, to start on a slightly sour note, but I shall be brave about it.

A written ministerial statement promised that the consultation analysis would be available in the Vote Office and the Library. I am sorry to tell the Minister that it is not to be found in either place; I hope that his officials will ensure that that is rectified.

Today, we know the real cost of the Chancellor's vanity and who pays the price of his failure to add up the figures in March. Today, we will see for the first time ordinary families on ordinary salaries in ordinary homes facing £1,000 council tax bills. In the few short years since Labour started to target them, ordinary families' council tax bills have risen by more than 40 per cent. Council tax bills of £1,000 are just the start. The Government have promised a 16 per cent. increase in council tax over two years—a slippery stealth tax buried on page 197 of the pre-Budget report: so much for open government. Council tax bills of £1,000 will be in addition to the £35 a week for every man, woman and child that will be paid in extra taxation. The Government propose the introduction of a new band of council tax, which will push even more middle-income families into higher bands, particularly in the south-east and London. This will make matters worse.

In last year's statement on the local government finance settlement the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), said:

"There is no reason why we should see large increases in council tax"—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 169.]

Yet average council tax in England went up by 8.5 per cent.—four times the rate of inflation and the biggest cash increase in the history of council tax. However, the right hon. Gentleman should recognise that last year was part of the grand tradition of local government settlements established by the Deputy Prime Minister, who said in his statement in 1998:

"we look to local authorities to set sensible budgets that will keep council tax increases as small as possible." —[*Official Report*, 5 February 1998; Vol. 305, c. 1259.]

The reality was that different council taxes rose by 8.6 per cent. in band D—three times the rate of inflation.

The Minister has just said that the distribution of grant to local councils means that there is no reason why councils cannot continue to improve services while sticking to a reasonable council tax increase, yet the Government have promised a rise of 16 per cent. over two years, or seven times the rate of inflation—a rise caused mainly by this settlement and the rising burdens that the Government have placed on local government.

Last year the former Secretary of State promised:

"From 2003, we will introduce a system that is transparent, fair and just." "—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 169.]

It is right that we should judge him on those criteria. The Deputy Prime Minister has added his own special touch of mystery and ambiguity to a system that was complex and incomprehensible. We now have a system that is more complex, opaque and unjust than the one that it seeks to replace. The labels may have changed, but the reality remains the same. This is looking less like a consultation exercise and more like the last page of "Animal Farm", when the animals could not tell the pigs from the people. All this has been done just to transfer money from Conservative authorities to Labour ones. It seems that the Government are using a particularly heavy sledgehammer to give money to a few nuts.

It seems that the front-page headline in *The Times* in July was right when it predicted:

"Labour will tax Tory voters to fund heartlands"

Mr. Steven Pugsley of the Rural Services Partnership said that

"taking money away from rural services at a time when communities are looking for ministers' reassurance that they have their interests at heart would be unforgivable. The options under consideration would decimate vital services to market towns, villages and rural communities"

Last year, the Government made great play of the fact that there would be no scaling back of grant to pay for the floors and ceilings. The effect of scaling back falls on to a relatively small number of authorities. Birmingham would lose £1 million, Oxfordshire would lose £800,000 and Derbyshire £750,000. This year the Minister has announced the reintroduction of scaling back. What is the cost of this scale-back and will he confirm that it will affect local education authorities? How much money will be cut from education?

The new system depends heavily on a council's ability to raise council tax—resource equalisation. The Minister hopes optimistically that this does not mean that we will reward high spending, but it does mean that well-run councils that have been prudent and kept council tax down will be penalised. The system will penalise debt-free authorities that will face having their capital receipts raided to pay for badly run authorities.

Let us put partisanship aside for a moment. Next week we will have the verdict of the Audit Commission on councils in England. Conservative Members suspect that high-performing authorities will lose grant and need the protection of the floor announced today. Equally, we suspect that low-performing authorities will be rewarded by the settlement. Will the Minister give a guarantee that this will not happen?

Poverty and need are treated differently depending on where one lives. Can the Minister explain why, under the formula, Lancashire receives £85.48 more per child than Leicestershire and why Durham receives £83.20 more per child than Buckinghamshire? Is it not a sad reflection on the formula that Labour has chosen to ignore and airbrush out rural poverty?

The minimum grant or floor announced today will be insufficient to meet the needs of local education authorities in that it refers only to schools and pupils. This complex minimum grant takes no account of pressures facing LEAs such as school transport and special educational needs. If authorities are forced to apply for grants wholly on education, little will be left to fund other front-line services. This will lead to a macabre game of musical chairs. Councils will raid social services budgets; pressure from the needs of the elderly will lead to bed-blocking, which in turn will cause the Government to fine authorities, leading to an increase in council tax. It makes no sense to have different Government Departments tugging each other and local authorities in opposite directions, all because, in the words of *The Times*:

"Labour will tax Tory voters to fund heartlands".

Does the Minister agree with the Chancellor's estimate that council tax will increase by 16.3 per cent. over two years? Will he confirm that band D properties will incur bills of £1,000 for the first time? How many authorities, and how many local education authorities, will receive just the floor figure? How many LEAs' grant will be subject to scaling back, and can the Minister explain the curious fact that, according to his statement, the amount raised through business tax is £1 billion down on the figure published in *Hansard* last year?

This is a missed opportunity. Consensus could have been reached on reform of the system; instead, the Minister has chosen to ignore advice from Members on both sides of the House. This is the same old Labour, and the same old fiddled figures.

Mr. Raynsford: To change the tone, may I start by thanking the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) for his kind words about the provision of information? I say to him quite openly that this is a complex subject, and we tried our best to ensure that all Members had the opportunity to see the figures, and to understand what we are seeking to do. The full details are in the Vote Office, but, according to the normal convention, they were accessible only from the moment that I sat down.

The Opposition have been scaremongering about council tax increases for some time—long before this settlement. They talked about the threat of cuts in

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services, and about huge council tax increases, but those claims were based on wholly erroneous and unjustified interpretations of the consultation. It is now absolutely clear, as I hope they will have the good grace to admit, that all that scaremongering was unjustified. I hope that they will at least ponder the contrast between this Government's 25 per cent. increase in support for local government over six years, with the 7 per cent. real-terms cut under the Tories.

The hon. Gentleman's claim that the settlement will force up council tax is simply wrong, as is his claim that rural areas will suffer a loss. If he looks at the detailed figures, he will note that rural shire districts across the country as a whole get a 7.6 per cent. grant increase. What a contrast that is with the individual cuts that they suffered under the Tory Government! I can attribute his claim that the scaling factor will result in a loss to education authorities only to his misunderstanding of what it is. The scaling factor is designed to help to pay for the cost of the floors. The floors are supported first by the ceilings, but authorities that would otherwise receive more than the ceiling do not do so, and the scaling factor reduces by a very small margin the grant—

Mr. Pickles: What is it worth?

Mr. Raynsford: I have already given the hon. Gentleman the figures. They are in the statement, which he had for three hours before the debate, and I am astonished that he has not even bothered to discover them.

The hon. Gentleman's suggestion that high-performing authorities are somehow going to be penalised is quite wrong. There is no correlation between the work done by the Audit Commission, which is looking at the performance of authorities, and the needs assessment that informs the distribution. He will see that some high-performing authorities receive very good grant increases, and that some authorities that are performing less well also do so. That is because the two activities are quite separate. I am sorry that he has failed to understand that.

The hon. Gentleman's criticism of the children's education allowance is particularly ill-founded in a year in which we can state that, overall, there is a £200 per pupil average increase. That is in marked contrast to what happened when the Tories were in power. He confused the Chancellor's estimate of council tax increases in the Red Book, based on previous year trends, with what will actually happen, which will be a matter for individual authorities to determine. He also asked about the number of authorities that will get the floor level increase. The answer is clear from the figures that I have already provided, but he ought to be pleased that the floor is there. Without it, many authorities would suffer losses.

I shall pause for a moment to describe one scenario. Westminster city council has faced a real problem, not because of anything to do with our Department but because of the census data, which show a significant fall in the population of that area. Were a floor not in place, that authority would have suffered a serious reduction. Is he complaining about our efforts to provide protection for authorities through such a floor? His remarks suggest that the Conservatives have a wholly unsatisfactory understanding of what we are seeking to do. Their approach to local government has been condemned by their own record in government.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I thank the Minister for his statement, and for his courtesy in providing a particularly early sight of these very complex figures. I begin by welcoming a particular aspect of the statement. The Government have listened to some of the representations that were made. I am glad that Ministers have now checked the map and that they now recognise that Kingston-upon-Thames is not in east London.

Overall, however, the statement is extremely worrying for my constituents and for millions more. Rather than increasing council freedoms, the statement is a control-freak statement. Rather than being generous with Government money, the settlement is generous only with council tax payers' money. Does the Minister not realise that he has utterly failed to deliver on his promise of a fairer, more transparent and simpler system? Is it not true that, under the new system, there will be large council tax rises in the worst-hit areas for several years? How can that be fair?

Despite the Minister's claim that he is reducing ring fencing, most councils will see more special grants next year. He has abolished seven special grants and introduced 16 new ones, but how can feeding that financial fog increase transparency? Is it not true that, by looking solely at the grant system and failing to replace the unfair council tax, and to take budget power from Whitehall, the Government have missed the chance to establish a genuinely simpler system? As the Minister admitted, the Treasury predicts a 7.2 per cent. rise in council tax next year, but do not the Government always underestimate council tax rises—by a massive 3.1 per cent. last year? Is there not a real threat that average council tax rises next year could top 10 per cent.—four times the expected rate of inflation? The Government cannot duck the blame for rocketing council tax. It is Ministers who place councils in a financial straitjacket, with less room to move than Houdini, but they cannot escape the blame.

The Minister claims that his floors and ceilings will protect council tax payers, but he has set the level very low. Does he acknowledge that, at best, such protection will be partial and short-lived? What will happen in year 2 or in year 3, when the changes really kick in? If he is so concerned with protecting the losers, why were the Government not honest enough to announce the floors for years 2 and 3? Not only would that have shown the truth about this statement; councils could have planned for the future. Indeed, through his own local government Bill the Minister will force councils to plan budgets over the longer term, yet in this statement he is refusing to give councils the very information that they need to make those plans. Is he not just a little shamefaced about that hypocrisy?

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) complained greatly about shifting cash between different authorities: I say "Westminster and Wandsworth" to that. Will the Minister at least concede, however, that huge shifts leave him open to the

charge of gerrymandering? Does he not realise that, because the grant review was so rushed, that charge will stick? Will he confirm that he has breached Cabinet Office guidelines on good consultation by releasing the consultation's conclusions along with his settlement? Should not the Government have learned from their embarrassing mistakes in last year's settlement, and from the A-level debacle, and delayed the review by one year to allow for a full and independent analysis?

The most disappointing aspect of today's statement is without doubt the Minister's failure to bring clarity and equity to local education authority budgets. In so doing, he has ignored the principal recommendations of every professional group: Ofsted, the Audit Commission, and head teachers and governors associations. Why did he reject their idea that the bulk of education standard spending should be distributed using an activity-led formula? Given that the Government are increasingly telling schools what to do, why has he abandoned the principle of activity-led funding in favour of the discredited historical spend data? Will he explain to the House how schools appear to have lost £250 million between the Chancellor's spending review and this statement?

It was noticeable that the Minister did not bother to boast about increases for social services. Frankly, we are not surprised. Will he confirm that, with increased demand pressures and national insurance costs, the settlement represents at best a standstill for social services? How will that solve bed blocking and help children at risk? The Government may say that it will take time to make up for the lost years of Conservative underfunding, but social services are often life-and-death services. Why have they fared so badly?

The Minister said that the Government were removing the perverse incentives in the formula for fire authorities. When will he publish the new formula?

When they began the settlement process Ministers promised to move a mountain, but they have brought forth a molehill. The Minister can rightly claim that this is a better settlement than any delivered by a Conservative Government, but it will mean council tax hikes and little new cash for the most vulnerable. It will certainly not lead to the rebirth of local democracy.

Mr. Raynsford: I thought that the spokesman for the official Opposition had made a pretty poor fist of his response—until I heard the Liberal Democrat spokesman's effort. I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's acknowledgements of the representations that he made in respect of his constituency, and I am pleased that he is pleased that we listened to them. I shall make no jibes about geography.

I wholly reject the hon. Gentleman's allegation that the Government have a control-freak tendency. The settlement is part of a process in which we are devolving greater power and responsibility to local authorities, as I am sure he will understand when we discuss the Local Government Bill in Committee later in the Session.

The hon. Gentleman complained about council tax rises, without mentioning that Liberal Democrat councils had the largest increases last year. Liberal Democrat Members should look to their local authorities before they criticise others. He also asked why we were not giving absolute guarantees of the floors and ceilings for future years. I have explained that ad nauseam, to him and to other hon. Members. Until we see the full details, including the latest demographic data, it is impossible to set an accurate floor that also allows a reasonable gap between it and the ceiling. The hon. Gentleman must understand that. No responsible Government could do otherwise, but we have said repeatedly that there will be floors and ceilings, that there will be protection for authorities, and that there will be greater certainty. That is an indefinite pledge, and we have said that it will be a continuing part of the system. The Government have made a clear commitment that floors and ceilings will continue to be parts of the system.

The hon. Gentleman complained that the Government had not consulted sufficiently. We consulted before we published the consultation paper. We listened to the consultation, and we are publishing the figures today so that they can be consulted on. The Liberal Democrats have an extraordinary approach: they would love life to be one long continuous consultation—all talk and no action.

Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said, schools have not lost out. They are gaining substantially, as the settlement gives an extra £200 on average per pupil. It is a travesty for the hon. Gentleman to claim that there are losses.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about inadequate funding for social services, even though the settlement contains an overall increase of 5.5 per cent. in PSS resources, and an additional £100 million specifically for bed blocking. Extraordinarily, he omitted to mention that, and even criticised the Government for increasing the number of specific grants. That shows that Liberal Democrat Members have only the most rudimentary understanding of the essentials. Their questions are very wide of the mark.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. This statement has run for just over half an hour already. I have to protect the important business that follows, so I ask hon. Members to restrict their comments to one point only. In that way, I shall be able to call as many hon. Members as possible.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for the hard work that he and his ministerial team have put into consulting so widely on this matter. I thank him, too, for the extra money that has been made available, and for edging towards fairness. However, he will come before the Select Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions tomorrow morning. Will he be able to convince that Committee, or my constituents in the Bull's Head, that this system will be more easily understood? Will voters in local elections be able to determine whether their local authorities are efficient and well managed, or whether the funding system is still hampering their activities?

Mr. Raynsford: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about our consultation, and about the

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settlements in respect of Stockport. Stockport is to receive a 6.8 per cent. increase, and Tameside one of 8.3 per cent. I am sure that he and his constituents will be extremely pleased about that. My hon. Friend raised the question of whether the system was easy to understand. I have openly accepted that it is complex—but the obverse side of the coin of fairness is complexity. One cannot have both fairness and simplicity: to take account of all the myriad circumstances that have to be considered, it is inevitable that the formula has to be reasonably complex. That is unavoidable if one is to be fair. We could have a simple system, but it would not be fair. I do not think that my hon. Friend would like that.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): We have a rebadged area cost adjustment, but it may well have more frontiers than its predecessors. We have a new, gothic structure in resource equalisation, which might well prove to be as complex as area cost adjustment. How much of the new structure depends on council tax banding and resources? When the Government allocate money to schools, what account has been taken of the size of school balances? Does the Minister think that school balances should not accumulate beyond certain levels, rather than mounting up and sitting Gollum-like in school treasurers' caves after collection?

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman asked a series of questions, but did not mention that Craven, one of the two districts that he represents, is to receive an increase of 12.5 per cent. I am sure that he and his constituents will be delighted by that. On the education question, my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards will write to the right hon. Gentleman with a detailed response.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I want to ask about area cost adjustment. Many of us have argued that my right hon. Friend should take account of the costs that local authorities actually incur, so why has he decided to use the new earnings survey, which reflects costs in the private sector? Why do authorities in the Merseyside area now qualify, whereas those in south Yorkshire and Tyneside do not?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend raises an interesting question about area cost adjustment. His authority of Sheffield has received an increase of 6.1 per cent. I am sure that he and his constituents will be very pleased about that. We have reformed the area cost adjustment to ensure that it takes a wider view of areas with especially high costs. Parts of west Yorkshire do qualify, but wages costs are inevitably the driver, and it is not possible for every area to benefit. The settlement is an attempt to recognise that there are additional costs associated with delivering services in high-cost areas, and to do so in a much more sensitive way than the old area cost adjustment mechanism. I think that we have made progress on that.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): Does the Minister agree that when he began his statement, every child in Devon received £200 a year less than the national average for education, and that now that he has sat down, that serious discrimination remains untackled? Why did the Minister not look at that serious problem affecting west country children, instead of just loading council tax rises on to their parents?

Mr. Raynsford: Children in Devon and elsewhere in the country have benefited from the very substantial increases in education spending that the Government have made over the past six years, and that we continue to make. On average, there is a £200 increase in the amount per pupil this year, and that significant increase follows previous increases. Obviously, circumstances vary between areas, but Devon county council has received a good above-inflation increase of 4 per cent. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is delighted that the district of West Devon, which he represents, has received an 11 per cent. increase in grant.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I thank my right hon. Friend for recognising the needs of local authorities that are trying to deliver public services in areas of high housing cost such as Reading, Slough and the Thames valley. An increase of 8.8 per cent. for Reading is welcome, but may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the need for his Department to give practical help to local authorities desperately trying to boost the amount of affordable and key worker housing in their areas?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend will be as delighted as we are that Reading is receiving an 8.8 per cent. increase and West Berkshire one of 8 per cent. He may wonder why Reading is getting 8.8 per cent., given that the ceiling is 8 per cent. I should have explained that the capital element is outside the floor and ceiling, which is why some authorities can do even better than the ceiling.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister attaches great importance to affordable housing, and will announce his proposals for community plans to secure effective communities, more provision of affordable housing and the building of decent communities, particularly in areas of need such as the one that my hon. Friend represents.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): In his statement, the Minister said that he had made detailed changes to personal social services and simplified things so that there is now a single formula for residential and domiciliary care. In Kent, that appears to mean that the Government are to take millions of pounds from social services and give it to Richmond house, so that the Department of Health can give it back to primary care trusts, so that they can give it back to social services—with all the administrative costs deducted. At the end of the day, my constituents will have to pay more for their residential care. Why?

Mr. Raynsford: Kent has received an above-inflation increase of 3.9 per cent., which is a good settlement by any standards. The Government are particularly concerned about bed blocking, which is a serious problem. It is necessary to do something about it. It does not help if people occupy beds in hospitals unnecessarily because of inefficient provision of alternative accommodation. The arrangements that the Government are putting in place

are designed to ease that problem. A substantial grant is available to local authorities to help them meet their obligations. I hope that the system will achieve what I know the hon. Gentleman wants and what we certainly want—a reduction in bed blocking.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. I am glad that the Department is looking at the index of mass deprivation in connection with distributing resources, particularly in education and social services. He referred to the population figures, and the fact that over the past 10 years we have been using the 1991 census figures, with 1 million people incorrectly included in the formula. That means that authorities in SIGOMA—the special interest group of municipal authorities—have been losing out in funding over the past 10 years. I hope that that injustice to SIGOMA has been recognised. Can my right hon. Friend give an indication of how the Government are approaching the funding gap between what local authorities are spending and what they have been allowed?

Mr. Raynsford: I know that my hon. Friend has been campaigning assiduously for a long time not only for his own authority but for others in the parts of the country that he cares about passionately, which are represented by the SIGOMA group. I hope that there will be a broad welcome for the settlement, not just in Wakefield, which is receiving a substantial 7.9 per cent increase, but in many other areas represented by SIGOMA. On population change, we have rightly chosen to include latest population figures and put in place safeguards to ensure that authorities' budgets are not unreasonably disrupted by very sharp short-term movements. We want to use the most up-to-date data on that, as well as on the spending needs that underpin the basis of the new settlement.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Is there not something utterly perverse about the Minister claiming that there is £100 million in the budget to prevent bed blocking, when £100 million is precisely the figure that the Department of Health has in its budget for the revenue that it will raise from fining local authorities?

Mr. Raynsford: I note that the hon. Gentleman did not make any reference to the 3.7 per cent. increase that his county council has received, which he ought to welcome. Had a Tory Government been in power, his authority would have been facing a cut in its settlement. He should be celebrating the real-terms increases that the Government are delivering. Our concern is to reduce the incidence of bed blocking. It is precisely to encourage and incentivise authorities to do their best to deal with the problem that the arrangements that I have described were put in place.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I congratulate the Minister on the continuing increase in local government funding. How can the settlement that he has announced help the Liberal Democrats who run Liverpool city council to address the continuing problems of multiple deprivation and population loss?

Mr. Raynsford: I know that my hon. Friend will celebrate the fact that her city has received a 7.3 per cent. increase. We did not hear much about that from the Liberal Democrats, did we? All we heard from them was doom and gloom about how poorly local government is doing. Actually, local government knows that the Government have been helping authorities with real-terms increases in grant, and those increases are going to authorities of all political persuasions. There is no discrimination against a particular category of authority. Liverpool should certainly be pleased about the settlement that it has received.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): The Minister has given an assurance that no local authority will have a cut in cash terms. The right hon. Gentleman will also know, because I have mentioned it on several occasions, that the London borough of Havering is one of a small group of authorities throughout the country that has received a perversely low settlement under the old formula. Will the Minister give a further assurance that the London borough of Havering will not receive a cut in overall terms?

Mr. Raynsford: Yes, I am pleased to give the hon. Lady that assurance. The Havering settlement involves an increase of 3.5 per cent., which is a good percentage point ahead of inflation, and I hope that she and her constituents will be pleased with it.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): My constituents in Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke-on-Trent will be asking what extra money there is and whether the allocation is fairer. Will my right hon. Friend tell me how, in respect of neighbourhood renewal funding, it will be possible to make sure that every penny provided will be allocated to the areas of highest deprivation in Stoke-on-Trent?

Mr. Raynsford: I am sure that people in my hon. Friend's constituency will be pleased about the settlement. Stoke-on-Trent is receiving a 6.5 per cent. increase and Staffordshire Moorlands district is getting a 12.5 per cent. increase, which is on the ceiling. So there are good results for my hon. Friend's authorities, and I am sure that her constituents will be pleased. We obviously want the considerable resources allocated through neighbourhood renewal to get through to meet real needs, but that should be determined locally, with the local strategic partnership working with the local authority to ensure that there is an identification of projects dealing with real need that can be the focus for that very important funding.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): For about 15 years we have waited for the day when the old formula system was swept away and Somerset schools got a fair deal equal to that of other parts of the country, and we had enough funding to put policemen on our streets. However, that step change in education has not taken place and there will be fewer, not more, police officers in Somerset as a result of the settlement. Is that fair?

Mr. Raynsford: The previous settlement was not introduced 15 years ago but came in more recently, so if the hon. Gentleman has been waiting for a change he has got his figures wrong. That is not altogether

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surprising, because his curmudgeonly question did not recognise the fact that his local authorities have done extraordinarily well out of this settlement. Somerset county council has received a 6.8 per cent. increase and Mendip one of 12.1 per cent., but the hon. Gentleman did not have the decency to recognise that fact.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Cumbria county council, which is run by the Conservatives in cahoots with the Liberal Democrats, has been saying on its website that the council tax will have to go up because money is being taken away from rural areas? Can he confirm that that is not true? Can he also confirm that Cumbria has a 7 per cent. increase for education—the highest anywhere in the country?

Mr. Raynsford: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I confirm, as I have already said in response to an earlier question, that rural shire districts have done well out of the settlement. It is certainly the case that local authorities in his area have benefited. Cumbria county council is receiving a 4.7 per cent. increase, and Carlisle, I am sure that he will be delighted to know, is getting a 9.9 per cent. increase. I know that his constituents will be really pleased with that.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): For next year, the Government have responded to the strong campaign from Members of Parliament representing Hampshire and elsewhere who were concerned about the big increases in next year's rates by raising the floor above their previous proposal—and we welcome that. But does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that there are enormous longer term consequences for Hampshire residents from changes in the formula, and that unless he can go further than he has gone so far today, my constituents will simply assume that the pain has been deferred?

Mr. Raynsford: I know that the right hon. Gentleman is very familiar with these issues, because he occupied my post in a former Government—but of course when his party was in government he had to stand at the Dispatch Box and justify cuts in allocation, whereas I am pleased to be able to tell him that Hampshire county council is receiving an increase of 3.7 per cent., and that his local authority, Test Valley borough council, gets a 5.8 per cent. increase.

As I have said, the floors will continue in the system indefinitely. They play an important role in giving certainty to local authorities. The one thing that I cannot do is to predict precisely what the floor level will be—for reasons that I made clear in answer to an earlier question—but the right hon. Gentleman will know that the floors this year are not that dissimilar from last year's levels. It is certainly our intention to ensure that there are no steep changes in the floors year by year. We have to examine the latest detailed figures before we determine the floors in any one year, but our aim is to try to build consistency and give greater certainty to local government.

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): I welcome the Minister's statement, but his decision to set the floor for London local authorities at 3.5 per cent. will come as a grave disappointment to my local authority, Hammersmith and Fulham. My right hon. Friend is well aware that Hammersmith and Fulham is a high-performing authority, but the borough treasurer advises me that it faces a £10 million cuts package and a likely council tax increase in excess of 10 per cent. Can he assure me that if the local authority can show evidence that the settlement gives them peculiar difficulties, he will meet us and listen to those representations?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend's authority is one of several in central and west London that have been affected by the census data to which I referred earlier. I should have thought that he would welcome the fact that there was a floor to protect authorities from suffering a cut. I should have thought that, rather than being disappointed with a floor of 3.5 per cent., he and his constituents would be pleased that the Government have ensured that there is an above-inflation increase for the authority, which would not otherwise have been the case, because of census information.

I entirely acknowledge my hon. Friend's point that Hammersmith and Fulham performs well, and we look forward to seeing the result in the comprehensive performance assessment issued by the Audit Commission next week. High-performing authorities have generally proved their ability to work well and prudently with their budgets and to deliver cost-effective services, and I am sure that my hon. Friend's authority will want to do that.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): How will the Minister allay the concerns of East Sussex county council that a small increase may indeed turn out to be a reduction when we take account of the additional responsibilities that the council will be required by the Government to carry out? Is it not the truth that the figures do not compare like with like, because the services that the council has to cover this year have been extended?

Mr. Raynsford: I find it slightly odd that the hon. Gentleman should regard a 3.8 per cent. increase for his authority as a rather poor settlement. He will recall that when his party was in power authorities were getting reductions, not 3.8 per cent. increases. This is a good settlement for the hon. Gentleman and the people of East Sussex and, with the extra margin above inflation that we have granted, it should certainly enable the authority to work prudently and deliver efficient services.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I welcome the settlement on behalf of my constituents—it is the best that my local authority has ever received. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his work in producing a fairer and simpler system. We can make representations on the new system until 14 January, but does that also apply to the allocation of neighbourhood renewal funds? Does my right hon. Friend accept that the sharp and arbitrary cut-off point for the allocation of neighbourhood renewal funds works against some of the smaller

metropolitan districts, and others with high levels of deprivation, but where such deprivation does not extend right across several wards?

Mr. Raynsford: I very much appreciate my hon. Friend's extremely kind remarks. I am sure that he and his constituents are delighted at the 8.2 per cent. increase in Bury which is, as he says, the best settlement that it has ever received. I am delighted for him.The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women has responsibility for neighbourhood renewal and is holding further consultations about the formulae used to assess eligibility. I cannot promise my hon. Friend more than that, but I am sure that if he talks to my hon. Friend she will be more than receptive to any representations that he would like to make.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): During the past few months, the Minister has gone out of his way to consult Members of Parliament and others. He knows that, in an Adjournment debate, I raised the local government finance formula for Norfolk. The Minister will reply now by giving me the headline figures for Norfolk and—in headline terms—they will look reasonably good. However, leaving that aside—as the Prime Minister would say—can the Minister explain to Norfolk taxpayers how that headline figure will equate to all the extra costs that have been loaded on to Norfolk county council during the past two or three years? Next year national insurance will cost us about £600,000. Most of any increase will be taken away, according to his own Government's figures. Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to meet me and a delegation of MPs from Norfolk to discuss the formula shortly?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman will be aware from correspondence in the local press that there has been a lot of speculation in Norfolk about alleged cuts as a result of the settlement—[HON. MEMBERS: "Scaremongering".] I had to write to point out that it was indeed scaremongering. I am pleased to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that Norfolk county council receives an increase of 6.3 per cent., that Breckland district council receives an increase of 12.7 per cent., and that Broadland district council receives an increase of 12.5 per cent. I should be happy to receive a delegation of the hon. Gentleman and other Members—they will be able to tell me how they intend to spend the extra money that we are giving them.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Conservative and Labour Staffordshire Members who are absent are hosting a lunch for the distinguished and much respected county clerk, Mr. Bernard Price, who is retiring next year. I know that those Members would have liked to be in the Chamber, especially my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack).

May I add my words of praise to the Minister personally for the great amount of time that he has taken over the consultation for the Green Paper and in holding seminars for Members? Will he confirm that responses from residents in the authorities of the F40 group were prominent among those to both the Green Paper and the consultation? Will he explain whether the focus on the basic allowance approach benefits F40 authorities? It certainly appears that Staffordshire will benefit, so does he agree that the new focus will see off the scaremongers who said that the new system would be no better for Staffordshire than the old one?

Mr. Raynsford: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about the consultation and the efforts that we made to ensure that everyone was as familiar as possible with the way in which we were approaching the process. I am sure that he is delighted with the results for his authority: Staffordshire county council receives an increase of 7.1 per cent. and South Staffordshire district council receives an increase of 13 per cent. Those results are extremely good.

My hon. Friend has been an assiduous campaigner on behalf of the F40 group, and the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) met delegations from F40 led by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford on several occasions during the consultation process. He will be pleased to know that overall, the F40 authorities receive an increase of 6.8 per cent.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I thank the Minister for meeting a delegation from the London borough of Sutton during the consultation on the formula review, which appears to have been helpful as regards today's settlement. However, will the Minister tell us whether the scaling-back figures are included in the exemplifications that have been provided for Members? If not, what does that imply for my local authority?

Can the Minister tell us how the £100 million allocated to be paid back to the NHS—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I asked for one question only.

Mr. Raynsford: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging the attention that we gave to his representations and I am sure that he is as delighted as his constituents will be that Sutton has received 7 per cent., a good increase. He asked about the scaling factor; he will know that that was applied before these figures were announced. There is no scaling back on the figures announced. It is the process involved in determining the floors and ceilings to ensure that there is a zero sum process to support the floors through both the ceiling and the scaling factor.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware that London local authorities entered into this process with some scepticism and there will be many, such as Brent and Tower Hamlets, that are pleased with a settlement that reflects their high costs and levels of deprivation. My authorities, the Conservative boroughs of Westminster and of Kensington and Chelsea, have spent recent months advising their residents that they can expect cuts of up to £40 million. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that they will receive increases of between £4 million and £7 million, and that the cuts that Westminster proposes—such as the £250,000 play charges for the poorest parents in the borough—are wholly unnecessary?

Mr. Raynsford: There is no justification for scaremongering—no more in Kensington and

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Westminster than in other parts of the country. We have always said that we were seeking a fair settlement and that we would ensure that no council faced losses. As we have put a floor in place, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster, are protected from the consequences of the census data that showed a lower population than had been previously expected. Those factors apply in those authorities as well as in the neighbouring authority of Hammersmith and Fulham, to which I have referred. I am sure that my hon. Friend and her local residents will be relieved that we have a floor in place; otherwise, there would have been a serious consequence from the adoption of the most up-to-date census data.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I seek a direct answer to my question, not a pre-prepared one. Is it still the Minister's intention to sequestrate the capital receipts of debt-free councils and redistribute them, such as the receipts of East Devon district council in my constituency, which has benefited the council taxpayer by keeping taxes low and providing good services and is now to be penalised for that good stewardship? It is, of course, a Conservative-controlled council.

Mr. Raynsford: I am sorry that the hon. Lady has not recognised the extremely generous settlement that we have given to her authority. Not surprisingly, she has not mentioned that Mid Devon will get an increase of 12.5 per cent. We have always taken account of the availability of capital receipts on the principle that it is right that when resources that have been paid for by central Government—housing stock, predominantly—are realised through sale, there should be a contribution to the wider national housing scene. That has always been the case. We are proposing changes relating to debt-free authorities that, as a result of current arrangements, would not be subject to that regime and would get an unfair advantage if that were not changed. That will be part of the legislation going through the House, which the hon. Lady will be able to debate in due course.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): May I thank my right hon. Friend for the statement, and for the way in which he involved people in the long consultation process? Birkenhead has one area with the highest proportion of poor children anywhere in the country. What increase in taxpayers' resources will be going to Wirral council to help provide better services to some of the poorest people in the country?

Mr. Raynsford: I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind words. I am sure that he will be delighted that Wirral will receive an increase of 7.7 per cent., which is equivalent to £18.4 million of additional grant. In addition, the authority will be receiving £5 million in neighbourhood renewal funding. These are substantial increases being made available to meet the needs of his deprived community, and I am sure that he will welcome that.

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): Will the Minister recognise that the floor, though welcome, is an insufficient fix to meet the dismaying problem of the very poor response rate to the census, particularly in inner London boroughs? Is it not plausible that part of the problem is the fact that asylum seekers have been given insufficient help in filling out their forms? As at least some of the newcomers from Sangatte will probably find their way to inner London, will the Minister say what plans he has to make sure that local authorities are properly compensated for the costs that they face, at least in the short term?

Mr. Raynsford: Last year the right hon. Gentleman was complaining about the ceiling for Kensington and Chelsea. Had we taken on board his representations that the ceiling was unfair, there would have been no finance for the floor, from which his authority is a beneficiary this year. The census issue is a complex and serious one, and I know that a number of authorities that have seen a substantial reduction in their population in the latest census data compared with what was anticipated are naturally concerned. However, the floor provides protection for those authorities, as I acknowledged in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck). I say the same to the right hon. Gentleman. As far as asylum seekers are concerned, the Government are keen to ensure that there is a robust regime in place to handle our responsibilities and to ensure that there is effective help for authorities that have to meet additional costs because of the presence of asylum seekers in their area.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): My right hon. Friend should be congratulated on finally getting rid of the anomalous and unfair standard spending assessment system; that will be widely welcomed. He has said that one of the factors that he takes into account is the relative ability of authorities to raise council tax. Does he agree that many authorities in the south of England that benefited from the fiddling of the former Government have low council tax bases, and that their ability to raise funds from council taxes is far greater than authorities such as—to pluck a couple out of the air—Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead? Does the settlement fully reflect those differences and, if not, why not?

Mr. Raynsford: I am pleased that my hon. Friend acknowledges the progress that we are making in terms of grants to local government, and in eliminating some of the anomalies and unfairness inherited from the previous Government. I believe that the settlement announced today is good news for both Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead, both of which have received significant increases. Above all, my hon. Friend will be pleased that there is in place a framework that acknowledges the needs of more deprived communities. Deprivation is taken into account and the resource equalisation process helps authorities with high needs but a low council tax base. That is an important element in our new structure.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We must now proceed.

Points of Order

2.30 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish to raise a point of order, of which I have given Mr. Speaker notice. I seek your help, because this is the second time that I have had to ask for assistance in obtaining a reply to correspondence that I have sent to the Department of Health. I wrote on behalf of a general practitioner in my constituency, Dr. Stephenson, on 21 June, and despite tabling a named-day question that was due for answer on 25 November, I have been unable to obtain a response from the Department. May I ask for your support in ensuring that the Department responds more efficiently to requests for information from Members of Parliament?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I suggest that the hon. Lady place that information before the Select Committee on Public Administration.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I recognise the difficulties that the Chair always has on statements such as the one that we have just had, in which so many Members wish to speak. As the only Surrey Member of Parliament who was standing, I was, unfortunately, unable to intervene to protest at the inadequacies of the local government settlement for my area. Can you advise me how I might approach the difficulty that we have when the Minister is armed in advance with the figures for the settlement and the percentages? We cannot get those figures unless we leave the Chamber at a time when we are seeking to catch the eye of the occupant of the Chair. The Minister was insufferably smug in responding to every Opposition question with figures in front him that we did not have, and which we could not get unless we left the Chamber. If we did so, we would not have been able to catch your eye. Can you advise us whether it might be possible, with future statements on local government finance, for the Minister to release the figures to all Members of Parliament half an hour before the statement starts, so that we can see the inadequacies of the Government's redirection of funding to their friends in the north before we come into the Chamber?

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I realise that a statement of that importance and magnitude has a dramatic impact on the constituencies of all hon. Members, but the occupant of the Chair ought to have in mind the necessity to call people from the counties. No Derbyshire Member was called, although three—the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) and myself—were attempting to speak on an issue that has been great importance for a number of years. I do not think that a Member was called from the east midlands, which has been left out on area cost adjustment. Mr. Speaker told us the other day that he would allow statements that he regarded as important to run on. No statement is more important for all our constituents than the one that has been made today.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Yes, I am sorry that I was not called, but I do not complain. All I will say now is that Bolsover hit the ceiling—12.5 per cent.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did not notice many Members from Essex being called during the statement, either. We are one of the largest counties in the country. As 75 per cent. of all the county council's money comes from central Government, this issue is vital to 1.5 million people. May I reiterate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), that in future when we have a statement on matters as technical as local government finance, it would be helpful if we could at least be given 30 minutes to look through the papers before we have to respond to what the Minister says?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have considerable sympathy with the many hon. Members who were rising in their places, but whom I was not able to call. It is exceedingly difficult, and those who occupy the Chair try their best, bearing in mind the fact that, of course, some hon. Members have been called during earlier statements on local government finance. I was very aware that hon. Members were leaving the Chamber—I assume, to go to the Vote Office—and returning with bundles of papers, and in no way does that mean that the occupant of the Chair is unlikely to call them during such a statement.

BILL PRESENTED

Income Tax (Earnings And Pensions)

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by Mr. Secretary Smith, Mr. Paul Boateng, Dawn Primarolo, Ruth Kelly and John Healey, presented a Bill to restate, with minor changes, certain enactments relating to income tax on employment income, pension income and social security income; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday next, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 13].

ESTIMATES DAY

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

VOTE ON ACCOUNT: 2003–04

Government Drugs Policy

[Relevant documents: The Third Report from the Home Affairs Committee, Session 2001–02, on The Government's Drugs Policy: Is it Working? (House of Commons Paper No. 318-I); the Government's reply thereto (Cm. 5573); and the Home Office's Annual Report 2001–02 (Cm. 5406).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, pursuant to Resolution [26 November],

That resources, not exceeding £4,651,171,000, be authorised, on account, for use during the year ending on 31st March 2004, and that a sum, not exceeding £4,597,261,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for the year ending on 31st March 2004, for expenditure by the Home Office.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I advise the House that the 15-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches comes into operation when the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) finishes his speech.

2.32 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): That makes a pleasant change, Madam Deputy Speaker.

May I start by welcoming the Government's new drugs strategy, which was published recently? I am glad to see that it now contains some more realistic targets, with one notable exception: the suggestion that opium production in Afghanistan can be reduced by 70 per cent. in five years and entirely eliminated in 10 years. I think that that is what Sir Humphrey would call "a brave decision, Minister".

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Courageous.

Mr. Mullin: At least the Minister has the comfort of knowing that, when the day of reckoning comes, he is unlikely to be still in the post that he now occupies.

I particularly welcome the increased emphasis on harm minimisation, the commitment to increased resources for treatment and to making heroin available on prescription to chaotic users. I am grateful to the Home Secretary for having taken seriously the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. I hope that he will give further thought to our proposals regarding safe injecting houses.

I have been a member of the Home Affairs Committee for eight of the past 10 years, and I think I can say that our inquiry into drugs policy was one of the most detailed that we have conducted during that time. I would also like to think that, in due course, our report may prove to be one of the most influential, but the jury is still out on that. We held 11 oral evidence sessions with 45 witnesses, including experts from the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland and, besides their evidence, we also took into account over 200 written submissions.

As we quickly discovered, there is no one true path. On the contrary, there is an absolute difference of opinion among experts of every relevant profession—doctors, police and social workers. Opinions, all advanced with equal passion, range from those that argue that prohibition has failed and therefore should be abandoned to those that argue that because all drugs are harmful—and they are—existing bans and proscriptions should be maintained or, indeed, tightened. In between, there are many shades of grey.

May I thank all those, from whatever side of the argument, who helped to guide us through that minefield? In particular, I thank Ruth Runciman, who provided us with valuable help and advice at an early stage in our inquiry and whose report for the Police Foundation on the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is essential reading for serious students of drugs policy and proved extremely helpful to us during our deliberations.

Perhaps it would be helpful if, at the outset, I were to place on record a few basic facts about drug abuse in this country. First, all illegal drugs and most legal ones are to a greater or lesser extent harmful. That message cannot be repeated too often. However, it is a mistake to pretend that all drugs are equally harmful; they are not, and most young people know that, even if we do not.

Secondly, legal drugs, such as alcohol and tobacco, are responsible for far greater damage to individuals and to the social fabric in general than illegal ones. To take only the most obvious example, about 120,000 people a year die from tobacco-related diseases compared with about 1,600 who die each year from illegal drug abuse. In addition, an unknown number of injecting drug users die prematurely from HIV and hepatitis C.

Thirdly, although a substantial number—about half—of our young people dabble in drugs at some stage in their lives, they usually use so-called soft drugs, and happily most of them soon grow out of it. So more than 2 million young people in any year use drugs, usually cannabis or ecstasy. Fourthly, there are about 250,000 so-called problematic drug users in this country—the highest level in Europe—and they are responsible for about half of all acquisitive crime in this country.

Heroin users are by far and away the biggest problem. They destroy not only their lives, but those of their families and their communities. Despite the best efforts of police and customs, the number of heroin addicts in this country has risen remorselessly over the past 30 years. In 1970, there were only about 1,000; today there are around 200,000. Let no one argue that our drugs policy over the past 30 years has been such an overwhelming success that all we need to do is carry on down the same old road.

Most of the remaining 50,000 problematic drug users are addicted to crack cocaine. Unlike heroin, which dumbs down people, crack can lead to violent and unpredictable behaviour and is responsible for a growing amount of gang warfare in London and elsewhere.

Once those basic facts have been digested, certain conclusions are inescapable. First, a policy based upon retribution alone will not work. Given, as I said, that more than 2 million young people dabble with illegal drugs in any year, it is obvious that they cannot all be locked up or even fined. In any case, what is the point of criminalising tens of thousands of young people who are in every other respect law abiding, most of whom are

unlikely to inflict lasting damage on themselves or anyone else—although some do— and who will grow out of it anyway in due course?

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I wonder whether my hon. Friend watched television last night and saw a remarkable young man, destined for great things—perhaps he will be Prime Minister one day—Master Will Straw. Will my hon. Friend reflect on the fact that, in the opinion of some hon. Members, the best thing for Master Will Straw, as a supplier of what will now become a category C drug, would be for him to spend a very long period in jail? What good would that do?

Mr. Mullin: As I think my hon. Friend wants me to say, it would do no good at all. As I recall, however, Will Straw's father took the appropriate action at the time, which, I hope, put him on the straight and narrow.

Secondly, law enforcers should overwhelmingly target those who deal in drugs for profit, especially those that cause the most harm—heroin and crack cocaine.

The third inescapable conclusion is that drug addiction is overwhelmingly a health problem and should be treated as such. It is now widely recognised in this country and others that harm minimisation is a thread that should run through all policy on drug abusers, concentrating in particular on those who are doing the most damage to themselves and to society. Overwhelmingly, that means heroin users. The prize for society as a whole is large. If we can reduce the number of heroin users, we will reduce the amount of burgling and mugging by addicts seeking to fund a habit. Research conducted for the Home Office shows that for every £1 spent on treatment, about £3 is saved in costs to the criminal justice system.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Can the hon. Gentleman tell us his view or that of his Committee on whether the experiment in Lambeth produced the right response from the authorities—concentrating on the hard end and not spending time and effort on soft drugs? Does he accept the view of the Home Office research study, which shows that cannabis, on the balance of the evidence, is not a gateway drug, and that little evidence exists to suggest that somebody who starts on cannabis moves automatically or naturally from there to other more serious drugs?

Mr. Mullin: I have not read the research to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I agree that cannabis is not necessarily a gateway to other harder drugs; it is in some cases, but cigarettes are just as likely—in some cases, more likely—to lead to harder drugs. With regard to the Lambeth experiment, I have no detailed knowledge of it, except to say that one of the effects of conducting such an experiment in isolation in one borough is to pull in so-called drug tourists, which somewhat skewed the way in which the experiment was viewed. It must be right, however, to focus remorselessly on those who deal in the hardest drugs and those that cause the most damage to society as a whole.

My fourth inescapable conclusion is that harm minimisation means that we need to be realistic about the relative harm caused by different types of drugs. At present, the law is an ass. Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, ecstasy is classified alongside heroin and crack cocaine as a class A drug, supply of which attracts a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, and possession of which attracts a maximum sentence of seven years. Furthermore, existing law makes no distinction between dealing for profit and so-called social supply: a group of young people sharing among themselves. The Select Committee concluded that the law should recognise such a distinction. Purely on the basis of the science, we also recommended—as did the Police Foundation previously—that ecstasy should be reclassified from class A to class B, for which, incidentally, substantial penalties are still available. I am sorry that the Home Secretary did not take that up.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I wholly agree with the Home Affairs Committee's conclusion that it is absurd for ecstasy to be grouped with heroin and cocaine, because that diminishes the arguments against heroin and cocaine. Does not the hon. Gentleman agree, however, that it should not be included in class B with amphetamines and barbiturates? Did the Home Affairs Committee consider broadening the bands and having wider categories for all illegal drugs?

Mr. Mullin: What the hon. Gentleman says sounds as if it makes sense, but I would want to study the matter further before venturing a firm opinion. I am in no doubt, however, that drugs need to be categorised according to their degree of harmfulness. After that, it becomes a scientific issue. On ecstasy and perhaps one or two other drugs, the science is clear.

The logic that applies to ecstasy applies to cannabis, too. The Committee therefore welcomes the Home Secretary's proposal to reclassify cannabis from class B to class C. He has since said that he proposes to extend police powers of arrest not just to cannabis users but to all other category C drugs. At first glance, that seems to be a step backwards rather than forwards, and I should be grateful if the Minister would address that point when he replies.

A policy of harm minimisation requires realistic, honest education targeted on those at most risk. It should address the harmful effects of all drugs, including alcohol and cigarettes. On illegal drugs, it should focus on those that are most harmful, which, in most cases, means heroin. The message needs to be simple and unambiguous: heroin is a loser's drug. That message should be directed at communities with the highest incidence of heroin abuse, and at the most vulnerable young people, who are often underachievers and school drop-outs, and those from communities in which work for the unskilled has collapsed, as it has in some of the ex-pit villages of Nottinghamshire, south Yorkshire and County Durham. In that respect, I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) in highlighting the problems in his area. Above all, the education message should be delivered by people with street cred—not by men in suits—and ideally by recovered addicts.

In conclusion, I should mention that some people believe that we ought to go further. We took a good deal of evidence on that. Some of those who gave evidence to us argued that we should decriminalise all drug use, concentrate law enforcement entirely on dealing, and,

[Mr. Mullin]

for users, concentrate only on education and harm minimisation. That is more or less what has already happened in countries such as Portugal. We rejected decriminalisation because, apart from the obvious political realities, we thought that it would send the wrong message to the 50 per cent. of young people who at no time in their lives touch illegal drugs, many of whom, according to research, are deterred precisely because drug taking is illegal, and, of course, because they care about the effects on their health. Nevertheless, we should study carefully what is happening in Portugal and elsewhere to see what we might learn from it.

Others argue that all currently illegal drugs should be legalised and regulated in the way that cigarettes are. Some surprising and serious people hold that view, including a former chief constable, a former British ambassador to Colombia who had first-hand experience of the devastating impact of the American-sponsored war on drugs in that country, and Mr. Fulton Gillespie, a most impressive witness, whose son had died of a heroin overdose, and who believed that his son would still be alive today if heroin were legalised and regulated. Their arguments were that prohibition has failed, that most of those who have been killed by heroin died because it had been adulterated by criminals or because they had taken the wrong dosage, and that we need to get the trade out of the hands of criminals.

All those arguments have a certain logic. We rejected them because they ask us to gamble gains that are at best theoretical against the inevitability of a significant increase in the number of users, especially among the very young. The one question that the legalisers could not answer satisfactorily was what they would do about crack cocaine, which as I have said, leads to violent and unpredictable behaviour. Those arguments will not go away. We should be under no illusion: if existing policies fail to stem the tide of heroin—past policies have utterly failed, as the street price of heroin, although stable now, is as low as it has ever been—new ones will have to be tried. Some old arguments will have to be revisited and some old prejudices set aside in favour of what works.

For now, however, the path is clear. Our policy must be based on three clear pillars: prevention, treatment and harm reduction. That is what our report recommends, and I am glad to see that that is the direction in which the Government are moving.

2.49 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): A number of different issues need to be considered in relation to the Government's drug policy. I want to start, however, with what has been noticed and commented on widely this week in the media. We have seen headlines such as "Labour drops key target on drugs". The accompanying article said:

> "More than four years into a 10-year strategy to tackle drug misuse the Government yesterday conceded that it was too ambitious. Ministers set out an 'updated' strategy that abandoned almost all of the original targets. The strategy then went on to outline a new national action plan."

Anyone who has examined in detail what the Government promised to do when they appointed the drugs tsar, Keith Hellawell—with the huge fanfares that everyone who follows the issue will recall—will recognise what has happened. The Government have conceded that everything that they were trying to do and that they told everyone that they were going to do has failed.

I do not blame the Minister personally. I know that he works extremely hard and is very diligent. However, I urge everyone who follows our proceedings to note that the Government have abandoned the targets and are starting again only a few years after they announced with such a fanfare what they would do. They must therefore face serious criticism.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose—*

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *rose—*

Mr. Hawkins: I will give way much later to the arch-legalisers from south Wales. We have crossed swords many times and I have told them before that I will never agree with their views about legalisation. I may give way to them much later on one or two points of detail. I shall start by considering what the Government are doing before I deal with the crackpots on the Labour Back Benches.

The Government suggested that Keith Hellawell would be the answer to the nation's drugs problems. When I saw Mr. Hellawell reacting on television to questions about the Government's new announcement, he described it as all spin to cover up failure. That is the Government's much-heralded drugs tsar talking. His words should be taken seriously.

Fortunately, police forces and media commentators still listen to Mr. Hellawell. He is still the authority—and is treated as such—that Ministers from the then Home Secretary downwards praised so highly when they appointed him. We had a change of Home Secretary and we all know that the new Home Secretary fell out with the drugs tsar. As with so many much-trumpeted Labour appointments, the drugs tsar paid the penalty for falling out with the new Home Secretary. The Government's failure has been made clear by their drugs tsar.

We have seen other descriptions in the media of what the Government are now saying will be their revised targets. We have seen them described as "tough love" and as the "national heroin service". Addicts will be given free drugs even though that policy has failed before. Press commentators are right to warn all law-abiding members of society about the dangers of drugs and about the dangers of weasel words.

Two of the weasel words that the Government repeat constantly refer to so-called "harm minimisation". I have considered these matters for four years as a member of the Opposition Front-Bench team, and for many years before that, including those years when I prosecuted and defended drugs cases in some of the most deprived areas of the east and west midlands. I have seen the way in which weasel words are used. Harm minimisation is often treated by campaigners as code for giving up and as code for legalisation. We must start using clear facts in the terminology that we use.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) who opened this important debate, and to the work that his Select Committee has done. As he rightly said, it produced an extremely thorough and

detailed piece of work. All parties and those outside the House have benefited hugely from the detail of that investigation and from the evidence that the Committee collected. However, those of us on the Opposition Front Bench do not have to agree with all the Committee's conclusions, and I know that the hon. Gentleman, who takes these matters as seriously as I do, recognises that fact. He also recognises that I and my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the shadow Home Secretary, have repeatedly said that we welcome what the Home Affairs Committee did in investigating the matter so thoroughly. There are conclusions, such as the fact that certain drugs should remain class A, with which we entirely agree.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) *rose—*

Mr. Hawkins: We also agree, as the hon. Member for Sunderland, South and the Minister know, that clear emphasis should be placed on intensive rehabilitation. Like the Home Affairs Committee, we have called for a huge increase in the amount of rehabilitation available, particularly for those addicted to class A drugs.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman after I have given way to my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron). However, I should pay tribute to the work of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), who is a relatively new Member of the House. He has done much valuable work that my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset has also publicly praised.

We want any changes to the law or to the Government's targets to be evidence based. I know that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South and his Select Committee would be clear in saying that there should not be a rush to judgment on such important matters.

Mr. Cameron: Does my hon. Friend not think that there is some cause for celebration? Following the Select Committee report, which puts a great emphasis on treatment, both sides of the House are emphasising treatment. The Government are doing that through the ditching of their many targets, and we are doing so through the talk of mandatory treatment. Is that not something to celebrate as we go ahead to deal with this difficult problem?

Mr. Hawkins: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He is a member of the Select Committee that produced this valuable report. We need to ensure that we have real treatment. In answers given to me and to my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset at recent Home Office questions, the Government have used the wholly misleading figure of 118,000 people in contact with treatment agencies. The Chairman of the Select Committee and I know perfectly well—evidence to the Select Committee makes it clear—that being in contact with a treatment agency is vastly different from receiving the intensive rehabilitation that my hon. Friend the Member for Witney, many other members of the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset and I are talking about. We mean real intensive rehabilitation for many more people.

John Mann: I am a little confused, because the Conservative party website says that the Government's treatment plans

"seem to echo our own proposals".

Precisely how much residential rehabilitation does the hon. Gentleman think should be provided? The Leader of the Opposition suggested that it should be available for everybody and the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) suggested, in response to me, that it should be provided to many. How many residential rehabilitation places does the hon. Gentleman think should be provided?

Mr. Hawkins: We have made it clear from the Dispatch Box—in particular, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset has done this—that, as a start, an incoming Conservative Administration would increase tenfold the number of real intensive rehabilitation places from whatever figure is inherited at that time. A tenfold increase is an exponential increase, and that is what is needed. In the end, any Government addressing the problem of people seriously addicted to class A drugs will have to ensure that they work towards intensive rehabilitation being available to everyone who needs it.

John Mann: I have a copy of the Conservative implementation paper on home affairs, and it specifies in the small print that the 10 per cent. relates only to juvenile class A drug addicts. That is obviously a much smaller figure than the one that the hon. Gentleman quoted. He mentioned a 10 per cent. increase—I am sorry, a tenfold increase—on the current figure, but the small print to the document states:

"We have assumed that half the in-patient places are for young people."

It therefore assumes a fivefold increase. I seek clarification. Are we talking about a fivefold or tenfold increase? Is the document or the hon. Gentleman right?

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman became confused between 10 per cent. and tenfold in his second intervention. We have said tenfold, and we have also said—this is common ground with the Minister—that there needs to be a particular focus on young adults because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset has put it, they are joining the conveyor belt to crime. It is most important that the number of those addicted to hard drugs should not continue to increase, because they are so disproportionately involved in acquisitive crime to fund their drug habit.

Another issue on which the Government need to do much more is that of drug drivers. The Minister knows that I have been pursuing that for some time. Last week I was fortunate to be to invited Hampshire constabulary to speak at the launch of their Christmas and new year campaign against both drink drivers and drug drivers. They had seen my speeches on drug drivers, our work on

[Mr. Hawkins]

getting information from all police forces in England, Scotland and Wales and the work by my researchers, Rhiannon Sadler and Anarkali Moonesinghe, on getting information from coroners. All the police forces and coroners said that insufficient information was collected nationally about the number of deaths and serious injuries that are caused by those who drive when addicted to drugs.

Sometimes it is a matter of trying to disentangle whether someone has been drinking and taking drugs. We have at last acquired a clear picture, which is, I am afraid, that the Government do not have enough information. There is also a clear lack of joined-up government. Whereas the old Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions had acquired a well written report from the Transport and Road Research Laboratory at Crowthorne, just up the road from my constituency, on the huge increase in the number of fatal and non-fatal accidents caused by drivers under the influence of drugs, the Home Office did not use that information as an impetus to start collecting figures. Almost every coroner who responded to my office said, "We need more information. It has to be collected centrally. Only the Home Office can do it."

Some police forces, such as Northamptonshire and Strathclyde, are involved in pioneering work and have started their own projects. Hampshire police were launching their new Christmas and new year campaign called "Are you FIT to drive?" FIT is an acronym and refers to the test that the Hampshire police will use, which they demonstrated to me and the media. What was most moving about the launch at the Hampshire county constabulary headquarters at Netley last week was the contribution by the victim of a drug addicted driver. She had made a remarkable recovery thanks to her courage and her family's support and was prepared to appear before the media—television, radio and the press—to say what had happened to her when she was unwise enough to get into a car driven by someone who was under the influence of drugs. The driver had also had vastly insufficient sleep, having been up for days at the Glastonbury rock music festival. As a result, people in the accident were killed.

The young lady who spoke at the launch was lucky enough to survive and I was impressed by the courage she displayed by standing up and saying, "I want to persuade other people not to have anything to do with drug drivers." That is fine in terms of influencing passengers of drug drivers, but what about those entirely innocent victims who are driving lawfully along a road and are hit head on by a drug abusing driver? They have no opportunity to avoid the problem but are nevertheless the casualties of it.

The Government have presided over a huge increase in drugs use, as confirmed by their figures. It is clear that something is going wrong. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South referred to a consistent failure of policy since the second world war. I agree that the figures speak for themselves. Drug use has increased tremendously over those years. In recent years, however, it is not so much a case of things being tried and found wanting, but of things being found difficult and not tried properly. That is where I part company with the hon. Gentleman and his Committee's report.

When the hon. Gentleman talks about the reclassification of ecstasy, he should ask the parents of the late Leah Betts and the relatives of the other victims of ecstasy what they think.

Mr. Mullin: I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman took the subject seriously. I think I made it clear that the arguments about ecstasy—whether one thinks it a good or a bad thing—are based purely on the science. We have taken the advice of scientists on which category it should fall into. Were it to be reclassified into class B, the penalties available would still be great and would leave those who use it in no doubt about society's disapproval.

Mr. Hawkins: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I take the issue seriously. We will have to beg to differ. Unfortunately, reclassification sends the wrong signals. I think he will agree with me on one thing at least. When we talk about sentences available, we are, of course, referring to maximum sentences. He will appreciate that my practical experience in the courts is that people rarely get the maximum sentence. We are dealing with signals that the Government have sent.

Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Home Affairs Committee recommendation is worthy of support because we need to ensure that the relative harm is understood? The evidence shows that heroin and crack cocaine are the big killers. They are the nasties. Ecstasy occasionally kills people. Cannabis has killed no one. The logic of the Committee's recommendation and the logic of the view taken by the Liberal Democrats, which I hope will eventually percolate through to the Conservative Benches, is that it is nonsense for ecstasy to be in the same league as heroin and crack cocaine, or for cannabis to be in the same league as either.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman knows that I do not agree with him. The signals that we send to young people are important. I have just talked about those who suffer death or serious injury as a result of drug induced driving. He says that cannabis has killed no one, but there are many cases in which the person responsible for a fatal accident committed the driving offence as a result of the use of cannabis alone.

Mr. Cameron: I had to think long and hard about the problem when I served on the Select Committee. Does my hon. Friend accept that the signals argument goes both ways? What signal does it send to young people that ecstasy is in the same class as heroin and cocaine?

Mr. Hawkins: My answer is straightforward: it sends a valuable signal. I have no desire for our opposition, which is based on the tragic experience of people like Leah Betts' parents, to change. We do not want to send out the signal that heroin is less serious now.

The Government have to take notice of what the respected schools health education unit has discovered as a result of the Government's signals. The Minister will be aware of the media surveys that show that almost every young person who does not follow politics or take note of the details of what we say in the House thinks that cannabis is legal. They have seen the general message. The figures from the unit confirm a huge jump in the use of cannabis.

The number of boys in their early teens who smoke cannabis has rocketed in just two years since the Government started to give every young person the impression that cannabis is legal. Some 29 per cent. of those aged 14 and 15 said last year that they had tried the drug compared with only 19 per cent. who admitted using it in 1999. A large-scale research project found that school children are increasingly likely to believe that cannabis is safe and has no down sides. The 10 per cent. jump in young drug users reversed a previous decline in drug taking by school children which was reported by the same research group in the second half of the 1990s. That was when Conservative Ministers were trying to clamp down hard on crime in general. Indeed, crime had dropped for the first time since the second world war as a result of tough anti-crime policies.

The Government's mistaken signals have reversed that. There has been a huge increase in crime, much of it drug related. The Prime Minister said, in his much vaunted soundbite, that he would be "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime", but the biggest single cause of crime is the use of drugs. The greatest single cause of crime stems from those who are addicted to drugs and are funding their drug habit by acquisitive crime. The Government have not been tough on the causes of crime.

Nearly 16,000 pupils were asked to complete questionnaires at 334 schools.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We were told at the beginning of the debate that there was a 15-minute limit on speeches following the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). It seems that the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) is being given a great degree of leniency.

Madam Deputy Speaker : The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) is not being given any degree of leniency. The 15-minute limit applies only to Back-Bench Members. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) was exempted from the limit because he is the Chair of the Select Committee.

Mr. Hawkins: You will confirm, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I had confirmed with you in the Chair what the position was before I rose.

As I have said, nearly 16,000 pupils were asked to complete questionnaires at 334 schools. The responses showed a similar boom in girls using cannabis. In 1999, 18 per cent. of girls aged 14 and 15 had smoked cannabis. However, last year the figure was 25 per cent. The survey covered 15,881 pupils aged between 10 and 15. The findings are severely at variance with what was said by the Prime Minister and other Ministers when they first came to office, proclaiming their commitment to the so-called war on drugs. Instead, the figures have gone dramatically in the wrong direction.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I hoped to bring the hon. Gentleman out of his fantasy world into the world of reality. He talks about the majority of crime being committed by drug users and refers to it as acquisitive crime. Yes, that is true. However, the Committee did not discover that those who took ecstasy were among that group. The hon. Gentleman must think seriously about the findings set out in the report and about the scientific evidence. He must think again about placing ecstasy in the same class as heroine and crack cocaine. Ecstasy is qualitatively different.

Mr. Hawkins: I entirely disagree with the hon. Lady. She talks about science, and I shall quote once again from one of the reports on the recent figures in the recent survey. It states:

"The terrible irony is that all the while the deceptive message that cannabis is safe has been taking hold among school children because of the misguided approach of Whitehall"—

that is a reference to Labour Ministers—

"and the police. The evidence points increasingly in the opposite direction. Last week"—

the hon. Lady is talking about science—

"three respected scientific studies linked cannabis with the huge increase in the amount of depression and schizophrenia."

Another scientific study showed that it is five times more likely to cause cancer than tobacco. The physical and mental health of an entire generation of youngsters is being put at risk because of the Government's willingness to accept the drugs agenda of a small liberal metropolitan elite.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell us what his party's policy is on the classification of cannabis.

Mr. Hawkins: The Minister heard me say earlier—I have said exactly the same to him in Committee—that when we come to office, any changes that we make will be evidence based. We believe, unlike the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice), apparently, in examining the science. My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset has always said, as has my right hon. Friend the leader of the Opposition, that we will try to do everything on the basis of evidence, and not on the basis of the pro-legalisation fantasies that are shared by a number of Labour Back-Benchers.

I recognise that the Minister takes these issues seriously. That being so, he needs to examine the experience that we have had in visiting intensive rehabilitation clinics in Sweden, where they have managed to create a social consensus that illegal drugs are so damaging to society that all the forces in society need to work together to try to take illegal drugs out of the system. There is a social consensus in which teachers and head teachers, parents and society at large do not tolerate illegal drug taking. As a result of that, there is far less acquisitive crime and far fewer drug addicts. The population is healthier. We need to try, if we possibly can, to use the evidence of what has been done in Sweden and the evidence of the more successful rehabilitation clinics that I have visited in this country, such as the excellent Promise centre in south Kensington, where I met some of the addicts and their families only two or three weeks ago, to ensure that we have a more sensible and effective anti-drugs policy than the Government's failed policy.

3.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, and all members of the Committee, for the thorough and thought-provoking way in which the Committee's recommendations were produced earlier in the year.

The report and all the work that went into it has made a crucial contribution to the Government's policy, although we were not able to agree with all of the Committee's recommendations. For example, we have different views on the reclassification of ecstasy. Ecstasy is a drug that has not been misused to the degree that cannabis has, or for the same length of time. Knowledge of the long-term health consequences of the use of ecstasy is not as well founded as it is in respect of cannabis, but people die as a result of taking it. I believe profoundly that much of the harm minimisation work that is necessary to save the lives of those who are abusing ecstasy can still take place without any need to reclassify it. I hope that we proved that when we published the safer clubbing guidance earlier in the year. We were therefore not able and not minded to accept the Committee's recommendation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South is already aware that we did not support the Committee's request that we consider a provision for injecting rooms. However, many of the Committee's other recommendations have been extremely valuable and they have been fully embedded in the updated drugs strategy. For example, the Committee's call for a renewed emphasis on harm minimisation and for the focus of education to be on class A drugs and problematic drug users now stand as central features of the new updated strategy.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I am not convinced by the arguments on ecstasy. There is a great deal of science available, and it seems that ecstasy damages the brain. Whether that is reversible or irreversible is a point of controversy. Is my hon. Friend prepared, as he has done with cannabis, to refer ecstasy to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs for a serious study?

Mr. Ainsworth: We cannot go down that road and we have made it clear that we are not prepared to do so. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has a remit to keep under review the classification of all drugs. It is free to do that and it will continue to do so. From time to time it will make recommendations to which we will have to respond. It will do so with regard to cannabis and ecstasy. There is no need for us to approach the council. The Government's position is clear on the classification of ecstasy. As we do not know what the long-term consequences of the abuse of ecstasy are on individual health, and because it kills people unpredictably, we are not prepared to reclassify ecstasy.

In our new strategy, we will focus on the most dangerous drugs, the most damaged communities and the individuals whose addiction and chaotic lifestyles are the most harmful, both to themselves and others. The misery that they cause cannot be overestimated, which is why, under the strategy, all controlled drugs are illegal and will remain so.

We are making an unparalleled investment to tackle the harm that drugs cause. Direct annual expenditure will increase by 44 per cent. over the next three years, with a total investment of nearly £1.5 billion by 2005–06. The extra resources that we are committing to the fight against drugs demand high standards of delivery. Home Office teams will work with local partnerships and agencies to identify problems and ways of tackling them, including better mechanisms for supporting effective delivery and improved systems for monitoring and evaluating progress.

The strategy is not new—we are not starting from scratch. We are learning from, building on and adapting the 10-year strategy started in 1998. The strategy will be driven by a stronger focus on education, prevention, enforcement and treatment to prevent and tackle problematic drug use. We will deliver that key agenda by using what we have learned over the past four years—what works and what does not. The Opposition spokesman talked about the former drugs tsar and what he had to say. I wish to make it clear that the strategy is not a dog's dinner. It may be more fitting to point out that the dog barks when the caravan moves on.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Will the Minister put on record the fact that while more young people are taking drugs than ever before, they are still a minority? The vast majority of young people do not take drugs regularly. In his fight to prevent more young people taking drugs, will the Minister pay tribute to the excellent work by voluntary youth organisations and youth leaders, who play a vital role in making sure that the number of young people taking drugs is reduced and does not increase?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. That is partly why we are not prepared to contemplate, and the Select Committee on Home Affairs did not recommend, going down the legalisation or decriminalisation route. There is evidence that a lot of young people are deterred from experimenting with drugs by the fact that they are illegal. The majority of people do not take illegal drugs, but we should not underestimate the size of the problem. We should pick up what the Chairman of the Select Committee said—for the past 30 years, we have not had a proud record in this area.

We have one of the biggest problems in the world with illegal drug use, and nobody should be proud of Britain's record. The Conservative spokesman has an admirable ability utterly to ignore the facts at the Dispatch Box. To suggest that just a few years ago we were edging towards a solution and that everything is now going backwards is a complete travesty of the truth. Under the Conservative Government, crime doubled, and there is clear evidence that the steepest rise in problematic drug use took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s. How on earth the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) can say that the position was anything other than that is strange but, in its own way, admirable. We have seen him take a similar stance on many other issues on many other occasions.

Paul Flynn: Does my hon. Friend recall that when the 10-year strategy was introduced in the House in 1998, it was supported, in every detail and target, by the Opposition and the Liberal Democrats?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am not surprised that my hon. Friend has raised that, as he has long-standing views on the issue. There was a wide consensus in favour of the 10-year drug strategy at the time. We should remind ourselves of the current position. Just because the ex-drugs tsar has made pronouncements for his own purposes in the past few years, we should not forget that, before 1998, there was no strategy at all. Somebody had to pull people together and point them in the right direction. There was no evidence base whatsoever—that was not the tsar's fault, but it can be blamed, if we want to be blatantly party political, on the party that had been in government for a generation. The targets set by the tsar were, I accept, pulled out of thin air and taken from other jurisdictions—they were described by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary as aspirational.

Something has been achieved in the past four years, as we have at least started to build an evidence base and, with support, are pushing our policies in the right direction. It is only right, however, to review the strategy now, refocus it and learn lessons about what has not been working and what is not attainable. It would be irresponsible of us to do otherwise.

John Mann: Nobody in my constituency wants vague targets instead of quantifiable evidence-based outcomes. In that context, will my hon. Friend look at the evidence from my inquiry on the quality and variety of teaching in secondary education? Best practice can affect whether or not young people can relate to a message delivered to them, and is fundamental to whether they hear the message at all.

Mr. Ainsworth: I appreciate the depth of my hon. Friend's analysis of the problem in his constituency. He has made an important contribution to the debate that has opened up over the past year. I hope that he does not think that we have retreated from all the targets in the drugs strategy—we most certainly have not. Treatment is key to whether or not we succeed. If Opposition Members care to look at the strategy, they will see not only that treatment targets are still included, but that they are on course to be delivered and that we have strengthened them—there is now a requirement to look at the quality of the treatment provided and the number of people who successfully complete an entire course of treatment. We have strengthened some targets, but have also got rid of aspirational targets that did not help to motivate people working in this area. It is a case not of abandoning targets, but of refocusing the strategy on what is needed and what, we hope, will make a difference.

Simon Hughes: The Minister will know that we share his view that it is far better to get rid of the huge number of targets that, to use the Home Secretary's words, appear to have been plucked out of thin air and were almost certainly unachievable, and to refocus on a small number of targets which, we hope, are achievable. Treatment issues are key, as we are considering a health issue. A two-week maximum waiting time from referral to receipt of treatment is proposed in the new Government strategy. The establishment of 2,000 more intensive care programmes is also proposed. Are the Government determined to set themselves a date by which at least minimum provision is available along those lines in each part of the country, following the National Audit Commission's recommendation? As the Minister knows, one of the problems has been that people in some places can wait for months or years, while others receive much speedier treatment.

Mr. Ainsworth: We need not only to increase massively the amount of treatment, but to ensure that it is provided in the places where it is needed. The targets are there and the National Treatment Agency has been established to try to ensure that they are met not broadly across the board, but in localities; that a work force are developed who will enable us to meet those targets and get people into treatment on the proposed time scales; and that good-quality treatment is provided. We believe that, by the end of the 10-year strategy, we will be in a position to have doubled the amount of treatment in this country and to have places to get 200,000 people a year into quality treatment—the overwhelming majority of problematic drug users on the basis of the problem as we currently measure it.

I am surprised when Opposition Members talk about treatment, as they are currently suggesting that we pour almost the entire treatment budget into residential rehabilitation that would treat a fraction of problematic drug users. Such treatment would be wholly inappropriate for many of those people, and what would the rest of them be left to do? I do not know about the hon. Member for Surrey Heath, but I know that his right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary is not a supporter of increased public spending. Is he not one of the people who had to be hushed up during the previous election for proposing £20 billion of cuts? The Conservative party will need to explain the suggestion that we can spend the entire treatment budget on providing residential rehabilitation for a fraction of problematic drug users and either leave the rest to fend for themselves or spend more instead.

Paul Flynn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I want to make some progress, but I shall try to give way to my hon. Friend a little later.

There can be few more deserving cases than those of parents, carers and families. The distress and disruption that drug misuse causes to families cannot be imagined if it has not been experienced. More support will be provided for families and carers so that those affected can easily access advice, help, counselling and mutual support. We will be looking substantially to improve the support given to families locally.

Young people will remain a key priority. We will focus on preventing young people from taking and misusing drugs through a m[illegible] new education campaign to drive home the risks. There will be support for young people most at risk and increased outreach and community treatment and support. That will include referrals to treatment and care through the youth justice system, so that by 2006, we will be supporting 40,000 to 50,000 vulnerable young people a year.

We will take on the dealers and protect the communities from the harmful flow of drugs on to the streets. That will include strengthening enforcement action at both street level and the middle market level.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

We will disrupt supplies at all stages in the supply chain. The police need and deserve the full support of the other agencies and partners at a local level. We need co-ordinated activity by local partners to tackle drug supply at street level and build community resistance to dealers and their crimes.

An awful lot has been said about Lambeth—a lot of factual stuff and also a lot of nonsense. In the past few years, we have managed to put together in Lambeth a coalition of the drug action team, the local authority and the police that has had considerable success against the open crack market that existed in the centre of Brixton. It has shut crack houses, arrested considerable numbers of dealers and pressured people into treatment in order to prevent them from going elsewhere and dispersing the problem to other boroughs. A lot of good work has been done in Lambeth in the past few months and it should be recognised.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I am surprised that he wants to give such a paean of praise to what has happened in south London. I do not think that the residents see it that way.

I wanted to intervene with regard to what the Minister said about support for addicts. Am I correct in my understanding that part of what the Government are now proposing in their new strategy is that a licence will be issued to hundreds of GPs to prescribe heroin to anyone who is a heroin junky and whom the GP thinks might benefit? Is that the Government's position on heroin?

Mr. Ainsworth: If the hon. Gentleman could shelve his petty prejudices for just a second and participate in a factual debate, we would all be better off, as would his party.

Our policy on the injection of heroin is very clear. We believe that, for serious opium addiction, methadone will overwhelmingly remain at the centre of treatment. It is a drug that the profession is used to working with, and comfortable with. It is also the most appropriate drug in many instances. There is, however, a lack of confidence in parts of the medical profession in regard to the prescription of heroin. In some cases, certainly those in which people have failed to respond to any other treatments that have been offered, it is appropriate. We are working with the profession now, and we have consensus around some guidelines that may give GPs the confidence to use diamorphine when it is the most appropriate drug to prescribe. It would be very sad if the hon. Gentleman were against that. What he has said also seems to go against what the shadow Home Secretary appears to be advocating.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Since the publication of the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs on drugs, and of the Government's response, the son of a close friend of mine has died in circumstances that suggested that he had been injecting heroin, although that has not finally been determined. May I ask my hon. Friend whose door we should knock on when people with drug problems—and those who are actually addicted—come into our surgeries and we cannot get them into detox centres or get them the treatment that they require?

Mr. Ainsworth: We cannot grow these services to the level that is needed overnight. That simply is not possible. We need to grow the work force and the expertise, and we need to increase the quality of that work force. In the first instance, my hon. Friend needs to talk to his local drug action team. We need to provide the funding to his local DAT, so that it can grow the treatment to deal with the problems that exist in his community and many others. We have established the National Treatment Agency, which will help us to monitor the performance of his local DAT—and the others—so as to ensure it is hitting its waiting list targets, and that it has the most appropriate treatments in place to deal with the addicts in his community.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. That is what annoys me about the policy that is coming across the opposite Dispatch Box, which is that only residential rehabilitation amounts to treatment. In many circumstances, people do not need such rehabilitation, and it would be inappropriate to provide it. Sometimes a drug treatment may be appropriate, sometimes counselling. In the case of really chaotic drug users, it is a question, in the first instance, of getting hold of them, establishing contact and settling them down, so that we can start to deal with their problems. Dealing with addiction is a far more complex issue than the hon. Gentleman is prepared to acknowledge.

Paul Flynn: Is my hon. Friend as puzzled as I was by one of the claims made by the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins)? We were told, in the all-party group on drugs misuse a few weeks ago, that the estimate of the number of people who had problems with addiction was 320,000—a higher figure than we had ever heard before—and that the number of those receiving some form of treatment was 118,000, also a substantial figure. The hon. Gentleman says that he will increase the amount of people in treatment tenfold, to 1 million, which is three times the number of addicted people. Can the hon. Gentleman be treated seriously?

Mr. Ainsworth: I thought that too when I first heard the hon. Member for Surrey Heath. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) has some figures that are a lot nearer to what the Conservatives are saying, which suggest that the number of people in treatment that they are planning to increase tenfold involves only a fraction of the total. I think that they are planning to increase tenfold 2,000 residential rehabilitation places for young people, which would give us about 20,000 places. I do not know what they intend to do with the rest of the problematic drug users, but those plans are a little different from what I first thought they were, and from what my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) thinks they are.

John Mann: May I assist my hon. Friend with the figures, as I have them in front of me? The proposal involves 8,618 residential places, which would be available only to 11 to 19-year-olds. This is described as a tenfold increase precisely because it applies only to

that age range. That figure is taken from the Conservative party's home affairs implementation paper.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am not sure that we should dwell on the Conservative party's policies any longer, because Conservative Front Benchers need to sort out exactly what they are so that they can tell us what they mean by getting addicts into treatment and what is their policy on reclassification. They are certainly not prepared to do so at the moment.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way again later if I can.

The Government will also increase the amount of drug-related criminal assets that we recover as we work to make the UK the least desirable, most uncomfortable and most unprofitable place to deal drugs. We will make full use of the new powers introduced by the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to maximise the recovery of profits from those convicted of drug supply offences. There is no room for the notion that having convicted and sentenced a drug dealer, it would be wrong to confiscate that person's ill-gotten gains. We must drive that idea out of every corner of our criminal justice and law enforcement system.

We will continue to collaborate with other countries, including the Afghan Government, to achieve their opium production eradication targets. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South, the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, who has expressed considerable scepticism about that, that Afghanistan now has a Government who are committed to ridding the country of its drug problems. They have set themselves targets and those will be extremely difficult to achieve. I understand that.

We will have to do a lot of nation building before we can eradicate poppy cultivation in that country, but it would be wholly wrong not to send the new Afghan Administration the message that we are prepared to do as much as we can not only to help them to rebuild civil society, but to eradicate narcotics and the terrorism that flows from them, which prevents them from getting a grip of their country and being able to help their own people.

Mr. Hawkins: Some minutes ago, when I first tried to intervene, the Minister was responding to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) and praising the work of drug action teams. Will he comment on a letter recently sent to my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the shadow Home Secretary, by the chief executive of a drug action team? He says:

"Currently the proportion of time spent on planning, commissioning and monitoring provision is out of balance with the longevity of the funding streams and is thus highly inefficient and ineffective".

That is the reality of the confused picture that the drug action teams, which can and do provide good work, are finding. Those remarks are from someone who is trying to run a DAT, and the Government are making his job much more difficult.

Mr. Ainsworth: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman, never mind consistency of funding—DATs never existed when his party was in power. We need to go down the road of pooled budgets and we need to give people long planning times as well as indications of their budgets. We fully intend to do exactly that.

There will be a major expansion of services to refer people to treatment and support via the criminal justice system. We will use every opportunity from pre-arrest to court and sentencing to identify drug-misusing offenders, engage them in treatment and break the link between drugs and crime.

We will focus on the 250,000 class A drug users who account for 99 per cent. of the costs of drug abuse in England and Wales and who do the most harm to themselves, their families and their communities. We will expand treatment and support services to ensure that people get the help they need when they need it. By 2008, we will have the capacity to treat 200,000 problematic drug users each year.

The evidence that we have received from a number of police forces and treatment agencies suggests that crack cocaine use is steadily increasing throughout the UK. The problems are acute and they demand urgent action. There will be new initiatives to stem the flow of crack to the UK, police action in a number of key force areas to close local crack markets and specialist treatment programmes for crack users.

Treatment and support services will be extended to include a new package of aftercare services to help those leaving prison to rejoin society. We will make significantly more money available to plug what I consider to be the biggest gap in the drugs strategy, and provide through-care and after-care for people leaving prison and ending treatment. If we do not do that we will send those people straight back on to the market—straight back into the clutches of the dealers and straight back into crime, if indeed they do not kill themselves with overdoses. We must plug the gap, and that is one of the most important changes that we are making.

All this adds up to a radical and comprehensive package to tackle drug misuse at all levels. Over the past year debate on the issue has made great strides, with only a few exceptions. Since my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary asked for an adult debate a year ago and since the Home Affairs Select Committee's report on the Government's drugs strategy, we have managed to open up discussion. We have managed to introduce much more common sense into that discussion, and to make room for people to exchange views at every level—from the political level down to the local level. That means that teachers and local practitioners will be more confident about discussing such matters. Only by providing open debate of that kind and giving people that confidence will we be able to make the real difference that will be needed over the next few years if we are to reduce the problem of drug abuse.

3.46 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I pay tribute to the Minister, who, since taking his current position, has been entirely reasonable on this issue, as on others, and has been positive in trying to bring about the sort of constructive debate that is taking place now—with the odd exception. We need to engage in such debate if we are to meet the fundamental target that the Minister identified and reduce the amount of

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drug use, abuse and addiction, and reduce all that flows from those things. I pay similar tribute to the Minister's colleagues. We welcome the new spirit that has accompanied the arrival of the second Labour Administration, who—I say this straightforwardly—are different from the spirit of the first.

Let me also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and his colleagues from all parties on the Select Committee, including my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) and the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron). I followed the Committee's deliberations from afar. It took evidence from people with personal experience of, for instance, family bereavement, who reached entirely different conclusions from each other, and who told the Committee dramatic and devastating things. I heard and read about those things. The Committee laboured hard to distil all the evidence and to ensure that it was up to date.

The Committee has done us a service. I make only two exceptions in that regard. My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I support nearly all the recommendations, but we disagreed with one recommendation on cannabis and we did not think that the Committee went far enough in respect of heroin prescribing. The report is very authoritative, and there is evidence of a huge amount of work. I want to thank the voluntary sector, in two contexts. The charity DrugScope is based in my constituency. It conducts evidence-based research, and in seeking to put its case on that evidence base it does us a great service—as do those parts of the voluntary sector mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, including faith groups and the youth service, which try to educate people about lifestyle choices that are better than those leading to addiction. It often does a brilliant job in protecting young people from the peer-group pressures from which they all suffer. In many cases it pulls them back after they have tested the water—as young people always do.

Like the Select Committee, my colleagues have done a huge amount of work. My noble Friend Lady Walmsley chaired a policy committee for a year, which went around the country taking evidence and talking to people. She took the committee's conclusions to our conference in Manchester in the spring. We had a full morning's debate and reached conclusions that, although not everyone agreed with them, followed a democratic decision-making process based on the best evidence available.

We are all trying to get the best answers and I salute the Government on their strategy, which I consider to be much more along the right lines than the last one, not least because they have dropped some of their absolutely unachievable, undeliverable targets and are focusing on the simple message that this is principally a health issue not a crime issue and that prevention and treatment are central to making sure that we break the back of what has become a nightmare in many communities, with addiction leading to crime, illness and sometimes death.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman said that one or two members of his party might not share his view. Would they include, perhaps, Lord Alton of Liverpool, who recently chaired a superb conference in the House of Lords at which my views about cannabis, which are shared by leading members of the National Drug Prevention Alliance, were advanced? It was attended by some of the most authoritative speakers from Sweden, who explained how they have created a national consensus.

Simon Hughes: My noble Friend Lord Alton was a Liberal and a Liberal Democrat, but he left our party to become a Cross Bencher. I do not in any way undermine his view, but I was referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, who takes a different view from mine, as do some of my other hon. Friends. Our views do not follow a pre-ordained pattern. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), who has worked in the health service, believes that we should legalise all drugs. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) who has had international business experience, takes a very different view.

Mr. Cameron: They are Liberals—they do not have to agree with each other.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is being unfair; he knows that there are different views in all parties. We must not dishonour the debate by pretending that party allegiance is its most important factor. We must welcome the debate, which should be based on evidence.

In May this year my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) asked the Minister for some figures about the purchase cost of drugs, both now and over the past 10 years. The price of many addictive drugs has fallen considerably in the past 10 years. Between 1990 and 2002, the price of heroin fell from £90 to £63 per gram; cocaine fell from £87 to £60 per gram; amphetamine fell from £13.80 to £9 per gram; ecstasy fell from £18.80 to £7 a pill; LSD fell from £4.20 to £3.40 a tablet; and cannabis resin fell from £91.80 to £77 per ounce. The only price that has remained roughly similar over the past five years is that of crack cocaine. The concern is that, if we are not careful, illegal drugs will become cheaper and more easily accessible than alcohol. Certain drugs might become even more appealing for young people because they will be easier and cheaper to buy than a pint of lager. Drugs are easy to get hold of in normal life—young people do not have to go looking for them. That is why the issue goes beyond illegal drugs and includes alcohol, tobacco and so-called medicinal drugs that can also become addictive, such as amphetamines.

The Minister referred to the UK's terrible record of failure. Over the past 30 years, we have had more addicts than almost any other European country. That is not just my opinion—in my constituency, drug addiction is such a regular issue that I wish I could say anything but that—but is backed up by independent surveys. The Minister will be aware of the recent report by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. Its summary refers to a significant increase in cocaine and ecstasy use in the UK. It also refers to 44 per cent. of 16 to 29-year-olds having consumed cannabis. Another point in the report is often made by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn)—that the average age of heroin users is going down, whereas in

other countries, such as the Netherlands, it is increasing. So we have a real problem, in that addicts are becoming younger.

That is not mere theory. Almost every week, on going home after a late sitting of the House I see a daughter of a friend of mine—she is in her 20s—sitting outside a late-night supermarket, or standing on a petrol station forecourt. She has been waiting to get money to buy some more drugs. Sometimes, she knocks on my door in the early hours of the morning. Six years ago, that young woman was at home leading a drug-free life; now, she is a prostitute on drugs. People abuse her all the time, and almost all of her family relationships have broken down. That is a tragedy. We have all met such people in our surgeries. If she survives, it will be almost a miracle.

A friend of mine who is in his 30s—he is a constituent who came to my surgery a year ago—went through 14 years of addiction to heroin and alcohol. He is now clean and doing well, so there are good news stories, but he went through a terrible period, and we should never underestimate how awful such experiences are. Another friend went through a period of going clubbing and taking ecstasy every weekend. I could see what was going on. Mondays and Tuesdays were bad, things improved a bit by Thursday, and he was ready to go clubbing again by Friday. There is, of course, a risk; every year, a few people die as a result of ecstasy use. Mercifully, in his case he grew out of it. It may have lasting effects, but the reality is that it does not pose the same addictive risk as serious drugs such as heroin and crack cocaine.

These issues confront us all, which is why this debate is hugely important. Interestingly, it has moved from the side courts to the centre court. The last time that we had such a debate, it was held in Westminster Hall; today, it is being held here because it deserves to be. It concerns one of the central issues of health and crime in our society.

Before I set out the key factors as I perceive them, I appeal to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) to look at, and to respond to, the evidence rather more readily than he and his colleagues do at the moment. However, he and I are in agreement in at least one respect, in that I, too, believe that we must treat people who are in charge of vehicles and under the influence of drugs in the same way as we treat those who drive under the influence of drink. I think that I know of the family to whom he refers, and the daughter who gave evidence. Many people are injured or lose their lives because we do not yet treat this problem seriously. I ask the Minister to talk to his colleagues in the Department for Transport. We can do more to ensure that similar tests apply to both offences. For example, the old test of whether a person can walk a straight line could be used. It is really important that we send out the message that being under the influence of alcohol or of any other drug is equally unacceptable.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: As the hon. Gentleman knows, such tests are already carried out. However, we are conducting research that could support the use of a visible test, and we may have something to help the police to test addicts by next August.

Simon Hughes: That is very encouraging news, and many families will be reassured by it. I know of constituents—they have since become friends—who have lost relatives in collisions involving someone who was under the influence. They feel an enormous sense of injustice at the fact that the law has not treated them equally.

Mr. Hawkins: As the hon. Gentleman was kind enough to point out, I have worked on this issue for a long time, and I am delighted that he agrees with me. Indeed, in the end there may be all-party agreement on it; I certainly hope so. We intend to introduce our own Bill during this Session to try to improve the opportunity to collect evidence and to try to give the police the additional testing powers that they need. I am prepared to discuss with him, and with the Minister, how we might take that forward. In other words, there may be no need to wait until August; if all parties agree, we could produce something in this Session.

Simon Hughes: On all such issues, I am entirely happy to collaborate with the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, and with the Minister and his colleagues. None of us gains by taking a party political view on this matter. If we can get the right legislation soon we can change attitudes about drug use. Changed attitudes to drink driving and drinking at lunch time have rendered those activities less frequent. If the same thing happened with drugs, that would be very welcome.

One great international point affects us all, and that is that we will not be able to control demand until we control supply. The Minister is right to say that countries such as Afghanistan and those in south America must be the focus of our attention. I know that Ministers in the Department for International Development, the Home Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and elsewhere understand that. However, unless we can change the agriculture in those countries and make sure that people do not make a living from exporting heroin and other drugs at high prices, we will not be able to deal with the problem. Traffickers come here from the drug-exporting countries, and we know what happens as a result.

The Liberal Democrat party always seeks to respect international law, and the drugs problem is covered by international agreements and Geneva conventions. We are not allowed to legalise the use of narcotics, and my party accepts that constraint. However, the difference between us and the two other main parties is that we believe that the evidence in connection with cannabis, in particular, points to the clear conclusion that personal use and growing for personal use and social supply to another person should not be treated as criminal activities. We agree with DrugScope and other organisations—and by implication with the Home Affairs Committee—that the logic is that cannabis should be downgraded to a category C drug, as the Home Secretary intends. However, it is nonsense at the same time to make the possession of cannabis an arrestable offence for which a person can be imprisoned, as provided in the Criminal Justice Bill that had its Second Reading yesterday. That is a mixed message, if ever there was one. I have said as much to Home Office Ministers, and I repeat it this afternoon. We need the message to be clear. Some drugs, such as heroin and crack cocaine, are very dangerous, and other drugs, such as ecstasy, present an intermediate danger. I do not

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argue that cannabis is not dangerous, or that it may not be proved to be more so, but the evidence shows that it is in a different league. The hundreds of thousands of people who use it every week should not risk arrest for personal possession of cannabis. Anything else is a nonsense.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but I do not accept that the message is mixed. The hon. Gentleman should look at the provisions in the Criminal Justice Bill to facilitate an arrestable offence with regard to class C drugs, and at the guidance drawn up by the Association of Chief Police Officers, to which the police service has a real commitment. The provisions will limit how and when an arrestable offence is used. Such an offence should be used where a public order problem arises, and when there is blatant and continued use of cannabis. Police officers should not expect to have to face people who flatly refuse to comply with a request. That is the intention. Taken together, the ACPO guidance and the proposed new criminal justice framework do not transmit the mixed message that the hon. Gentleman fears.

Simon Hughes: I absolutely understand what the Government are trying to do. I have looked at the ACPO guidance, but I still do not think that the approach will work. People who go around with cannabis are at risk of being arrested and even imprisoned, if only for a short period, as are people who might be thought to be committing a breach of public order offence by, say, winding up the police. To be honest, that represents a misdirection of resources.

It must be better and clearer to say to people who smoke cannabis on their own that that remains a crime but that the policy is one of no arrest, no prosecution. The same applies to people who give cannabis to their mates for nothing, and to those who grow it in gardens or window boxes. However, people who start flogging cannabis on the streets are dealing, and can be prosecuted. People who stand outside school gates and deal cannabis will be clobbered with a severe sentence. Dealing is a commercial activity, and needs to be firmly dealt with.

I know what the difficulty in countries such as the Netherlands has been. The Dutch policy of having legitimate entry by the front door of a cannabis café but illegitimate entry by the back door to the suppliers of the cannabis strikes me as hypocritical. Until the UN convention can allow country opt-out, for which I hope the European Union will push, the best course of action is to keep cannabis use as a crime but have a non-prosecution policy for personal use, not for dealing. I put cannabis into that category for all sorts of reasons: it is widely used, it is the least harmful and there is no evidence of it causing death.

That is why we put ecstasy into the intermediate category and support the Home Affairs Committee's recommendations that it, too, be downgraded.The question that I am always asked is whether I would suggest downgrading ecstasy to the family of Leah Betts. I would and do suggest it to them, because although there are a handful of deaths from ecstasy there are 10 times as many from amphetamines. Of course there is a risk, but the evidence-based conclusion is that ecstasy has nothing like the same risk or addiction as other drugs. I would be happy, as the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) said, to refer this question to the advisory committee so that it can give us its evidence-based view. If its members say that it should be downgraded, we should follow that recommendation. I would be much happier with that than with a party political view.

I understand the media issues; I understand the personal grief and trauma that is involved. No one wants any other youngster to take ecstasy and risk dying, which is why the clubbing guide is welcome. However, ecstasy is not in the same league as heroin and crack cocaine. It is nonsense to keep it in the same category and it should be downgraded.

Bob Russell: Although it is obvious that cannabis is not in the same league as heroin, does my hon. Friend accept that we should not send out the message that it is okay, especially when it is known that cannabis is considerably stronger now than it was 10 years ago?

Simon Hughes: I absolutely agree with that. If we are to introduce evidence-based legislation, we need to be able to change the categories as the evidence changes and drugs because more or less pure or more or less strong. We have to be able to respond to what is happening in the real world where people are flogging drugs.

If cannabis, ecstasy and heroin are put in one rolled-up category, more people will be pushed into the hands of the dealers. If people who use cannabis socially have to get their supplies from someone who wants them as a regular customer, the supplier will want them to buy something that costs more and makes them more dependent. It is obvious to me that addiction lies down that road.

I am no expert on this subject, although, like the Minister, I read about it. I come to this as a lay person looking at the evidence. In its summary, Home Office research study No. 253, headed "The road to ruin? Sequences of initiation into drug use and offending by young people in Britain", says:

"My interpretation of the results of this study is that true gateway effects"—

that is, starting on cannabis and proceeding to other drugs—

"are probably very small and that the association between soft and hard drugs found in survey data is largely the result of our inability to observe all the personal characteristics underlying individual drug use."

The best evidence suggests that people do not go automatically from cannabis to other drugs unless the person who flogged them the cannabis tries to get them on to harder drugs. People are then prone to that happening and are likely to be caught.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I thank the hon Gentleman for allowing me to intervene. Does he recognise that many clubbers who use ecstasy are polydrug users and that those who sell it to them are polydrug dealers? That is one reason why it would be so dangerous to separate ecstasy and downgrade it.

Simon Hughes: I am with the hon. Lady half way on that. I think that, on the current evidence, cannabis is in

one category but that the use or possession of ecstasy should not be regarded as not criminal. It is therefore in that side of the park, beyond which is heroin and crack cocaine. I accept what the hon. Lady says. Cannabis is widely used—although I do not use it and I am sure that the hon. Lady does not—but if we can prevent it from being one of the drugs that the polydrug dealers want to sell and separate cannabis sellers from the people who want to flog ecstasy tablets, heroin and crack cocaine, whom we want to catch and lock up, we should do our constituents a better service.

I agree with the Minister about the Lambeth experiment. I have talked to former Commander Brian Paddick and to acting Commander Brian Moore. They hold the same view on the issue: the experiment worked. I like and respect the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), but she is wrong about this matter. Many people have pretended things that are not true about Lambeth. I live next door to Lambeth and am often in the area. The evidence from Brian Paddick and Brian Moore is the same, although they are entirely different people, with entirely different perspectives on the issue: we did better by not chasing cannabis users and we caught more people dealing hard drugs. Lambeth was not a honeypot for people coming from elsewhere. The police monitored the people whom they picked up and they were not drug tourists. The same people were peddling drugs before the experiment began. During the experiment, the police were more able to catch them because they had more time. I hope we can lay the honeypot claim to rest. The evidence from people on the ground is that the Lambeth experiment worked.

Yesterday, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) pointed out that a distinction might be made, which I hope Ministers will consider, as to whether or not people were carrying drugs for their personal use. There is merit in examining the substantial possession test—as a variant on the suggestion of the Home Affairs Committee—so that we can catch people who are clearly not carrying drugs for their own use because they have such huge quantities that, unless they were superhuman, they could never use them in a reasonable period.

I hope that we are all united in wanting severe punishments for people who trade and traffic drugs and try to exploit people where they are vulnerable, especially outside schools and youth clubs. Such dealers should expect the harshest penalty.

The Minister mentioned people who were leaving prison. Until recently, prison was one of the easiest places to become a drug addict. The Prison Service has worked hard, using sniffer dogs and other methods, to stop that. However, my view—although I took some persuading—which is shared by the majority of my colleagues, is that prison should never be the answer for those convicted only of possession of any drug. Our prisons are full to overcrowded and to lock people up because they use drugs is to criminalise people who should be receiving treatment for their addiction from the health service. I hope that we can get away from the idea of prison, even for people who constantly use heroin. If necessary, we can send them to prison for nicking from houses or cars because they want money for drugs—that is a different matter.

I hope that the Government will not forget about producing their alcohol strategy. On Friday nights, in streets in my area, such as the Old Kent road, more trouble is probably caused by alcohol than by drugs. I think that many of my colleagues have the same experience.

Following the Cambridge Two case, I hope that the Government will accept the recommendation of the Select Committee and amend the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. People running hostels should not get clobbered when they do not knowingly preside over drug taking and are trying to look after people and help them. We need to ensure that such places work well.

The exercise is not cost free. We are debating public expenditure estimates—the public budget. We are talking not about small sums but about billions of pounds. Will Ministers make it clear that the balance should continue to be tilted towards prevention and treatment rather than towards dealing with people only after they have been caught? I am advised that in the next financial year the proportion of money to be spent on treatment is less than a third of the total allocation. We can sort out the problems only if we spend much more on the prevention and treatment of addiction and much less on enforcement.

The debate is important. We are all united in our objectives. The Government are moving in the right direction and we welcome that. They get seven out of 10 for going the right way, but we hope that they will think again about things such as cannabis and ecstasy: please, no more muddled messages.

4.14 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): It is a delight to speak in this debate. Having spoken in every debate about drugs in this House since 1987, I know that there is a change today. In every one of those debates, until recent years, there was unanimity in the House that the only way of solving the problems was to introduce more tough policies—and every year it was clear that the policies were not working.

Before 1971 we had a British way of dealing with heroin addicts. There were fewer than 1,000 addicts, there was virtually no drug crime and deaths were extremely rare. That is the system to which we should return. There has been criticism by one of the newspapers suggesting that at that time there was leakage from the system—and occasionally there was, including a case involving two doctors. Because of that, politicians behaved as we often do: babies cry, dogs bark and politicians legislate. We put on the statute book the most damaging piece of legislation on drugs that has been introduced in Europe—the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. According to the National Treatment Centre, we now have not 1,000 addicts but 320,000, and we have 40 per cent. of all the drug deaths in our continent of Europe.

I have had the job of acting as the Council of Europe's rapporteur on drugs for its health committee. I have visited many other countries to see what is going on, and I beg the House to look at what has occurred in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Portugal and Germany; throughout our continent there is a change of view, which has come through to this House.

It is a pleasure to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the other Ministers now responsible for drugs policy, who are the most

[Paul Flynn]

reasonable that we have had in my time in Parliament. I can remember a debate in the early 1990s when the then Conservative spokesman, Mr. Mellor, said that there was one thing of which he could be absolutely certain—that heroin use had peaked in Britain.

I recall another occasion when the two Front-Bench spokesmen had to leave the Chamber during a debate to go out for a fix because they were both addicted to cigarettes, which are far more damaging than any of the drugs about which they were talking. There is a contrast between the drugs of choice of my generation and those of young people.

It was a shame that we had to suffer the vacuous speech of the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). It was the usual mix of prejudice and ignorance that we have come to expect from him. I appeal to the Conservatives—including the shadow Home Secretary and the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), who made a distinguished contribution in the Select Committee—to get one of their able and intelligent Members to act as their spokesman if the official Opposition are not to be left behind in the debate.

A tongue-in-cheek award of parliamentarian of the year was made to the leader of my party, who deserves many awards, but perhaps not that one. The person who gave the award suggested that it was given in order to foment trouble between the Prime Minister and his next-door neighbour. However, the award of parliamentarian's parliamentarian of the year should be given to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). I did not attend quite as many meetings of the Committee as he did, but I found those that I did attend an elevating experience because of the quality of cross-examination and the variety of witnesses.

I shall never forget one witness, Fulton Gillespie, who spoke about something of which we all have experience in our constituencies: mothers—it usually is mothers—ringing up to say that their young people are on drugs, asking what they should do, and wondering whether they should buy drugs or find a safe supply for them. I have a case of a mother with two daughters who are prostituting themselves; one has just had a baby who is also addicted to drugs. We feel hopeless in these cases, and I feel especially hopeless when I receive a letter such as the one I received on 28 October from the Gwent healthcare trust, informing me that the average waiting time for treatment is 11 months and the longest waiting time, for the specialist substance misuse service, is 17 months.

This is not a party matter, and people should not reduce it to one. We have had 30 years of monumental failure by all parties, united in error year after year. We are now escaping from it by having, for the first time, a policy of reducing the status of cannabis in law and a policy on the medical prescription of pharmaceutical heroin. That worked well until 1971. Lots of heroin users were veterans of the first world war who became addicted on the battlefield. There was the famous case of the author of "National Velvet"—a distinguished English lady living the life of a country gentlewoman, who took vast amounts of heroin every day in the form of pharmaceutical diamorphine. It killed her eventually: she took more heroin than most people take on the streets, but she eventually died a serene death at the age of 91. That is the alternative.

Fulton Gillespie talked about his son in very affectionate terms. He said what a nice chap he was, and how he loved him. He said that his son was more sensitive than his other four children and got upset about cruelty to animals, the cost of war and the Falklands war. He was not making excuses for his son, who had treatment. I shall explain how his death occurred. He went into prison on remand because he was stealing to feed his habit, but no heroin was available on remand. If he had been put into the normal prison, heroin would have been freely available, as it is in most of our prisons. When he came out of prison he went on to the streets to get his heroin. He took the same strength of heroin as before, but it was contaminated and it killed him. He was killed not by heroin, but by prohibition. He was killed by the fact that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 brought in strict prohibition.

We should not dismiss those people as junkies, as the Opposition spokesman did. That can happen to any family, and they are not some subspecies; they are part of our families and our constituencies, and they deserve the same compassionate treatment as anyone else.

Mr. Fulton Gillespie rightly said that the only answer is legalisation of all drugs. That does not mean a free-for-all, or that we want to encourage anyone to use drugs. DrugScope said in its submission that in all the cases in which there has been a policy of changing the regime on drugs, particularly cannabis, doing so has not led to an increase. That can be backed up by cases from all over the world, from Australia to the Netherlands and Switzerland.

We must make it clear that after 30 years of the harshest prohibition in Europe, Britain has by far the greatest use of cannabis in Europe and by far the greatest number of drug deaths. Yet after 25 years of regulated licensed criminalisation—this is not theoretical; it has happened—Holland has split the two markets. It has lower heroin use than this country, one tenth of our heroin deaths and a lower use of cannabis in all sections of society. The main reason why that has happened is the division between the soft drugs market and the hard drugs market. Young people who want to experiment, as they do in this country and other parts of Europe, can do so without being exposed to the pushers of hard drugs.

I disagree with my hon. Friend the Minister about the idea that there are other fixes. We have to look at what has happened elsewhere and imitate the successes. We certainly should not go down the same road as the United States. We are now in the extraordinary position of having 130 per 100,000 of our citizens in jail. That is nearly the highest figure in Europe, and it is double the average. America, with its harsh drug policies, has 700 people in jail per 100,000.

If we want to find a record of failure, which we must not repeat in Afghanistan, we need only look at Colombia. It has been said that we can eliminate drug use in Afghanistan and that we support a Government who will reduce poppy growing there. In fact there was a Government who were reducing poppy growing—they were called the Taliban—but the Northern Alliance was increasing poppy growing. That policy will not work.

The result of trying the same policy in Colombia is chaos and continual warfare between three armies, two of which are funded entirely by drug use.

The great danger is that heroin production will not be eliminated by persuasion, bribery or whatever other means without providing alternative crops, because the money incentive is too strong. If it were eliminated in Afghanistan, the drugs would then be grown in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Burma. We are now told that they are grown in North Korea. We cannot stop that supply, and the drugs are being sucked in through this country. We have heard about the drop in price, but drug production and exports to this country are completely out of control.

When we know that there are a huge number of people who become unable to work because they must enter a cycle of getting their drug, committing crimes to pay for it, sleeping it off and going through the same cycle again, do we say to those young people who are blighted by drugs that the only market available to them is a market run by criminals? Is not the only sensible way of dealing with the situation to collapse the evil, irresponsible black market in drugs by replacing it with a market that can be legalised, policed, licensed and controlled? That has happened in the Netherlands, and is happening now in Portugal. The Select Committee gave great attention to the drug users rooms that I have visited in a number of continental countries, which have an immediate beneficial effect. They immediately reduce crime, as they did in Switzerland, and have an immediate beneficial effect on the health of users—

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is experienced enough in these affairs to know that the regime in Portugal and Holland is decriminalisation not legalisation. Will he make that distinction? Why does he think that legalisation is much more appropriate than what we see in those two countries?

Paul Flynn: I want to make that my final point about what we can do.

The problem at the moment is the 1961 UN convention, which binds most countries in Europe and limits the things that we can do. In Holland it has led to the front door and back door problem in relation to the supplier, which is illogical and causes concern there. We are told by DrugScope that we can do a great deal more than we are doing now within the terms of the UN convention. The important thing is that that convention will come up for reconsideration in 2003, and it is up to us to make sure that we alter it to allow the practical experiments that have been proved to be beneficial elsewhere to be tried throughout Europe. Every country in Europe is struggling with the UN convention.

The explanation of how we got into this position dates back to the 1920s, when America had a Government almost as right-wing as the Government that it has now. That Government were religious-based and believed in prohibition. They introduced prohibition of alcohol and drugs, which spread throughout the world. That was the main cause of the problems that we have now. There was no recreational use of cannabis in Britain until it was prohibited. The argument is that perversely, prohibition increases use, because it creates profits for a group of people, as it did in America, where an empire of crime was established—and illegal drugs have done the same thing.

To return to the system that worked effectively here—as the Government are doing, slowly, tentatively and correctly—and to allow doctors to prescribe heroin will be a major step forward. I commend the Government for taking on the *Daily Mail*, the *Evening Standard* and *The Daily Telegraph*, which for the past two years, before the Government took their decision, had been calling for an intelligent debate on drugs, and pragmatic policies. Three early-day motions were tabled in the last Session describing the encouraging things that they had said about a change of policy. As soon as the Government had the courage to change policy, however, they condemned the Government in terms similar to those used by the Opposition spokesman tonight.

We must congratulate the Select Committee and the Government and acknowledge that we have at least changed directions. For 30 years all Governments have treated each successive increase in drug use with more of the policies that helped to create that increase, with tougher policies and longer prison sentences. For once, we have a policy that should be described not as tough but as what it is: intelligent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House, if it needs reminding, that Mr. Speaker has put a 15-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

4.29 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Like others, I welcome the report of the Home Affairs Committee and the introductory speech that we heard from its Chairman. I also welcome the many aspects in the Government's drugs strategy that have cross-party support.

Since I became involved in considering these issues and, in particular, since I published a pamphlet entitled "Common Sense on Cannabis", I have been struck by how the debates tend to be bedevilled by a threefold confusion. First, there is the confusion between soft and hard drugs. Secondly, there is the confusion between the use and abuse of drugs and, thirdly, there is the confusion between what is immoral and what is and should be illegal. I shall say a few words about each of those sources of confusion.

On the confusion between soft and hard drugs, immense harm has been done by the attempt to demonise cannabis and to present it as if it is as bad as and on a par with heroin, cocaine and other hard drugs. Claiming that cannabis is as bad as hard drugs discredits what we say about hard drugs. Therefore, it is sensible in principle to reclassify cannabis in accordance with its true nature. I am predisposed to accepting the Committee's recommendation that it is also sensible to reclassify ecstasy.

The argument that reclassification sends the wrong signals ignores the fact that maintaining an absurd classification also sends a false and misleading message. It sends the message that heroin and crack cocaine are no worse than cannabis and ecstasy. Heroin and cocaine are seriously worse, and we do not want people who discover that using cannabis in moderation has little ill effect on their health to think that, because it is classified in a similar category to more damaging drugs, those drugs will not damage them.

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

Even greater damage is done by the attempt to confuse the two groups by claiming that soft drugs, while not in themselves as damaging as hard drugs, lead ineluctably to the use of hard drugs—the so-called gateway theory. It is not a valid theory. The fact that most heroin users previously used cannabis is not proof that they were caused to use heroin by their prior use of cannabis. In fact, most cannabis users previously used tobacco, but the simple fact is that most tobacco users do not go on to use cannabis and even fewer cannabis users go on to use heroin. There is certainly no chemical predisposition in the use of cannabis leading one to the use of heroin or cocaine.

If the gateway theory were true and people who used cannabis were led on to hard drugs, there would be a strong case for maintaining the toughest possible sanctions on cannabis to stop people moving down that slippery slope. If it is not true, the effect of keeping cannabis as an illegal drug creates a gateway effect of its own. Cannabis is available only from the same illegal sources that push hard drugs. We are saying to people that, if they wish to use cannabis, they must pass through the supply gateway and bring themselves into contact with the people who may push upon them hard drugs such as heroin and cocaine.

I fear that the Government are risking getting the worst of all worlds. They are simply reclassifying and reducing the criminal penalties, but are not going the logical step further that is essential if we are to break the link between soft and hard drugs. They are not providing through licensing committees legal outlets for cannabis in each area so that the people who insist on buying this boring and unattractive drug can do so legally without coming into contact with the people and gangs who will push the hard drugs. That would take the supply of the drug out of the hands of the gangs and thereby reduce their empire and wealth.

The second confusion is between the use and abuse of drugs. In "Common Sense on Cannabis", published by the Social Market Foundation at £5 or available free from my website www.peterlilley.co.uk, I argued that cannabis is relatively safe if it is not abused. I quoted *The Lancet* study of all the medical evidence available which said:

> "On the medical evidence available, moderate indulgence in cannabis has little ill effect on health, and that decisions to ban or legalise cannabis should be based on other considerations."

I emphasise "moderate" and "little". I am not saying that it has no effect or that heavy and sustained use are not harmful. Indeed, I specifically stated that, although moderate and occasional cannabis use has few ill effects on health, it can be harmful if used heavily and continuously.

Several recent studies have been reported in ways which suggest that that picture has changed. If it has, we ought to accept the evidence. I am an old-fashioned person, perhaps because of my training as a scientist. I think it was Keynes who said, "If the evidence changes, I change my mind. What do you do?" Let us consider the recent evidence. There are number of studies. They all have one thing in common: if there is an ill effect that is causal, it is primarily the consequence of heavy and sustained use, and there is little, or much less, effect from occasional use.

The first study, published by the British Lung Foundation, said that cannabis is more carcinogenic than tobacco. That is not a new idea. The study was simply a review of past studies, most of which were available to *The Lancet* report when it reviewed the evidence. I quoted *The Lancet* report as saying:

> "There is some evidence that cannabis smoking may be even more likely than tobacco to generate bronchial ailments and to cause cancers especially if smoked in conjunction with tobacco."

There is no reason for us to change our minds on that because we all know and accept that there is a carcinogenic risk. It would therefore be much better to have legal supplies of the substance, which are obliged to carry a health warning explaining that risk and others, as tobacco products do.

The British Lung Foundation also made the point, which has been mentioned, that modern cannabis supplies may contain much higher concentrations of its active element tetrahydrocannabinol, known as THC. It implies that cannabis smoking is much more dangerous than it used to be and that although surveys have not found severe ill effects, they will in future. Whisky is much stronger than beer, but few people order it by the pint. I have not tried the stuff, and have no intention of doing so, but I understand that when people have stronger supplies of cannabis, they smoke less of it to get the same effect. So there is also no reason to change our mind on that.

The three other studies were more substantial. An Australian study said that there are risks of depression from heavy and sustained use of cannabis, especially if one starts young and if one is a woman. If I am not misinterpreting the figures, it seems to suggest that sustained use of cannabis reduces the risk of depression in young men. However, it certainly seems to show an increased risk of depression among the relatively small number of heavy female users.

The New Zealand study covers schizophrenia and depression. By contrast, it finds no link between depression and cannabis use, thereby undermining the Australian study. However, it finds a link between schizophrenic-type problems and the heavy and sustained use of cannabis.

The third major study is a reworking of the famous Swedish study of 50,000 people who were conscripted in 1969 and have been followed since. That reinforces previous evidence that suggests a link between cannabis use and schizophrenic symptoms. *The Lancet* report referred to the earlier reports of the Swedish study and agreed that cannabis could perhaps precipitate and exacerbate schizophrenic symptoms, but it concluded that cannabis is unlikely to have caused cases of schizophrenia that would not otherwise have occurred.

In the light of the latest reworking of the Swedish data, we cannot be quite so certain. Swedish researchers think that there may be some net addition to schizophrenic symptoms caused by cannabis smoking. However, we cannot yet accept that until there is some explanation. If that is the case, why has there not been a rise in the incidence of schizophrenia in the general population in western countries with the increased use of cannabis in recent decades? Unless and until we can explain that absence, we cannot suggest that the incidence will increase. Either way, however, we should discourage those who are susceptible to schizophrenia from taking cannabis, and discourage anybody from abusing it and using it excessively.

There is confusion between what is immoral and what is illegal. There are many who feel instinctively that even if cannabis had no risks to health and was in no danger of acting as a gateway to hard drugs, indulgence in it—and certainly excessive indulgence—would be morally wrong. However, in our modern world there is no greater sin than to moralise. Instead of voicing their moral disapproval of the abuse of cannabis, or explaining why they believe it to be immoral, people express their disapproval by exaggerating the health risks, by reading every conceivable study suggesting that there may be serious health risks, and by fostering the two previous confusions to which I have referred, that between soft drugs and hard drugs and between use and abuse.

I am an old-fashioned moralist. I accept that abuse of any drug to the point of intoxication is morally wrong, whether it be alcohol or anything else. It is degrading to get drunk out of one's mind. It undermines the conscience, and therefore for traditional Christian reasons it is wrong because it opens up the individual to committing far worse sins and evils. I believe that people would be better off explaining those moral consequences rather than exaggerating health and other risks.

In any event, many things are immoral or contrary to the prevailing moral code but are not crimes. Most people consider adultery to be wrong, but we do not fine or jail adulterers. It is bizarre to let people get drunk on alcohol, which is far more likely than cannabis to lead to violence, but to criminalise them for smoking one relaxing joint. A society with better understanding of the moral law and which was more willing to express its moral concerns would be less inclined to resort to the criminal law to solve social problems.

It is a sign of moral decadence to look to the state to uphold, to preach and to enforce what is morally right rather than to look to the individual conscience, to teachers and parents and others with moral standing to advise us on what is right and wrong. If we expect everything that is wrong to be made illegal, we shall find ourselves living in a very unpleasant society. I believe that the greater the freedoms we possess and the more responsibility we are allowed, in general the more responsibly people will behave.

I return to my original argument that both to break the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman has had his time.

4.44 pm

Mrs. Janet Dean (Burton): I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in today's debate. When the Select Committee on Home Affairs decided to undertake an inquiry, we knew that we were treading on dangerous ground. At the end of those eight months, we understood even more the difficulty and complexity of the drugs issue.

As the Chairman of the Select Committee said, we heard from many different organisations and individuals, and heard many different arguments. I believe that our report was balanced, but of course such a report upsets people on both sides of the argument. Members have said today that they would like cannabis in particular to be decriminalised. The Select Committee looked at whether decriminalisation would send a message to young people who do not take the drug because it is illegal, and encourage them to take it. As has been said, there are possible long-term health problems associated with taking a drug such as cannabis so, if that message is sent, more people may suffer from medical conditions in future. I suspect, for example, that we would not legalise tobacco today.

I am pleased that the Government have accepted most of the Select Committee's recommendations, and welcome their commitment to increase funding for treatment, both inside and outside the criminal justice system. It is important that treatment should be available when people are in prison or when courts impose drug treatment and testing orders, but there should not be a perverse incentive for addicts to enter the criminal justice system to receive treatment. We should make sure that treatment is available for people when they want it. Many young people are addicted to heroin, and we see their parents at our surgeries. Not until those young people are willing to undergo treatment can their problems be addressed satisfactorily. They should receive such treatment there and then—they should not have to wait for months.

Drug addiction is one of the evils of modern society. We all know that every community in our constituencies is affected by it, although it obviously has a greater impact in areas of deprivation. However, addiction is also a problem in market towns and villages—we can see it everywhere—and it brings distress to those communities. It degrades users and makes parents desperate. As I said, those parents come to our surgeries, and it is difficult to know how to advise them. We can give the clear advice that the Minister gave earlier and refer them to a drug addiction team to get help for their children, but they are torn between the desire to protect them and getting them to face reality. They see their once-perfect children, who were growing up as caring individuals, become deceitful and fall into criminal activity to feed their habit including, very often, stealing from their own family. Parents are faced with a choice between keeping their children in the family home and trying to protect them—but suffering that thieving—and trying to reject them, getting them to face up to their problems and seek treatment.There is no easy answer for those parents but, as I have said, it is important that treatment is available when required and that there is support for families trying to cope with that situation.

We must aim at prevention in the first instance and our overall message must be that all drugs are harmful. However, we must be realistic, which is why I support the Committee's recommendations on downgrading cannabis and ecstasy. I know that the ecstasy issue is a difficult one, as deaths are caused by them. The overall message must be that there is a danger in taking ecstasy. That must be the fundamental message that we send out, but we must also recognise that ecstasy is not comparable to heroin, crack and cocaine—it is in a different league. We must send out a realistic message to young people, but we will not do so if we do not grade the risks properly.

The overall message must be that all drugs are harmful. Even in relation to cannabis, we have heard hon. Members speaking about the dangers of driving or contracting cancer and possibly suffering brain damage. We have also heard it said that the Government have

[Mrs. Janet Dean]

sent the wrong message over the past year or so. Sometimes, however, it is the media that send the wrong message; it will not necessarily be the Government who do so.

Above all, the worst thing about drugs is addiction to heroin and cocaine. I welcome the Government's initiative to introduce innovative advertising and more measures to tackle crack cocaine, which is one of the neglected drugs in terms of treatment. I welcome the acceptance that we should tailor treatment services to the individual, including harm minimisation, needle exchange, methadone treatment and abstinence treatment where appropriate. I also welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister said about prison-to-home services, which are vital. I know of constituents who have died on getting home from prison and returning to the dose that they were taking previously.

We must tackle drug production and dealing. There is a difference between those who supply their friends with drugs of whatever sort and the big boys who probably never take them, but cripple our communities by dealing in all sorts of drugs. We must also tackle deprivation and the lack of hope among young people. That is where the Government's policy of tackling crime and the causes of crime is important. If young people are given hope, they will be less likely to fall into the habit in the first place.

I welcome the Government's acceptance of most of the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee. We have a long way to go and the problem will never be easy to address, but we have to tackle it in different ways.

4.52 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am delighted to take part in this debate.

Helping to produce the report, and serving on the Select Committee on Home Affairs discussing and debating it, has been by far the most interesting thing that I have done in the year and a half I have been in Parliament. Everyone on the Committee genuinely tried to empty their heads of preconceptions and to look at the evidence and think about it. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who introduced the debate. He chairs the Committee admirably and tries very hard to ensure that we reach unanimity, even if we cannot always do so.

I strongly believe that the report is the right one at the right time. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South spoke about the utter failure of drugs policy in this country over a long period. In the 1970s, there were 2,000 heroin addicts; today, there are 250,000. Cannabis use has consistently increased and 50 per cent. of young people now admit to having tried it. Last year, 3,500 of our fellow countrymen died through drug abuse—a 20 per cent. increase on a decade ago. Another health problem that is not often looked at is the fact that 300,000 people in this country have contracted hepatitis C through drug use, and one third of them are likely to die prematurely.

Before dealing with the recommendations, let me say that I feel extremely strongly about this subject and desperately want to see a reduction in drug abuse and better paths to enable people to get out of it. If one takes a slightly progressive—or, as I like to think of it, thoughtful—view, one can sometimes be accused of being soft. I reject that utterly. Friends and people close to me have had their lives ruined by drug abuse and I want us to tackle the problem properly. That is what the report is all about.

When we boil this report down and look at it closely, we see that its central point is that we must focus on the 250,000 problematic drug users. If we can get them into treatment, there will be a huge prize for this country. First, it would cut crime. The report estimates that 30 per cent. of property crime is committed by drug abusers, although the police in Oxford and many other towns and cities say that that is a massive underestimate. The report talks about each addict needing to steal £16,000 worth of products a year to fund their habit. I think that that, too, is a massive underestimate. If they are stealing from shops, they will often sell the products at a knock-down price. The value of the products that they need to steal is probably nearer to £40,000. Secondly, getting those people into treatment would save us a great deal of money. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said that it was pointless to send heroin users to prison, and I wholly agree with him. It is a waste of money. We must get them into treatment.

As I said in my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), I am pleased that some of what we have said has already been accepted on both sides of the House. The Government are placing a renewed emphasis on treatment, and some of the wilder targets of the drugs tsar have been cancelled. The tsar has not yet had the full Russian treatment—he has not been taken out and shot—but I sometimes think that Members on the Treasury Bench might like to lock him up, in true Russian fashion. On our side, policy has been changed—rightly—to give real emphasis to treatment. The proposals on mandatory treatment and trying to find ways of getting young people into treatment put forward by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and the Front-Bench team have been hugely positive.

I would like to talk about two of the report's most contentious recommendations. The first involves the prescribing of heroin—diamorphine—and the second relates to the use of safe injecting rooms. Both those recommendations have the same end in mind, which is to get people into treatment and to make that happen quickly. We have to realise that every day that an addict spends out on the streets funding their habit is a time of crime, of ill health and, possibly, of death. Many people estimate the percentage of property crime committed by drug abusers to be nearer 50 per cent. than 30 per cent., which would mean that every other time someone's house was burgled or their car broken into, it would be drug-related. This provision will be of interest to all our constituents, if we can get it right.

I understand from the conversations that I have had with drug addicts and drugs workers that there is no single method of treatment that always works. We need to have a variety of methods. I plead with the Minister to acknowledge that the voluntary sector is terribly important in providing these services. In the old days, when all that was available was a few detox beds and a psychiatrist or a few junkie doctors, it was actually the

voluntary sector organisations—such as Kaleidoscope in south London—that started to provide methadone scripts. Instead of handing out great big doses, they were handing out daily doses. They were socialising the people concerned, and talking to them to make sure that they were in contact with treatment provision. We must do that now.

The person to whom I spoke at Kaleidoscope made the point that there is nothing magic about illegal drugs. We have to try to make treatment attractive. She said that, when we talk to someone who has tried to give up smoking or has been on a diet, they will always say that the way they did it was the best way. It is the same with drug addicts. Someone who has had a residential placement will say how powerful it was, and how they rebuilt their life through the steps process. A similar thing happens when we talk to people on methadone replacement. We need to "let a thousand flowers bloom", if I can put it like that. We must make treatment attractive. Think of all the money that the Government spend on getting people to give up smoking. We have to try to draw people into treatment.

Why prescribe heroin? It has worked overseas; the evidence that the Committee heard on that was compelling. The average age of heroin addicts in this country is, tragically, still going down. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey mentioned that in other countries, such as Holland, it is going up. Furthermore, methadone is not suitable for everyone. Some very chaotic drug users need to be stabilised, and perhaps heroin is the answer for them. The proposal might also help to cut the number of drug-related deaths. The fact that 3,500 people died last year from drug overdoses shames us. Most importantly, whatever treatment is chosen—including heroin prescribing for the hardest cases—at least the people concerned are getting into treatment and making contact with the agencies and the people who can help them. This is a difficult decision for the Government, but I hope that they will make it and persevere with it, because I believe that it is the right one.

When I first heard about the concept of safe injecting rooms, I hated it. I thought the concept of the state providing a room for someone to inject something into their veins awful, but I listened to the arguments and, in particular, to Members such as the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice), who is in her place, and the hon. Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean), who has just spoken.

People who live in inner-city areas whose children have to step over drug paraphernalia in the streets and on housing estates deserve a break from heroin use in their communities. That takes me back to the point that safe injecting rooms at least get heroin users to a place where they can be contacted by the treatment agencies so that the work of trying to get them off drugs can start.

The point about contact is hugely important. Everyone says that drugs are not just a crime problem. They are not just a health problem or just a problem of poverty either. They are a social problem in the true meaning of the phrase. If Members talk to anyone who has or has had a heroin addiction problem, they will find that there is always something else wrong with such people's lives. That is where the voluntary sector in particular can help to pick them up and turn them round.

I hope that the Government will be brave. We are seeing some progress, although they are, I am afraid, sometimes fond of using tough language on subjects such as crime and asylum. This is not a time for tough language; they must just get it right. The Home Secretary called for an adult debate and I welcome that, but I did not welcome his response to the report, as he immediately ruled out one or two recommendations. We had spent hours thinking, debating, arguing and considering the evidence, but he seemed to dismiss those recommendations in a matter of minutes. Rather than rejecting them so hastily, it would have been better to spend time reflecting on them.

I shall make a number of suggestions based on my constituency experience of talking to people who have to deal with the problems of drugs. The first is on the system of DATs, or rather DAATs, as Oxfordshire has a drug and alcohol action team, which is headed by Bill Holman. He made the point to me that the Oxford coroner does not record drug-related deaths properly, so I would be grateful if the Minister looked into that; otherwise, we shall have no baseline for the target and no way to measure it.

The next point is on the structure of DATs. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) made a good speech in Westminster Hall about that, which I read as, sadly, I could not be present. There is a bit of confusion here. DATs are non-statutory bodies and in many cases most of the employees work for different agencies. In Oxfordshire, some are employed by the youth service, some by social services and some by the primary care trust. Although I am always against creating vast new bureaucracies, DATs need more clarity in how they are set up.

We should consider DAT funding streams: something comes from the Department for Education and Skills, something from the youth offending team and something from the Department of Health. On the whole, we should give those bodies the money and let them get on with the job. Social services rather than the DAT tends to commission residential care places. If we are to give DATs more power and more influence, we need to let them get on with it and commission a full service of education, prevention and treatment.

My next constituency point is on education. I would recommend to all Members that they sit at the back of a secondary school class when a drugs education programme is being conducted. I did so when a group of former addicts called Energy and Vision, which is part of the voluntary sector, was involved. It does education programmes across Oxfordshire, which are incredibly powerful. They are information based and non-judgmental, and they provide proper information for the students, who were gripped by what they were told. That, however, was not namby-pamby or soft.

The ex-addicts described how their experimentation with drugs had led them down a dreadful path to losing their homes and friends, breaking up from their families, prison and the collapse of their lives. They had credibility and their programme had power, as they were not the men in suits referred to by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South.

We must be frank about education. Of course we want it to reduce drug use, but reducing drug abuse is key and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin

[Mr. David Cameron]

and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) made that point with great power. We know the figures—50 per cent. of young people try certain drugs—and it is most important that they understand the real risks of their experimentation and the risks of getting into drug abuse.

I want to make a point on policing. I met the police in Oxford, who are responsible for an active drug treatment and testing order programme and trying to get addicts into treatment. They included assistant chief constable Steve Love and Jim Trottman, who is in charge of policing in Oxford city. A point was made to me then that I consider important: I hope that the Minister will take it on board. Apparently, the police and the probation service do not always follow the same track. The police want to target the most prolific offenders and ensure that they are the subject of DTTOs, while the probation service is rewarded on the basis of the number who go through the system.

We must also consider the speed of the process. We all know about delays in the court system. The trouble with DTTOs is the need to wait until an offender who has carried out burglaries or car crimes, but is also involved with drugs, goes to court. Could treatment, or at least being referred for treatment, be a condition of police bail? If the arrested person rejected that condition, there would be an even faster track to court.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The updated strategy contains a proposal to pilot refusal of bail to those who are not prepared to accept treatment. We will consider early interventions of the kind that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Cameron: I am pleased to hear it, and I look forward to seeing whether the system works.

A common theme features in what has been said to me by those involved in education, by the police and by the DAAT. When things go wrong, treatment services must be available. They must be attractive, access to them must be quick, and we must ensure that they work. As others have said today, that means that there must be more places. Although residential places are not the only answer, there are not nearly enough. According to a written answer given to me, there are only 1,900 in the country, and I support the proposal of my Front-Bench team to increase the number, while retaining all the existing treatment options.

Let me end with a plea to the Minister. This is an incredibly difficult subject. It is impossible to control from Whitehall the number of drugs that will be taken, what new drugs will appear and what will happen to the figures. If the figures do not do the right thing, I ask the Government not to return to retribution and war on drugs. That has been tried, and we all know that it does not work.

I think we are making progress. Of course, anyone who takes part in a debate like this is in danger of being called soft. Following the report's publication I was introduced in this way by a local radio station: "Now we will hear from a Conservative MP who thinks that heroin addicts should be given prescriptions for ecstasy". That was a tough one; it was difficult for me to explain my way out of it.

I think, though, that if we get this right we will have a chance to cut crime, save money, improve the health of the country and even save lives. That is definitely worth a brickbat or two.

5.7 pm

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I am pleased to be able to contribute, and I will try to be brief.

Let me make a confession to my colleagues on the Select Committee, and to the Chairman in particular. I was a relatively new member when the Committee decided to look at the Government's drug policy. In fact, I was an entirely new member: it was at the first sitting that we drew up the topics that we wanted to investigate.

I remember the occasion well. When a colleague suggested that we investigate drugs, my immediate reaction—which I did not share with the Committee—was "Why? Do we not all know where we stand? Drugs are a bad thing; we are all against them; people who take them are stupid or inadequate or easily led, and we know that those who sell them are horrible criminals who ought to be banged up for as long as possible". At any rate, my views were close to that. I was not looking forward to an investigation that seemed to have no real purpose. I had already made up my mind: I took a very hard line, and no one was going to make me deviate from it.

After a thorough and at times difficult series of evidence sessions, I was forced to reconsider. I still think all drugs are bad and I still think drug pushers should be given the heaviest of sentences, but I no longer believe that we have been tackling the scourge of drugs in our society in the best way possible. So I would say to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), who has just left the Chamber, that I do not mind being called radical, but I draw the line at being called liberal, for a variety of reasons.

Simon Hughes: Not related to this debate.

Ms Prentice: Indeed.

The most obvious failure in the Government's drugs policy is that young people, who are the customers of the drug dealers, do not believe in the current strictures. That is not to say that they do not believe that drugs are bad for them or that they are wrong; they simply do not believe the message as we present it. They have seen their friends take cannabis and survive; they have even heard the arguments about the beneficial aspects of some drugs and they do not consider it to be such a big deal. They also know about the downside of alcohol and tobacco, so they think that those of us wearing suits are just a tad hypocritical when we go over the top about cannabis. Indeed, had we known earlier what we know now about tobacco we might have banned it. I believe that the Government's change of tack on cannabis is right. It should remain illegal, but it should not be such a serious offence as it was, and it should not be classified the same as harder drugs. That change is logical and understandable and is much more likely to be accepted and understood. If a law is consistently flouted, it becomes useless.

We also felt that a similar change should be made in respect of ecstasy. I heard my hon. Friend the Minister say why he believes that cannot happen. We thought

long and hard, but we felt that the evidence from parents and others persuaded us that ecstasy should be reclassified. The Government have set out guidelines for clubbing, so they clearly realise that ecstasy is different from heroin and cocaine.

Heroin and crack cocaine gave rise to the most frightening problem, which was examined in probably the most difficult and stressful Select Committee sittings: namely, whether those giving evidence were users or whether their families had suffered. Initially, the families suffer most. They have goods stolen from their homes; they have to face the shame and the blame in their local communities when the addict steals from others to pay for his habit; they experience the despair and degradation of witnessing the drug take control of their son, daughter, brother or sister; and, finally, they suffer the sorrow and pain when a son or brother dies from an overdose or from using impure drugs. We would all agree that, for parents, watching a child die a painful and horrible death that they can do nothing to prevent must be a most harrowing experience. The parents who have been mentioned today, Tina Williams and Fulton Gillespie, helped me understand why we had to change the policy. I believe that it is right for the Government to concentrate their resources on the 250,000 or so chaotic drug users and at the same time bring down the full force of the law on those who traffic drugs and prey on those drug abusers.

I read the report by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on heroin use. It is a brave report and I understand many of the pleas that he makes. I was particularly concerned by his constituents' negative response to the National Treatment Agency. I hope that that is not typical around the country.

An even greater concern is that there are simply not enough agencies around, which is why it is right to concentrate on prevention and treatment. Some GPs have little understanding of or sympathy with drug users and need training to ensure that they approach the problem more positively and help young people. That is why drug abusers are often alienated from their GPs. They are very reluctant to come before certain professionals because they do not believe that they will get an appropriate response. I therefore hope that the Government's changes in respect of prevention and treatment will make a big difference.

In telling us about the lack of available treatment, Tina Williams described her son, who is a heroin addict:

"He has no veins left in his body; all his neck veins went; all his groin veins went. However, it did not make any difference, there was still a five month waiting list. There is no such thing as an emergency."

I do hope that the philosophy that now underpins the Government's strategy will ensure that Tina Williams' experience will not be repeated.

I want to underline the plea from the Chairman of the Select Committee for at least a pilot on injecting rooms. The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) described the situation in inner cities, parks and open spaces, and on the landings of tower blocks. Finding needles is not the way for young people to learn that drugs are a bad thing, and I hope that the Government will look again at the issue.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) said that the original strategy was too ambitious, but in my view it was simply wrong, and the drugs tsar has to take some responsibility for that. The Government should probably be commended for recognising that they were wrong, and for changing course. No one is ignoring the dangers of drugs; it is those dangers that have led the Committee to reach its conclusions. I did not expect the Government to agree with every one of its recommendations—much as I would have liked them to—but I hope that the new strategy will be simply the first update, and that they will return to this issue periodically. In doing so, I hope that they will continue to use our report as a reference point.

I shall finish by briefly quoting Tina Williams again, because it is the families of drug users who really feel the brunt of the problems that arise:

"If you speak to the family, everybody is affected; my grandson is affected as are his brothers and sisters. There have been no holidays for five years. The home has just really stood there, it has stood still because time has stood still for me. Just like any parent, if you have a child and that child is sick, you drop everything to try and pick that child up. That is why I feel so sad for people who have lost their children and for people who are still dying. In this country, three people die a day from addiction"—

drug addiction—

"and I think it can all be avoided. If the services were in place, then death could be avoided."

I hope that the Government's updated drug strategy will give Ms Williams hope, and bring about fulfilment of it.

5.18 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): The failure of the Government's drugs strategy to date means that our country still faces a very significant problem that affects the whole of our society—the wealthiest, the poorest, and everyone in between. Indeed, I think it highly unlikely that anyone of my generation does not know of someone who has succumbed to the horrors of drug addiction.

This is not just an urban problem. Now, our towns and villages have almost instant access to heroin, cannabis and—increasingly—crack cocaine. That is certainly the case in my own constituency, where there are almost weekly reports in the local papers of drug-related incidents, be it cannabis smoking underneath the skateboard ramps in Godmanchester, or heroin raids in Huntingdon. Indeed, almost every local youngster whom I speak to on the topic knows pretty much instantly where they can purchase drugs, whether or not they use them personally.

While it is clear that the Government have failed to meet almost every one of their targets for controlling illegal drugs, we need to look forward. However, I do not see enough in the new proposals to suggest that we are tackling the root of the problem, which, to my mind, is ultimately a question of addressing cultural values. However, I appreciate the fact that we are having this debate, and I welcome the Select Committee's proactive stance. I freely admit that I am no expert on drugs. However, I recognise that the issue is one of the most important social matters in my constituency. It is essential that hon. Members make it their business to educate themselves about drugs. In that way, we will be able to deal with the enforcement and medical-related factors, and understand the cultural implications.

For most drug takers, drug use is very much bound up with the concept of glamour. They want to be part of a clandestine counter culture, and to be alternative.

[Mr. Jonathan Djanogly]

Education, awareness and, above all, open debate are vital. Discussing the implications of drug use in a wider context would go some way towards breaking down drugs' attractive, private-club aspect and, therefore, their so-called glamour.

Describing crack cocaine and heroin as glamorous is repulsive to me, but the word provides an accurate description of the way many young people approach them. Many people will remember the advertisement that used the image of a young woman crouched dead on the floor with a needle in her arm. Some will have found that shocking, but most young people have been hardened by screen violence, and seduced by heroin chic in the fashion world and films such as "Trainspotting".

I should note that I do not want to denigrate that film, which portrayed reality and showed how heroin can cause people to die sad and lonely deaths choking on their own vomit. However, it also showed how some young people—living on sink council estates or bored in some idyllic country village—can see heroin as a glamorous escape from their everyday environments.

The advertisement to which I have referred failed because it concentrated on the damage that drugs can cause the people who use them, and ignored the wider implications for society, dependants and families. The truly unacceptable aspect of addiction is the destruction of families, and the way in which the houses of family members and neighbours are looted for drugs money.

We should aim to remove the glamour from drugs. We should explain the personal impact that they have on users, but it is also vital that we make children aware at a very early age of the impact that addicts have on the people around them. We must make children aware of their responsibilities towards other people. Instead of showing children pictures of overdosing addicts, I think that they should be exposed to pictures of the victims of drug-fuelled crime, of grieving parents and HIV-infected babies, and of old people on hospital trolleys waiting for a teenager to have his stomach pumped.

The Government's proposal to reclassify cannabis from class B to class C is a mistake. Leaving the technicalities aside, what message is being given to young people? Is it that the Government will take responsibility, and say that using cannabis is wrong and will be punished? No. Is it that the Government will take responsibility and say that cannabis is acceptable, that they will identify dosages and protect people from spiked dosages? No, I do not get that message either.

I believe that the message from the Government is that they want to make no comment on cannabis use. As long as people do not sell cannabis, their use of the drug has nothing to do with the Government. That is the worst of both worlds. As the experience on Lambeth shows, it will lead to a massive increase in the drug's use, and in effect hand control of the situation over to drug dealers.

Paul Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Djanogly: I should love to, but I am severely restricted for time, and other hon. Members wish to speak.

The position is the same for hard drugs. A few weeks ago, I sat in on a prison drugs rehabilitation group run by the excellent organisation RAPt. I learned a lot from the young men in the group. Normally, heroin addicts are treated by being given methadone. Most of the men in the group had been on 10 or more methadone courses. They all said that the courses had done absolutely nothing for them.

With respect to those hon. Members who have spoken in support of the alternative, those young men did not talk about swapping methadone for prescription drugs or about having access to legal shooting galleries. They all said that the only effective treatment was rehabilitation.

Mr. Cameron: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Djanogly: I would love to, but I cannot.

Rehabilitation is slower, more intensive and more expensive, but it works. The experience made me realise that the policy advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), of increasing rehabilitation tenfold—we can argue about exactly what tenfold means—and giving young people a clear choice between rehabilitation or prison is the right one. I urge the Government to go down that road.

More than 60 per cent. of prisoners in many of our jails take heroin. Drug testing is, if anything, making matters worse—prisoners are switching from cannabis to heroin, which stays in the body for a shorter period. A generation of prisoners is leaving our jails with huge drug debts that force them to reoffend immediately to pay off their debts and feed their habit. In the prison that I visited, only 5 per cent. of inmates had access to rehab, and how grateful they were for being given a new chance in life. That figure must be increased.

Likewise, although excellent work is being carried out in my constituency by groups such as DASH—Drug and Alcohol Service Huntingdon—and DIAL Druglink to tackle drug-related crime, provide counselling, develop employment opportunities and educate children, there are not enough available funds for them. Huntingdonshire primary care trust, with a population of 148,000, provides 1,600 structured counselling sessions a year. However, it calculates that it needs four times that number of consultant sessions to be effective. It is also concerned at the lack of Government understanding of the practicalities for local areas in implementing the Government's compulsory 200-page long treatment notes, given the inadequate space and resources to operate it. It is all very well to come out with new strategies and 200-page guidance notes, but the Government must appreciate that they need paying for, and that is not happening at present.

Finally, I note that not enough is being said here today or generally about alcohol abuse. Several hon. Members have mentioned the connection between drugs, driving and alcohol. There is a lack of clarity surrounding the Government's policy on how drugs and alcohol policy combine. My local PCT has been told that drugs funding is only to be used for drugs misuse, although many drug addicts also have alcohol problems. The two cannot be detached. I ask the Government to look at the issue again.

If this debate is the start of a new mindset for the Government in acting on the massive implications of drugs in our society, it has my full support and I

welcome it. However, I do not feel that what I have heard in the Government's proposals so far will be adequate to solve the problem.

5.27 pm

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): I welcome this report and the amount of money that the Government have invested in it. I have always felt that public money invested in an anti-drugs strategy, providing that it is effective, is one of the most cost-effective ways of using such money.

Inevitably, following the report of the Select Committee, the debate has been dominated by the issues involving the appropriate level of criminality of various classes of drugs and rehabilitation. In the short time available to me, I want to focus on effectively breaking into the drugs distribution network. Labour Members agree that all drugs are dangerous, whatever their criminal classification, and that they are promoted and marketed by a network of criminals who are ruthlessly efficient and very effective. There is a real danger that however effective our rehabilitation programmes, this criminal operation will continue to recruit new people to drug-taking, irrespective of our propaganda initiatives.

The Assets Recovery Agency is mentioned in the report. Unfortunately, I feel that its potential in combating drugs use is being underplayed. When the Minister commented on the confiscation of criminal assets, he did not mention that the ARA, set up under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, can target people with a criminal lifestyle, such as drug dealers, even though there is not sufficient proof to prosecute them in a criminal court. Currently, that procedure is under-used.

After all, a drug dealer is fairly obvious. Such people tend to drive flash cars and wear gold chains and designer suits. They are certainly not renowned for squirreling their money away in a stakeholder pension. They like to cut a dash in their local, criminal, youth-oriented community, where they act as negative role models for marginalised young people who want to get in on the act.

It is essential that we tackle the drug dealers. By identifying them and confiscating their assets, the ARA could remove one of the strongest incentives for taking up that activity. The agency could knock out a link of the chain that spreads drugs and the misery associated with them.

I realise that many members of the Home Affairs Select Committee have spoken in the debate. I am a member of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. We visited Dublin and talked to members of the Irish Criminal Assets Bureau, which does a job similar to that of the ARA. Ireland has a population of only 3 million and the drugs market is much more rudimentary, yet the CAB has achieved remarkable success. Over the past six years, it has obtained £72 million in confiscated assets from criminals in Ireland—a not inconsiderable sum.

In this country, previous legislation on such matters has not worked effectively. A report from the Cabinet Office performance and innovation unit, published before the establishment of the ARA, stated:

"Specially tasked law enforcement officers struggle to investigate the financial aspects of crime to support this effort, but their effectiveness is limited by their numbers and . . . training."

If the legislation is to be effective, we need to increase considerably the number of officers engaged in asset recovery.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I agree with my hon. Friend, but if he feels that we have not yet made a hit of the ARA that is because the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 only became law in the summer, so it is not yet fully established. We have trained 86 extra financial investigators for individual police forces and set up a centre of excellence—so watch this space. We fully intend to use all the powers in the Act.

Mr. Bailey: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments. To a certain extent, they pre-empt my next few points. However, when we interviewed the officials who were setting up the ARA, they said that the estimated number of staff was 100. That compares with 44 in the CAB so, if we bear in mind the fact that the population of Eire is 3 million while that of the UK is 60 million, the evidence that we took in April this year suggests that there is no great appreciation of the potential importance of the role of the agency, despite my hon. Friend's reassuring words.

I hope that the Home Office will take this seriously because it is a way in which we can make a significant impact. We will emerge with a social and financial virtuous circle. As half the money will be put into a recovered assets fund that can be recycled to deal with drug dealing, the more successful we are, the more money we earn to invest in the very processes that have been successful in the first place. There is a financial benefit and there are social benefits that accrue from tackling drugs.

In my constituency, there is a communities against drugs scheme, and I want to emphasise its success. There have been mutterings—I say no more than that—that if local authorities have not spent the money allocated to them in this financial year, they will have it reclaimed. My constituency was slow to get going, but there is now a range of initiatives that are proving effective, including four effectively targeted police operations in which 45 people were arrested, £50,000 was confiscated and £12,000 worth of drugs was obtained. There is a drugs information line that has had 100 calls, as well as parents support groups and school initiatives. I plead with the Minister not to be precipitate in removing any money from such local initiatives because my local authority has ideas, is working on them and will use the money effectively.

5.36 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I was a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee when it investigated drugs policy. Two weeks before the investigation began, the Home Secretary informed the Committee of his intention to downgrade cannabis from class B to class C. At that moment, I knew that whatever proved to be the outcome of the Committee's deliberations, cannabis would indeed be downgraded to class C; a serious misjudgment, in my view.

I pay tribute to the Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) for his great patience in dealing with the many amendments that I tabled to the Select Committee report. He will

[Angela Watkinson]

know that I felt unable to add my name to those of the rest of the Committee on the final report. The Committee's investigations, spanning several months, polarised the debate into two schools of thought; the relative importance of harm reduction versus prevention.

Important though harm reduction undoubtedly is, it cannot stand alone as a policy and is doomed to failure without stringent prevention measures, backed up by enforcement. The notion that treatment can be provided to any existing drug addict who either wants it or is prescribed it as part of a criminal sentence, plus unlimited provision for the constant stream of new addicts, is a fantasy and is unaffordable. That is why I contend that of all the strategies available for reducing drug abuse in this country, prevention is by far the most important.

We must prevent the young people of today from becoming the drug addicts of tomorrow and swelling the ranks of those already addicted if the amount of treatment needed is ever to become manageable.

There are many who would say that drug use should be a matter of individual freedom and choice and, indeed, if people were able to take drugs in isolation and without harming anyone but themselves, there might be an argument for that. The tragic fact is that it is not just the individual who suffers. It is also their family, friends, work colleagues and the wider community in terms of drug-related crime and benefit dependency. This is a freedom too far, where the freedom of the individual impinges on the freedom of too many others.

The metropolitan trendy elite might find it amusing to take drugs socially, but they can afford to check in to an equally trendy and elite clinic for treatment whenever they need it. How unlike the residents of council estates who are no longer able to hold down a job because their drug dependence has robbed them of the ability to observe the normal disciplines of everyday life; the motivation to get out of bed in the morning, to arrive on time at work, to carry out the duties of their job and to interact with other people in a socially acceptable way. They so often also lose their moral fibre and turn to crime in the overwhelming need to meet the cost of their drug habits. However, it is not a fair or complete picture that paints drug addicts as simply victims and places all the blame on the dealers.

People who have disregarded all the available education and advice on the results of drug taking must, to varying degrees and depending on circumstances such as their age, take their share of responsibility for that decision, alongside the dealers. The market is demand led. That is why prevention is so important. Proper prevention, linked to proper education in schools and colleges, would reduce demand at one end of the market, while harm reduction reduces it at the other.

The main focus of new drugs policies is on the treatment of existing users of heroin, cocaine and crack cocaine. Those hard drugs do serious damage to the physical and emotional health of the user. However, there is overwhelming evidence—both medical and from the police—that the majority of hard drug users start on cannabis. That is not the same as saying that all cannabis users progress—I suppose that "regress" would be the more appropriate word—to heroin and cocaine, but it is fair to say that most hard drug users arrive there via the cannabis route. That is why downgrading cannabis is wrong. It gives out entirely the wrong message, especially to young people, that cannabis is harmless, legal or both.

Paul Flynn: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Watkinson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I will not because of the lack of time.

The mind-altering qualities of cannabis are so complex that, despite momentous medical advances, doctors still do not fully understand them. Some 75 per cent. of young people who suffer psychotic illness have a history of cannabis abuse. Even people in robust mental health suffer negative effects from the odd joint. Those effects may include a short-term lack of resolve, a lesser ability to work, drive a car or operate machinery and an unwillingness to make a physical or mental effort.

Beyond that, there is an unknown percentage with a mental or chemical predisposition for psychotic illness, and cannabis can trigger altered moods, confusion, delusions or even hallucinations in those people. Some ethic communities in which cannabis use is endemic suffer hugely increased levels of psychosis—up to 20 times greater than the general population.

Reducing the number of cannabis users would, in turn, reduce the numbers of new heroin and cocaine addicts, thereby reducing demand. Any relaxation of the law that makes drugs more accessible or reduces penalties will result, inevitably, in increased use and marketing, and be counter-productive to a national policy of reducing drug abuse.

The Government publication "Safer Clubbing" contains guidelines on the safer use of ecstasy in nightclubs. The formal acceptance of drug taking as an integral part of a night out is a classic example of the prevention versus harm reduction argument. Such harm reduction includes the provision of chill-out rooms and making drinking water available, giving the impression that ecstasy will be safe if water is drunk. In fact, drinking too much water can be just as harmful as not drinking enough.

The role of the police is now reduced to minimising use and co-ordinating with harm reduction policies. What does that mean in practice? In effect, it means non-interference and acceptance. To prevent more fatalities, we should aim for co-operation between police, nightclub owners and local licensing authorities in working towards drug-free clubs. What we have instead is capitulation on the grounds that offenders are too numerous to deal with under current police resources. If the same policy were suggested for burglary, for example, which is equally prolific, there would be a public outcry.

A drugs policy focused on harm reduction for hard-drug users is destined to fail because of the ever-increasing demand for expensive treatment, which has to compete for national health service funding with the whole spectrum of health issues.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *rose—*

Angela Watkinson: I am sorry; I am short of time, and I am reading as fast as I can.

The national drug strategy, published on Tuesday, seems to interpret harm reduction as meaning making it easier for people to take drugs and considering making them free of charge and freely available. That will be an extraordinary policy for any Government to introduce. It involves a removal of sanction or any deterrent and would amount to an acceptance of drug habits and effortless access. What message do the Government think that that would send out? It is like saying, "Don't worry, if you choose to take illegal drugs and develop a habit that ruins your health and your finances, the taxpayer will look after you without so much as a slap on the wrist." It amounts to a total removal of accountability and personal responsibility, and it will do nothing to reduce the number of drug addicts.

The Government must put much greater emphasis on prevention. The first essential in prevention policy is proper drugs education. Some of the literature that is currently in use, which passes for education, is information of the most undesirable kind. Lifeline, a Manchester-based charity, in a booklet about cannabis, shows how a joint is rolled. The first piece of advice in a section entitled

"How to survive your parents discovering you're a Drug User"

is,

"Don't get caught in the first place."

Other Lifeline publications are full of four-letter words, shockingly graphic illustrations or instructions on how to inject. One of the favourite phrases is "informed choice". Anyone advocating "informed choice" for other widespread illegal activities, such as speeding or shoplifting, would be severely censured. Why should it be different with drugs? Even if they were properly informed about drugs, and most are not, there should be no choice. Drugs are illegal. Anyway, children are not mature enough to choose. They are not miniature adults. They should never be put in the position of making critical life decisions. In 2000, DrugScope, our largest drug charity, distributed a booklet on cannabis in its "What and Why" series. One of the illustrations shows a young man in the midst of a crop of cannabis plants, wearing a cap that says, "Have fun, Take care". What sort of message does that send to our children?

Harm reduction education does not tackle drugs; it accommodates them. Ofsted inspections must start to address that problem. The majority of teenagers do not use any illegal drugs, and never have done. The biggest weapon that we have in prevention is normalisation and helping those under pressure to see the truth: that their abstention from illegal drugs and tobacco is the norm at any age of childhood, adolescence or adulthood.

The problem is vast in scope, and is a great challenge to the Government, but in making hard drug taking easier and downgrading cannabis—the drug that so often leads to a hard drug habit—the national drug strategy is defeatist and counterproductive. The additional funding allocated to tackling the problem will be as effective as trying to fill a bath without putting in the plug. Prevention is that plug, and it must be given much higher priority. The war on drugs has not been lost; it has never been waged.

5.47 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): If somebody had told me in 1997, when I came to the House, that we would have such a debate just five years hence, I would not have believed them. Only one or two people in the House at that stage were willing to put their heads above the parapet and suggest some of the ideas that have been accepted by the Government recently. We were regarded, if you will pardon the expression, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as crackpots.

I am therefore very pleased to take part in the debate today, and I congratulate the Government on the radical steps that they are prepared to take. Clearly, the current policies were not working, radical thinking was necessary, and development of the policy was essential. That is what we have seen in the last few months. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee and all the members of that Committee on their hard work in taking evidence and producing an excellent report, which came on top of the report by the Police Foundation, whose committee was chaired by Lady Runciman.

Not a great deal of time remains, so I shall concentrate on a matter that has not been mentioned in today's debate. Many organisations have written to me in my capacity as chairman of the all-party group on drugs misuse, and I shall start by addressing the question of the guidance notes in a recent consultation on an amendment by section 38 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 to section 8(d) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Following the Wintercomfort case in Cambridge, I raised the possible consequences in a debate in this place on 9 November last year. Since then, guidance notes have been circulated for consultation and section 8(d) is just about to be amended. In fact, the consultation period ended on 8 November this year.

Several organisations are concerned about some of the proposals. Previously, it was illegal for organisations to allow cannabis and prepared opium to be used on their premises. The pattern of drugs misuse since 1971 has moved on and it is admitted that future legislation needs to cover heroin, cocaine and crack, amphetamines, LSD, ecstasy and so on. The reason stated for the change in the regulations is that the police need powers to deal with the closed drug markets, mainly the crack houses and, in particular, the crack houses in London.

Section 8(b) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 already applies to the supply of all controlled drugs on premises, and it has been used. Indeed, a number of authorities in London—for example, Camden, Lambeth and Hackney—have developed policies to deal with crack houses quite efficiently.

Unlike heroin, which is a depressant and for which substitute drugs are available, cocaine either as the salt or the base, which is otherwise known as crack, is a serious stimulant that can make its users extremely aggressive, and no substitute drug is available. Cocaine is the biggest difficulty that we now face in the drug market.

Outside London, cocaine was not a great problem until recently, but concern is growing in large cities, such as Manchester, and even in places such as Bolton, which is part of greater Manchester. The supply of cocaine in the north is being accelerated by the fact that flights from the Caribbean rim now come into Manchester airport. Swallowers or mules—call them what we will—now come into Manchester airport in the same way as they come into Schiphol airport.

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

I was at Schiphol a few weeks ago, watching the treatment of drugs swallowers. Fifteen drug offenders are arrested each day at the airport and the authorities admit that they miss many more. Forty people came in on a flight from the Caribbean rim recently and they were all carrying up to a kilogram of cocaine in their gastro-intestinal tract.

Organisations working in drug treatment and those working with the homeless, in particular, feel that the proposed changes to the law will be unworkable if they are enacted and will be detrimental to drugs users, voluntary organisations and the public at large. It is feared that the changes will result in an increased number of homeless people on the streets, and nearly all of them will have serious drug problems. They will be unable to access accommodation for a long time and support services will not be readily available to them.

The guidance notes require those who know that drugs are being used on premises to contact the police as soon as possible. I submit to my hon. Friend the Minister that that alone might result in a lack of trust between the homeless people with serious drug problems and the organisations trying to help them. Organisations also fear that police forces will apply the law inconsistently across the country, although there is the backstop of the Crown Prosecution Service.

Agencies whose aim is to get drug users off the streets and stabilised before treatment is possible are particularly concerned by the new regulations, although the Government admit that special measures will have to be made available for the people who welcome in serious drug addicts. However, the proposed consultation document contains no mention of the paraphernalia that drug users use to inject themselves or of the sharps bins that will be required on the premises. Some clarification of that aspect is necessary.

Surely we should welcome it if all serious drug users who live on the streets come inside and at least stabilise themselves, even if they do not offer themselves up for the treatments that will be made available much wider than hitherto. It must be recognised that the only chance of survival for a small but growing cohort of very chaotic drug users is long-term maintenance on heroin or diamorphine. So I am pleased that the Government are to extend the prescribing of clinically pure heroin.

Although the draft guidance notes enable police to take into account harm reduction factors when deciding whether to prosecute, it will remain illegal to allow substance misuse on premises, whatever the motivation. A decision to act illegally would have serious consequences on the charitable status of many organisations.

The organisations are also concerned that if they are caught in the act of helping someone with a serious drug problem and are prosecuted under the regulations, they will lose their insurance. So organisations that help homeless people with serious drug problems face the risk of going out of business.

There are curious anomalies, too, which I hope the Minister will consider. Although allowing the use of cannabis on premises will carry the maximum penalty of five years imprisonment once it is reclassified, the user's offence will carry a maximum penalty of only two years. Who would want to report a drug overdose on their premises if the police are likely to prosecute under the amended regulations? That might encourage people whose friends have overdosed on the premises to remove the body to avoid prosecution.

If enacted in full, the amended regulations might affect parents who buy their offspring heroin so that they can treat them at home. Registered social landlords, such as housing associations, and even private landlords are fearful of the new regulations and may not let drug users take tenancies with them. I urge the Secretary of State and the Minister to consider the proposals in the light of all the comments that organisations have made.

5.57 pm

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing debate on what is probably the most intractable social issue confronting our society. Many hon. Members have said that drugs are a massive problem, and there is great concern and anxiety in every community the length and breadth of the UK about them. If we asked the public to name the social issues that most concern them, any survey would put drugs in the top five. The public are desperate for solutions and desperate to make progress.

The public have also heard it all before. There are a few significant differences in the report, but I have a sense of déjà vu. I am a new Member, but I have heard all the arguments before. That might have something to do with the fact that before I came to the House, I served as a director of a drugs charity that considered drugs issues. I was also in the Scotland Against Drugs campaign team. I have, perhaps, overdosed on drugs strategies in the past few years. Although there have been countless strategies, approaches and fresh starts, I am desperately trying to think of one that has made any significant progress on dealing with the drugs menace in our society.

We have set targets that have never been met. We have employed drugs tsars who go off in a huff after achieving absolutely nothing. We have set out new approaches that have been met by a tidal wave of new and emerging problems. What has underpinned successive strategies in the past three decades, as the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) said, is our unshattering belief in prohibition—that by keeping drugs illegal we will keep people off drugs. If we look at the history of those strategies, we must come to the desperate conclusion that they have been less than successful. Drug use has spiralled almost out of control under prohibition. Drug taking among young people is routine. A black economy has emerged, with associated gangsterism and petty crime, which creates havoc in many of our hard-pressed communities. If prohibition has underpinned so many of our strategies, the drugs war has been its popular cause.

The drugs war is the Vietnam of our social issues because there are so many correlations between them. The drugs war is fought on uncertain terrain, with limited intelligence against an elusive and determined adversary. Like the Vietnam war, the drugs war is well and truly lost. The only people who would go over the top in the drugs war are the Conservative Front Bench and a few of their fellow travellers on the Conservative Benches.

We have continued to overlook the central relationship between drugs and young people. Recognition of that has been lacking during the debate. We still do not understand why young people take drugs. We have had drugs within our society for about 30 or 40 years. As a society, we are relatively experienced in dealing with drugs issues. However, we have learned little from that experience. After 30 or 40 years, we do not know why certain groups of young people take certain drugs. Why is that? The answer is that we have never bothered to ask them in a proper scientific and rational way.

Surely it would be the most obvious thing in the world to ask people why they take drugs and what benefits they think that they get from their consumption. Instead of engaging young people in a proper and constructive debate about their drug use, we bombard them with propaganda. We tell them that essentially drugs are bad for them, that we must educate them off drugs and that they must say no. We try to frighten them off drugs.

Some of the education initiatives probably have had success. I believe that they have probably saved quite a few people from pursuing a career in drugs. However, such propaganda has acted also as a macabre recruiting sergeant for drugs. The propaganda bombardment makes drugs seem dangerous and exciting and they then relate to the morbidity that especially young and middle teenagers experience. We tend to deploy the present strategy because in our adult debate about drugs we like a prescriptive solution. We like targets and strategies. However, that is a million miles away from the debate that young people have about drugs. Young people do not start to engage with our debate and they do not understand it, as we do not understand their debate. All that young people want is to have a good time and to get high.

As well as young people not understanding our debate about drugs, they could not care a whit about the legal status of drugs. If that legal status had any effect or any impact, we would see that in terms of ecstasy, which is a class A drug. If someone is caught in possession of ecstasy, or worse still caught dealing in it, he or she could face a lengthy prison sentence. He or she could face a considerable fine. The result would be a criminal record. However, on any given Saturday evening, about a quarter of a million ecstasy tablets are consumed. So much for the possibility of securing a lengthy prison sentence or a massive fine as a means to depress demand. Legal sanctions are nothing but a passing nuisance for most young people and a source of part of the buzz for others. Such was the fear of the law that even prospective Conservative Front-Benchers smoked their joints without fear of possible repercussions.

Prohibition has been less than a success, but I say to those who advocate legalisation or decriminalisation that those approaches would probably be even worse. Prohibition has not worked and has not underpinned our strategies, but there is no reason to suggest that legalisation would fare any better. We need to focus on the greatest killer of all drugs, the drug that causes us the greater number of problems and poses the greatest associated health risk, and that is alcohol. We know that alcohol has almost a monopoly on the legal drugs market. It is a good example of what would happen if drugs became legal. New products would be developed. Manufacturers of alcoholic drinks compete with one another to try to secure new markets to try to entice new customers. In the past decade, the industry has been especially successful in attracting new customers. We have seen the coming of alcopops for new entrants.

Paul Flynn: I am enjoying the hon. Gentleman's speech enormously. Does he recall that during the prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s, the form of alcohol concerned was distilled spirit, the most concentrated and deadly form of alcohol that killed many people because they could not control the alcohol content? Illegal drugs are in the hands of criminals and they are being sold in their most dangerous form. If there is a system of licensed regulation, the likelihood is that much weaker forms of the drugs would be available.

Pete Wishart: I am making the point that if we introduce illegal drugs to a legal market, we may see legal drugs competing for that youth market. Manufacturers will try to develop new products to entice young entrants to the marketplace. As well as having alcopops, we might have cannabis candies or ecstasy allsorts. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that that would be a health disaster. Prohibition has not been a success, but legalisation would make matters 10 times worse.

Hon. Members have looked at third ways to solve other problems, so I propose a third way to tackle illegal drugs. To their credit, the Government are crawling towards that, however ham-fisted their approach. We need reclassification to be realistic and credible, especially for young people. It is nonsense to include ecstasy in the same category as heroin and cocaine – that exaggerates the danger of ecstasy but diminishes the danger of heroin and cocaine – but it does not make sense to include it in the same category as amphetamines and barbiturates, as that has the reverse effect. What is wrong with broadening the classifications? Why can we not have more drugs categories, which would make more sense than current classifications?

I said that the Government's approach to drugs is ham-fisted because I still do not know what they want to achieve. Throughout the UK, there is confusion about the Government's strategy. In the Criminal Justice Bill, a great hokey-cokey is going on – one foot is in on the reclassification of cannabis, but one foot is out, as the Government want increased tariffs for class C offences. No wonder no one knows what is going on. It is almost possible to believe that the Government will lead us to the top of the hill on decriminalisation only to take us all the way down again. It is incumbent on them to tell us what on earth is going on.

If there is confusion in England, there is even more in Scotland. Drug laws remain reserved to Westminster, but no consideration is given to the fact that we have our own legal system in Scotland, as well as our own policing arrangements. As for changing drugs laws, the Scottish Police Federation has said that the downgrading of cannabis to class C would make little practical difference. We do not have a system of cautions in Scotland, so people who are found in possession of small quantities of cannabis will still be reported to the procurator fiscal. The change in the law makes no sense to Scotland. I am disappointed that not one Labour Back Bencher from Scotland is in the Chamber tonight. Are they not interested at all in drug laws? It is a disgrace that not one of those 56 Members are here tonight.

[Pete Wishart]

In conclusion, I congratulate the Government on attempting to unravel the whole drugs package. There is not one drug problem, just as there is not one solution, and they are beginning to realise that. I welcome reclassification—as early as 1997, the Scottish National party suggested that route. Anyone looking at the issue of drugs will agree that the available resources should be targeted on the drugs that cause the most harm—heroin and cocaine. Harm reduction is the sensible approach, but for goodness' sake, the Government must ensure that they achieve clarity in their approach or the strategy will go the same way as the many others before it—forgotten and irrelevant.

6.7 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): I warmly welcome the updated drugs strategy, and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and his Committee on their report. It is a robust and valuable contribution, and has opened up the debate.

My office, too, has been looking at the problems faced by drug addicts—we have been talking to them and doing some research which, frankly, has been distressing. The average age of the addicts we spoke to was 22. Ninety per cent. of them had no educational qualifications and 80 per cent. left school before completing their education; 60 per cent. had suffered a family breakdown or serious family bereavement. All of them had been on soft drugs, which they had used before going on to heroin. Most were addicted to more than one drug, not just heroin. Several of them were using crack cocaine and emphatically told my researcher, Declan McHugh, and me that after using crack they used heroin to bring them down. Their situation is therefore extremely distressing.

More than 60 per cent. of those addicts admitted to committing a crime to feed their habit, and more than 50 per cent. said that they had lost their job as a consequence. All of them were unemployed. More than 30 per cent. had been in a state care home. They were tragic cases, feeling that no one wanted them then and that no one wants them now—that was a desperate thing to come to terms with. Many of them said that they no longer got a buzz from heroin and that that had gone a long time ago. They said that they simply needed heroin and that without a fix, they began to rattle and could not survive. Our research told us clearly that young people use this stuff out of desperation. Sometimes they start because it is a bit of fun or because their friends are doing it, but they soon become controlled by it and desperate to get away from it.

If the policy is to be effective—I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has been very warm to my constituents who have spoken to him about the issue on a number of occasions—it has to start with what we know about the problem of use of drugs. If we do not understand that, we simply will not get it right. When we did our research, people constantly said that they needed heroin to block out their lives. They told us that it eclipsed their minds, that it was the only substance available to them and that there was nothing else that could block out reality. It was a desperate experience to listen to them. One or two of the younger ones were in such terrible turmoil when they spoke to us about their habit that they found it impossible to continue and left the room. We were very uncomfortable and depressed about opening a door by encouraging them to tell us their life histories without necessarily being able to close it with effective treatment.

I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that this is a matter of urgency and a serious issue for us to get our heads around. Hon. Members have suggested that we must get real. When the people involved are young, vulnerable, very poor, coping with tragedy and are often without families, and are living rough, in care homes or on deprived estates, that is getting very real. That is the reality in my constituency. When we put money in for regeneration, we must see that our aims will not be achieved if we do not reduce drug dependency, as both issues are tied together so closely. The matter is not exclusively one for the Home Office or the Department of Health; it is also a matter of employment and most definitely relates to local government and housing. All those issues are impacting on the lives of the young people involved. Building on that knowledge and acknowledging that the needs of individuals are different in every case tells us that, if the policy is to be effective, we need not only to build on our knowledge about the problem of use of drugs, but to accept that the policy must be flexible to need and respond to the needs of individuals. The more we do that, the more we will have a chance of achieving success.

I am very pleased that there is a robust determination to help people to cut the dealer out of their lives. Our taking that stance is long overdue. The young people who spoke to us said that the dealers were like crows on their shoulders wherever they went. They said that if they had money in their pockets, the dealers were there and wanted to sell to them. We must cut the dealer out of their lives. The prescription of heroin in supervised conditions with careful treatments that are part of the overall process is very valuable. I interviewed people in their mid-30s and early 40s who will be permanently on heroin. We must come to terms with that fact. I do not want such people permanently to be dependent on heroin and committing crimes to feed their habit. We must allow them to control their habit and we must provide support, and prescription gives us the opportunity to do so.

I am very pleased that we are focusing our attention on the problematic drug user. Such a person will be devastating his or her family's lives and the community in which he or she lives. The policy is beginning to resonate and to show that it is one that we can deliver.

I should like to persuade my hon. Friend the Minister that the updated drugs policy needs to widen opportunities and increase services, which must be available 24/7 if they are to be effective. Inevitably, there will be a problem with having enough professionals quickly enough to allow us to respond now to the needs of our communities.

I would also like to persuade my hon. Friend to look at an example in my constituency. We have a group of parents called Parents Against Narcotics in the Community—PANIC. They have coped with these problems and enabled their children to survive heroin and crack cocaine dependency. They have expert knowledge second to none, and they can tell us all. They do not need to read the book; they have lived the

experience. They are delivering a service to a group of people in my constituency and I recommend them as a model for others. If we cannot train enough professionals or get the supply of support and services in place quickly enough, let us use the network of support that is already there.

I was delighted to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice) talk about Tina Williams, a first-class female who has coped robustly with her own family and is now determinedly coping with the problem on a much wider scale. It is a joy to hear the young people speak of this female. She gives them hope and a hot meal, and their only opportunity to have a wash and brush-up and to feel decent and human. She makes them feel human. This woman needs all the commendations that we can give her. I am delighted that she is in my constituency and that she is running PANIC for the people of Stockton. They say that, without her, they would be desperate. So, let us use the resources that are there for us. Parents and grandparents want to help; they are there. Ex-addicts want to help; it makes them feel that they are giving something back when so much has been given to them.

I also want to ask the Minister to consider the question of employment. Drug addicts need to feel wanted, for the sake of their self-esteem. They need to know that their talents and skills are recognised. Progress to work is excellent, but I want to persuade my hon. Friend to look at the Asian experience. There, employment is central to all treatment for drug addicts, and the success rate in getting addicts clean, involving employment, has been staggering. If they can do that in India, we can do it here.

The updated drugs strategy is first class. Individual treatment and support are crucial, and the prescription of heroin will cut out those disgraceful, disgusting dealers who are earning £8 billion a year in Great Britain selling the stuff to our youngsters. Cutting them out is long overdue. Well done!

6.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Listening to the first two hours of this debate, one might be forgiven for believing that there was consensus in the Chamber. The last few speakers, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) and for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), proved that that is not the case, however, and I believe that their views are far more representative of the British people at large, as are those of my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). I make no apologies for adding my views to the arguments that they have put forward.

It is time for hon. Members to speak up for the vast majority of decent, law-abiding people who will never have any desire to take part in this sick culture in our society. In my experience, the perception is that the war on drugs is not being lost, but purposely undermined by continual talk of decriminalisation, legalisation and reclassification. The Home Affairs Committee report has, sadly, added to that perception. In fact, the situation seems so bad in new Labour's Britain that I would not be surprised if a drug dealer were to be arrested for selling the substances in ounces, rather than simply for selling the substances.

Mr. Mullin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rosindell: No, there is very little time, so I intend to make as much progress as I can.

From the outset, I want to make clear my opposition to every strand of thinking that tries to make excuses for those who take or deal in drugs, whatever the so-called classification of the drug, or the amount involved. If the Government are to have any credibility on this issue, and if anything at all is to be achieved, there must be a clear line: drugs are simply wrong. They kill our children, destroy the fabric of our society and have much wider effects in terms of financing international terrorism.

Two weeks ago, I spent my Saturday night accompanying the police officers of Romford's crime and disorder unit around the town centre. Among the horrendous sights of that evening, we encountered a man who had been using cocaine. He was unable to control his actions and posed a clear danger to himself and members of the public. There is no justification in our society for peddlers of that evil drug to be free to walk the streets of my constituency, and those of other Members, and supply substances of that sort. We need the police to be given the resources to stamp such behaviour out completely.

Equally, there is no excuse for tolerating those who take such substances. To those who argue that drug taking is an issue of freedom, my response is simple: I believe in freedom too. I believe in the people of this country being able to do as they wish, but that freedom comes with responsibility—the responsibility not to behave in a manner that is detrimental to others and that of playing their part in ensuring that the fabric of society is not ripped apart.

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rosindell: As I have said, I want to make progress as there is little time left.

The taking of drugs breaks that responsibility. That was best put by the Honourable Asa Hutchinson, the administrator of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration in a recent lecture to the Heritage Foundation:

> "Drug abusers become slaves to their habits. They are no longer able to contribute to the community. They do not have healthy relationships with their families. They are no longer able to use their full potential to create ideas or to energetically contribute to society, which is the genius of democracy. They are weakened by the mind-numbing effects of drugs. The entire soul of our society is weakened and our democracy is diminished by drug use."

On that night in my constituency, that man found that he was exercising his freedom. He was also participating in the slow destruction of our society, not to mention the devastation that he must be causing, not only to himself, but to his family and friends.

Drugs do not just harm the health of the drug user. They also lead to many related crimes, particularly in terms of violence, theft and, of course, road accidents.

[Mr. Rosindell]

Drugs are a sickening culture in our society. Despite the domination of the debate by the liberal class, on cannabis I appeal to the good judgment of every Member of the House not to be taken in by the nonsensical and easily discredited arguments of those who support reclassification.

The Christian Institute's May 2000 pamphlet, a copy of which I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), is entitled "Going Soft on Cannabis". It outlines the counter-arguments to those often given for reclassifying that drug. I shall not go into detail, but for those who are interested the full document can be found on the Christian Institute website at www.christian.org.uk.

Drug culture apologists often claim that cannabis is not a gateway drug to harder and more dangerous substances such as heroin or crack cocaine. However, the Christian Institute points to a series of studies that revealed that most abusers of hard drugs started their drug abuse career by smoking cannabis: 90 per cent. of those who had used it more than 1,000 times had used other illicit drugs, but only 6 per cent. of those who had never used cannabis had used hard drugs. Children between the ages of 12 and 17 who had smoked cannabis were 85 times more likely to end up using cocaine than their non-cannabis-smoking peers.

Others try to claim that cannabis is less dangerous than alcohol. In 1995, an American study discovered a frightening statistic: 30 per cent. of a group of convicted murderers who were high on cannabis at the time of the homicides said that the crime had occurred because they were on cannabis.

Another argument that is often advanced is that the current laws are not working. Why bother keeping them, those people ask. In fact it is not the laws that are wrong, but the soft approach taken by the Crown Prosecution Service, the police and the Government. They seem to have given up on the idea of prosecuting cannabis users, and now let them off with a caution. The proportion of cases dealt with by caution rose from 3 per cent. in 1982 to 55 per cent. in 1998. No wonder the law is not working, if no effort is put into maintaining it.

The arguments for going soft on cannabis are all so easily defeated. I urge the Government to reconsider before giving the green light to thousands, if not millions, of young people to destroy their lives. I call on the Government and indeed the whole House, to reflect on the words of Nancy Reagan, which are etched on the wall of the Drug Enforcement Administration museum in America:

"Drugs steal so much. Every time a drug goes into a child, something else is forced out, like love, and hope, and trust, and confidence. For the sake of our children, I implore each of you to be unyielding and inflexible in your opposition to drugs."

I agree with Nancy Reagan. We cannot be flexible in our approach to drugs. The Government of this country must be resolute and firm.

Drugs are simply wrong. They are killing our nation's children. They are funding those who wish to attack and take away our freedom. They are breaking down our society. We must act now with a comprehensive zero tolerance strategy. I fear that otherwise we will let down future generations and our nation, and will bitterly regret it in years to come.

6.27 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I fear that Nancy Reagan did not bring up her own children well enough for them to avoid drugs.

I have much to say about the general issues, but no time in which to say them. I commend the Government's excellent document, the basis of which I wholeheartedly endorse, but I would waste more time by simply repeating what it says. I therefore intend, in the few minutes available to me, to make some points about what I would describe as the war on drugs that I think should be considered.

Another good document was published last February—"Changing Habits", produced by the Audit Commission. In its conclusions it referred to one of the key problems that I encountered in my drugs inquiry. As I told the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart), it is mentioned on my website, johnmannmp.co.uk. It involves 150 case studies. I have spoken, in great depth, to heroin addicts and their parents, and I agree with many of the Audit Commission's findings.

A critical issue, which the Government should address, is that of unco-ordinated assessment in relation to treatment. There are multiple referral routes, which is a core problem. The Audit Commission says that

"current assessment practices often do little to secure either rapid access or appropriate treatment".

There are "limited treatment options", as I was able to demonstrate effectively in my constituency. The commission also says that the

"type of support offered by community drug services reflected staff mix"

and that

"areas heavily reliant on specialist support frequently struggled to meet demand".

Those problems all occur in my area, but the inconsistency of approach across the country has to be tackled. The ethos within the drugs treatment service has led to something of a Cinderella service. As the example of cancer and Macmillan nurses shows, there needs to be a point of reference to direct people into treatment. Hon. Members have made comparisons with the rest of Europe, but the statistical base—ours and theirs—is not particularly reliable, so the fact that there are 118,000 drug addicts in treatment is not a meaningful statistic when it is extrapolated down to my area. We need to quantify what is working and what is not. I have taken the trouble to write to the Minister and I shall publish my 20 specific questions on what needs to be quantified and how that should be done. It is at the core of the issue. In regard to ministerial and Government responsibility, and given the ethos in the National Treatment Agency, there is an urgent need to hold those responsible to account by quantifying successes and the failures and doing so honestly.

I hope that in the coming months the Minister will challenge the notion of addicts having to present themselves for treatment. I find that a strange notion, but it runs through all UK drugs services and it is one reason for the confusion over what is treatment and who is in treatment and who is not. In my opinion, the notion of presenting needs to be knocked on the head, and I have many case studies—collected over a year, not a few

weeks—to back that up. Some of them are cited anonymously and are ongoing. What does that mean in terms of people getting treatment when they want it and the availability of different forms of treatment. Thankfully, Opposition Front Benchers are now backing down, but when I challenged the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), at column 652 on 20 November, to quantify his evidence in relation to residential rehabilitation, he said that a considerable number should be going. We now have only a very small number. The right hon. Gentleman cited the Netherlands and he may well have visited the Parnassia Institute, where only 3 per cent. of clients are in residential rehabilitation.

'Changing Habits" goes into great detail about the different options that are available. I would like a proper menu of treatments to be available in my constituency and I am sure that other hon. Members share my view.

Another issue that needs to be examined is what I would describe as the incestuous nature of treatment services. For example, the very good chief executive of my local drug action team is also a non-executive director of the National Treatment Agency and the eight reference groups. The fact that one organisation presents the statistics is also part of the problem. That needs to be knocked on the head. The statistics need independent validation. The absurdity of joint commissioning in my area is that the patient care trust, which has to deal with the biggest problems of heroin addiction and drug addiction, is not represented on the joint commissioning group. I am glad that that is now being challenged, and if there are further problems I shall draw them to the Minister's attention. However, it demonstrates the mish-mash that has continued for many years in the UK. European comparisons are not particularly relevant. I would suggest that most countries are behind us rather than ahead of us in terms of treatment.

I now turn to another problem. In *The Guardian* this week there are job adverts for drug treatment workers. The Prison Service is giving people permanent, well-paid jobs in drug treatment. The Stapleford Centre is recruiting a nurse practitioner on a salary of £33,000 to £36,000 and a medical officer on £65,000 to £77,000. Conversely, Turning Point in Sheffield employs drugs workers on one or two-year contracts and pays them £16,000 to £19,000 a year. Those are the extremes, but there are problems in relation to the lack of continuity and the inability to get the best-qualified people in areas where they are most needed. This may be controversial, but I would put it to the House that the best drugs workers should be working not in prison, but in the community. I would like the sentiment and some of the detail in the report to be taken to its logical conclusion. Young heroin addicts in my constituency are committing crimes; I have met only one who is not. I want them to be offered the option of being treated at the point at which they are arrested and enter the criminal justice system, rather than their simply going through the system and ending up in prison. Let us save the legal aid bill for defence costs, which, as the Audit Commission has shown, is the same as that for treatment. Let us recycle that money by treating young addicts at an early stage. That would make a fundamental difference.

I have two final suggestions, the first of which is the integration of police files and health files. The Parnassia Institute took that incredibly important step seven years ago, so it can be done. My own chief constable is keen to follow suit. In analysing criminal activity, he cannot tell who the heroin addicts are. Similarly, the drugs services do not know who the criminals are. The two systems need to be merged. The Derbyshire drugs market project is a good example of how the effective collation of such information can be used to disrupt the drugs market and to get those people out of crime and into treatment, where such services exist.

My final suggestion consists of a plea to the Minister and the Government. The Home Secretary said that

"starting from next year in the highest crime areas with the worst drugs problems the Government will roll out a comprehensive end to end approach."

In quantifying the areas with the worst drug problems, I hope that the artificial boundaries that have dissipated the problem throughout my area will not be used. East Bassetlaw does not differ greatly from the Nottinghamshire county average. It is the same as any other rural area, but in the area of west Bassetlaw, Worksop and the mining villages, the problem is very significant; in fact, it is ten times as bad. We want to be one of the pilots, and I trust that the Minister will give that suggestion proper consideration.

6.36 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I want to talk about two of my constituents, Mick and Pauline Holcroft, of Ledbury, who have allowed pictures of their daughter, Rachel Whitear—Mick Holcroft is Rachel's step-father—to be used in an anti-drugs video for secondary schools. They say that they want to "make people think" about the dangers of heroin, and to challenge stereotypes of drug abusers, because if it can happen to Rachel, it can happen to anyone.

Rachel's mother and step-father believe that she first took heroin when she was 18, after being introduced to it by an older boyfriend who was an addict. At first, she kept her habit under control and was accepted by five universities. However, her addiction continued and her parents noticed that her personality had changed from fun-loving and outgoing to unhappy, insecure and unreliable. She died of an overdose in rented rooms in May 2000, aged 21, just days after phoning her parents to say that she was leaving her boyfriend and coming home. Her body lay undiscovered for three days. The police photographs show Rachel's body keeled over on the floor, with a hypodermic syringe in her hand. The photographs of Rachel after her death are pretty harrowing.

If one were trying to put together an ideal background for a young person to grow up in, and in which to be happy and successful, the Holcroft family would be it, but even in that environment it was possible for this tragedy to happen. Mrs. Holcroft said:

"I think Rachel really hated what had happened to her. But you can't take heroin one day and suddenly decide to stop."

Rachel's step-father, Mr. Holcroft, said:

"There'll be a point in a child's life when someone says 'try that'. They'll be put into a circle where they are encouraged to try things and experiment."

[Mr. Bill Wiggin]

I think that I speak for the whole House when I say that we would all like that temptation to be made as difficult to encounter as possible. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

I sought the view of the Police Federation, which is the representative body of all police officers in England and Wales below the rank of superintendent. According to it, a large majority of such officers believe that cannabis should not be legalised or decriminalised. The role of the police is to enforce drug laws effectively. As we move further into the performance culture, their ability effectively to police the misuse of drugs will increasingly depend on working with other agencies. Those agencies will need to have complementary objectives and targets.

Widespread concern has been voiced about the unavailability of appropriate treatment for drug users. The current position is unacceptable. More than 70 per cent. of crime is believed to be drug related. Between 70 per cent. and 80 per cent. of criminals in prison have drug problems, yet they leave prison without receiving treatment. It is unacceptable that the police should be held accountable for crime levels when treatment that could have a real impact on the commission of crime is not provided.

The advocates of legalisation or decriminalisation present the apparent failure of the criminal law to prevent increased use of illegal drugs as a powerful argument for their cause. The same argument could be used to justify decriminalising burglary and assault and sweeping away all road traffic laws, but it is not. In recent times, a number of criminal offences, such as attempted suicide and homosexual acts between consenting adults, have been abolished. That was done because it was believed to be inappropriate to treat such acts as criminal, not because the criminal law had failed to prevent their occurrence.

Legal prohibitions on tobacco and alcohol have not prevented young people below the statutory ages from smoking or drinking, but there is no responsible body of opinion that would justify decriminalising those offences. We do not believe that there is an overwhelming body of public opinion that favours the major relaxation of current anti-drug laws.

I do not believe that we need a change in the law or in drug classification to change police priorities. Police officers use their discretion daily. The so-called Lambeth experiment was nothing new: police officers prioritise their work every day.

There is no real contradiction under current legislation between a lenient police attitude towards possession for personal use and the continued targeting of criminals who import and distribute the drug. Advocates of the decriminalisation or legalisation of cannabis choose to ignore the fact that the drug's THC content—the active ingredient that encourages physical and psychological dependence on cannabis, and which is highly abusable—has risen from less than 1 per cent. in the 1960s to as high as 30 per cent. today.

There is evidence from other countries—in particular from south Australia—that a more liberal approach to drug legislation results in an increase in petty theft and petty crime. The liberalisation lobby also claims that legalising drugs would end the black market and the activities of organised gangs. That assumes that the powerful international drug cartels would simply fade away into the night. The more likely scenario is that they would fight to maintain their lucrative street trade.

The advocates of change do not say how they would control drug manufacture and supply. Presumably, the enormous cost of legalising the drug trade would be offset by tariffs and taxation. Once they were introduced, smuggling would follow and the illegal traders would be back in business.

Some argue that the decriminalisation of drugs would destroy the criminal empires of those who currently make fortunes out of drugs. They often cite the end of alcohol prohibition in the US, and suggest that that ended the era in which criminal gangs exploited prohibition. The historical facts are different: gang crime in America soon recovered, as the criminals concentrated on other racketeering.

The Government are right to reject the calls of those who urge the legalisation or decriminalisation of so-called soft drugs. There is no evidence that that would lead to a decrease in the numbers of people using drugs. Worrying as the overall increase in the numbers of young people who have taken drugs may be, those numbers would be even higher if the criminal sanctions were removed.

The siren calls for decriminalisation and legalisation are not cries for reality. They are the voices of surrender and despair. I hope that the House will bear in mind the bravery displayed by Rachel Whitear's parents, and especially by her mother, Pauline Holcroft. If we can learn anything from that tragedy, it is that the fight against the evil of drugs in our society must continue unabated.

6.44 pm

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough): I listened to the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) with great interest because I too am a dad. If I were asked what I wanted for my three children, I would not answer that I wanted them to grow up to have fantastic careers, or even stable happy family lives. I would say that I wanted them to grow up to avoid hard drugs. If they do that, everything else becomes possible for them, according to their talents and efforts. By contrast, if they do not avoid hard drugs, it is much more likely that their lives will be ruined.

Yet if we are truly to tackle addiction and the crime to which it leads, we have to understand three critical truths, two of which have been understood by the Home Affairs Committee. First, all drugs are harmful but some drugs are much more harmful than others. Secondly, addicts are ill and need treatment, not punishment. Thirdly, prohibition does not always work. I believe that by their recent announcements, the Government have indicated that they have also understood at least the first two of those truths.

All drugs are not equally harmful. Heroin and crack cocaine are desperately addictive and extremely dangerous, but other drugs are less so. Indeed, some prohibited drugs are less harmful than drugs that are legal. Alcohol is addictive, leads to violence, is damaging to health, and kills between 5,000 and 40,000

people every year in England and Wales—yet it is lawful to buy, lawful to sell and lawful to use, subject only to constraints on age and access.

Tobacco is lawful too, even though it is addictive, causes cancer and kills 120,000 people every year in the UK. We do not like it, we cannot advertise it, we say that tobacco companies cannot sponsor sports—yet we cannot stop people using it. In the year 2000, only 11 death certificates in England and Wales even mentioned the word "cannabis".

If we tell our children that cannabis is as harmful as crack and heroin, they simply will not believe us. Why should they? If they do not believe that, why do we expect them to believe us about crack and heroin? We should downgrade cannabis, because the message that that carries is not simply that cannabis is less harmful than crack and heroin, but that crack and heroin are killers and desperately dangerous.

There is a second reason why we should downgrade cannabis: the simple fact that we want to be tough on crime. When the police are not chasing people who are smoking a relatively harmless recreational drug, they can start targeting the crack and heroin dealers in death. We should all applaud that.

The second truth is that addiction to hard drugs is a sickness and, like all sick people, addicts need treatment, not punishment. At present, however, the treatment they get is all too often woeful. It takes my constituents months to get on to a rehab programme, which is why, like everyone else in the Chamber, I welcome the millions more to be spent on rehabilitation. It is why I also welcome, alongside the extended methadone treatments, the schemes for prescribing heroin.

It is stupid to refuse to prescribe heroin to long-term addicts who need it, and who otherwise will rob others to feed their habit. I have been to a clinic in London; I have seen a doctor prescribe to addicts. One was a middle-aged mother, happily married for many years. Why on earth should we force her into the arms of a dealer when she can attend a clinic instead? Another was the wife of a man in his sixties who had injected opiates for 30 years. Do we really believe that he will ever stop injecting opiates? He did not even stop when he could no longer inject into his veins. He simply injected into his muscles instead.

We have to change our approach to prescribing. Too often, treatment is restrained by moral judgmentalism when it should be dictated by medical expertise. As I understand it, the current advice from the Government is not to maintain the patient but to reduce his or her dependency by prescribing ever-decreasing amounts. As a result, because addicts cannot get enough methadone from their clinic, they top up by buying street heroin from their dealer. In what other medical discipline would a doctor determine how much of a drug someone needed and then deliberately prescribe less? I do not believe that that is good medical practice—I believe that it is medical cruelty.

I accept that there is a risk of abuse if higher amounts are prescribed. I know that, and so do doctors. They are well aware that there will be those who seek more than they need so that they can sell the excess. However, we can monitor the doctors and the doctors can monitor their prescriptions and their patients to ensure that the risk is minimised. They can see for themselves whether a patient is capable of injecting safely. They can test patients to see exactly what their tolerance is. They can test their hair samples to see exactly what they have taken and whether they are topping up or selling the excess on the street.

That is not to say that we should never try to reduce dependency on drugs. Of course we should, but we should seek cleverer ways of doing so than simply prescribing less of the drugs that people need. My hon. Friend the Minister knows that there is a drug available—Naltrexone—that blocks the effects of heroin altogether. That means that there is no point in people mugging an old lady for 30 quid to buy a fix, because they will not get a buzz from the fix.

The trouble with Naltrexone is that it is principally available in tablet form. Addicts will not take it in that form, because taking the tablet takes away what is often their only pleasure in life. There is a solution: implants that can wean the addict off for weeks are available, yet they are not licensed on the NHS nor routinely used in our prisons. That is absurd.

Why do we not make better use of Naltrexone implants? Why do we not make wide use of them in the judicial system? Why do we not urge courts to offer drug-addicted criminals an implant, as part of—or even instead of—imprisonment? Why do we not offer them to prisoners before they are released? I understand that at present prisons offer Naltrexone only in tablet form—and only in a third of men's prisons and not at all in women's prisons, even though heroin addiction is rife in all of them.

We reduce a prisoner's dependency and then we kick them out into the street—the same street that they used to live in, next door to the same dealer from whom they used to buy. By then their tolerance is lower, so when they buy from that same dealer, they overdose and die. What is the alternative to Naltrexone? Is it to detox addicts in prison and then retox them ready for release? That is absurd.

There is a third truth—unpalatable to many—but it arises from everything that I have said: prohibition does not work. It did not work when it was applied to booze in the USA; it merely handed the trade to the mafia. It is not working at present in respect of drugs worldwide. The global trade is worth up to $1,000 billion a year; it is worth £8 billion in this country—little wonder that drug-related crime is up.

Things do not have to be like that. We can encourage heroin addicts into the arms of doctors instead of the arms of dealers. If we were brave enough, we could take the trade in cannabis away from criminals, license it, regulate it, tax it and make it safe. Of course there would still be some street trading, but there would be less. Furthermore, there would be no mixed messages for the police, because anyone dealing with drugs on the street would be a criminal.

If we want to drive down street crime, we have to do more than police aggressively in areas where it is endemic. We need to do more than sentence punitively our most serious and recidivist offenders. We must also focus our minds on the causes of crime when a more liberal touch may be more effective.

6.52 pm

Mr. Mullin: The debate has been excellent. We have heard many original and thoughtful speeches from Members on both sides of the House. I thank especially colleagues on the Select Committee for their contributions both today and during the course of the inquiry. One of the great strengths of the Select Committee system is that it is possible to hold a mature discussion on issues that cannot always be discussed maturely in other parts of the political process—let alone in the media.

I was disappointed with the contribution of the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), the Conservative spokesman. I felt that it did not quite rise to the occasion. I was especially disappointed by his abuse of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn). We might not necessarily agree with him, but we must recognise that he is one of the few Members of the House—with the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley)—who were prepared to discuss this subject when nobody else would. My hon. Friend was prepared to challenge deeply ingrained prejudices, and although I do not necessarily agree with him about everything, we should acknowledge that.

I agree with the hon. Member for Surrey Heath on one point: it is important to take the damage done by people who drive under the influence of drugs as seriously as that done by people who drive under the influence of drink.

As I listened to some of the later contributions to the debate, I had to pinch myself occasionally to remind myself that, as I made clear in my opening remarks, the Select Committee actually came out against decriminalisation and legalisation. We emphasised from the outset that all drugs are harmful, as I think we all agree—but that the degree of harm varies.

Although the Committee had a number of things to say about the classification of cannabis and ecstasy, we should not get too distracted by the arguments over that. Yes, both of them are bad for people. Any sensible person would acknowledge that. However, the key issue is that they are not the main cause of the problem. Most people who take ecstasy or cannabis grow out of it fairly quickly and go on to lead useful and productive lives.

Those drugs are not, on the whole, addictive. It is true that people die from taking them; I would not wish to be misunderstood. We all understand that all drugs are harmful. It is just that some are more harmful than others. Once we have worked that out, we come very quickly to the idea that the cause of almost all the drug-related chaos in society arises from the abuse of heroin and crack cocaine. About 99 per cent. of drug-related damage comes from those two drugs.

Once that essential point is grasped, one or two other things become obvious. One is that we must try to persuade the 200,000 or so chaotic users of heroin—who are responsible for about 50 per cent. of acquisitive crime and who damage not only their own lives but those of their communities and families; we have heard harrowing examples of that today—to seek help to stabilise their lives. Until we do that, we cannot even begin to address the problems that they are causing. It is true that some are well beyond the point at which their lives can be changed; they will not change and become clean and good citizens. However, we can stabilise their lives and stop them mugging, burgling and doing more damage to themselves and the people around them.

That brings us inevitably to the fact that we need the controlled prescription of heroin and diamorphine. I am glad that the Government are facing up to that issue. This is not rocket science, and it has been done with great success in countries such as Switzerland and the Netherlands. We heard from experts from those countries who told us how it was working. One caution; there has to be tight control of the system because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) said, we do not want leakage on to the streets, which just exacerbates the problem. That was one of the reasons why the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 was brought in. The system must be strictly controlled.

One of the problems that became apparent during the inquiry was the disappointing lack of interest from members of the medical profession. One can understand that a GP will not want his surgery clogged up with addicts, but we have had great difficulty in extracting from the British Medical Association any evidence at all on the issue. When we insisted that it make some sort of contribution, it consisted of less than a page, two thirds of which was about what the BMA stood for and did. That was a problem.

One doctor who gave evidence said that only half an hour out of seven years of medical training had involved dealing with people on drugs. We are getting better at this and I know that there are many dedicated members of the medical profession who are engaged in dealing with drug addiction—

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): Hear, hear.

Mr. Mullin: We have one not too far from me. However, the medical profession could do more in encouraging and training its members in this regard.

Finally, I repeat what I said in my opening remarks. There is no "one true path" in this matter. I am envious of the certainty of the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell), but—if I might say so, with respect—people who have given more thought to this matter than he has have worked out that there is no perfect solution to a problem that is serious and out of control. We are on a learning curve and feeling our way forward, but there is a certain amount of experience in the world. One can look abroad; foreigners can make a contribution to the way in which we deal with our problems, on which we can build.

The way forward is clear for the foreseeable future. It is along the road of prevention, treatment and harm reduction. That is way that we are going. The path is set for the foreseeable future, but it is not set in stone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I compliment the hon. Gentleman on his timing.

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to Standing Order No.54 (Consideration of estimates, &c.).*

Resolved,

That resources, not exceeding £4,651,171,000, be authorised, on account, for use during the year ending on 31st March 2004, and that a sum, not exceeding £4,597,261,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for the year ending on 31st March 2004, for expenditure by the Home Office.

It being after Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to Standing Order No.55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.).*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 2002–03

Resolved,

That further resources, not exceeding £7,400,007,000, be authorised for use for defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2003, and that a further sum, not exceeding £8,995,029,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to meet the costs of defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2003, as set out in HC 43.

ESTIMATES, 2003–04 (VOTE ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That resources, not exceeding £151,331,461,000, be authorised, on account, for use for defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2004, and that a sum, not exceeding £126,882,161,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, to meet the costs of defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2004, as set out in HC 39, 40, 41 and 42.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Paul Boateng, Dawn Primarolo, Ruth Kelly and John Healey do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Ruth Kelly accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending 31st March 2003 and 2004 and to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 2003 and 2004: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday next and to be printed [Bill 14].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the Questions on motions 5, 6 and 7.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

COMPANIES

That the Companies (Fees) (Amendment No.2) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 2894), dated 21st November, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Harbours (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Consumers for Health Choice

7.2 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I wish to present a petition from 365 of my constituents who are customers of the Oregano health food shop in Lowestoft. They are very concerned that the European food supplements directive and the proposed European directive on traditional herbal medicinal products could severely restrict their choice of safe, natural health products, which they have used successfully for a long time.

The petition states:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Future of Mater and Whiteabbey Hospitals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

7.3 pm

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): I am grateful to have the opportunity to raise a matter of considerable importance to my constituents. The debate surrounding the future of the two hospitals in my constituency and the range of services that they provide arises from the document, "Developing Better Services: Modernising Hospitals and Reforming Structures", which was published by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety earlier this year. That document contains the proposals of the previous Minister responsible for health in Northern Ireland on hospital services and the reform of organisational structures for health and personal social services in the Province.

I want to deal particularly with the proposal outlined in paragraph 4.19 of the report that Whiteabbey and Mater hospitals will be developed as local hospitals. Previously, the constituency of north Belfast, with its various needs, difficulties and challenges, had two hospitals providing a range of services. They provided acute services and addressed severe health and social and economic needs. This proposal means that we will be left without any such provision. I acknowledge that there is clearly a need for decisions to be made in this area, and that the Minister, in a speech yesterday in the Province, said that he would announce decisions and address those issues. That does need to happen. Decisions need to be made about the location of hospitals and the administrative and management structures for health and personal social services.

Change in itself is not a problem. The problem comes when change does not meet the health needs of the local community, does not lead to efficiencies and greater effectiveness and ignores what is happening and what is needed on the ground. One of my concerns, which is shared by many of my constituents, is that the report, particularly in relation to the Mater, appears to focus more on the needs of professional standards, training and practice and less on the patients, the community and people's needs. It is essential that what happens in relation to the Mater and Whiteabbey be in the best interests of the people and communities of north Belfast, and in the best interests of addressing social care needs and the health of the community. No other agenda should drive the proposals.

There is no doubt that the proposals, as set out by the previous Minister, will have a severe impact on the local community. They will lead to the loss of a range of key acute and emergency services and the loss of many local job opportunities in an area of severe unemployment. They will dent morale considerably at a time when it is recognised that north Belfast requires attention at the highest level of Government, not least by the setting up of the community action unit, as a result of the community action project, which addresses a range of issues in north Belfast. To remove the Mater hospital with its acute and emergency provisions and a wide range of other services would denude the constituency of a major facility that is supported across the political spectrum and across the community. That would leave a gaping hole in north Belfast.

I want to set out the positive context of some of the things that are happening in health and personal social services in north Belfast. On Monday, I had the great honour and privilege of attending the launch of three new healthy living centres in Duncairn gardens, in which cross-community groups and people from a wide spectrum across the community divide are coming together to provide £2 million worth of investment in north Belfast. The north and west Belfast health action zone has been established. Proposals are coming forward from the North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust on new health and well-being centres.

All that will be undermined if the Government say that they will downgrade the Mater and Whiteabbey to the status of local hospitals. The proposals are not logical, they follow no previous consistent argument, and the proposals in relation to the Mater hospital were a bolt out of the blue. No Government proposal or document had indicated that that was the thinking, and it did not follow from the conclusion of the Hayes report. The acute hospital review group suggested no such way forward; indeed, it suggested the retention of acute and emergency services at the Mater and a partnership with Whiteabbey hospital.

Seventeen out of the 20 wards in north Belfast are among the 25 per cent. most health-deprived wards in Northern Ireland. The Mater hospital is situated in Crumlin, the most socially and economically deprived ward in the whole of Northern Ireland. Ten out of the 20 north Belfast wards are in the 25 per cent. of wards in Northern Ireland with the highest ratio for cancer. There is clear evidence to suggest that that is linked to the high level and incidence of social and economic deprivation. We have a major problem with suicide rates, particularly among men. Mental health is another severe problem and we have some of the worst levels of drug and substance abuse anywhere in the Province or, indeed, in the United Kingdom. When we take all that into account, it is unthinkable that the Government should continue with the proposals set out in the document "Developing Better Services". I urge the Minister to examine those proposals and to reject them and, instead, to decide to retain the Mater and Whiteabbey hospitals in their current form.

It should also be noted that the Mater is the biggest single employer in Northern Ireland, with 1,000 employees, many of whom live in north Belfast, an area that does not have many major employers. The civil disturbances, the trouble and the violence have had disproportionate effect on the greater Shankhill and north Belfast area and the Mater hospital has throughout provided a dedicated and magnificent service to the people there. The accident and emergency ward is one of the busiest and biggest in Northern Ireland and it has demonstrated that it is meeting a terrible need in that part of the city.

In my previous role as the Northern Ireland Minister for Social Development, I played a part in setting up the community action unit. I know that the Minister has taken over responsibility for that, and is dedicated to it. It has targeted social need, which means concentrating Government resources on the areas of greatest need, and is carrying out the key objective set out in the document "Investing in Health".

Given all the problems in north Belfast, to suggest that workers could simply relocate to other hospitals does not take into account the problems that people have with access. People in north Belfast do not have as much access to private transport as people do in other areas, and there are also problems in getting through parts of north Belfast. As we know, there are severe community segregation problems. It is not an answer to say that people can go elsewhere. People from all communities and backgrounds feel safe in the Mater. I urge the Minister not to deprive the people of Belfast of that facility.

I referred earlier to the cross-community and all-party support for the views that I am expressing. Belfast city council has unanimously supported the same view and in the last debate in the Northern Ireland Assembly before suspension all parties across the board unanimously supported the retention of these services. The support did not come just from the representatives from north Belfast but from those from elsewhere.

A strong and vigorous local community campaign has been under way. Tens of thousands of signatures have been gathered, and the campaign has actively engaged the community. From greater Shankhill through to all the other parts of north Belfast, the response has been magnificent. It has come from the trade unions, professional bodies and the North Belfast Partnership Board, which is representative of nationalist and Unionist communities. They have all thrown their full weight behind the campaign for the retention of the Mater and of acute and emergency services throughout Northern Ireland. People are appalled at the suggestion that the proud traditions of the Mater could be lost and that services could be taken from the people of north Belfast.

I recently toured the hospital and looked at the magnificent facilities in the new McAuley building. It was built at a cost of £17 million, and not a penny of it came from public money. To think that that investment could be set aside and that the hospital could be downgraded would involve a terrible misuse of the money that went to provide the people of the area with the services to which they are entitled.

In terms of financial targets, activity and capacity, the Mater has met its targets, is increasing its capacity and its service performance compares well with any hospital of a similar nature anywhere in the Province. The Minister has been grappling with the problem of waiting lists in Northern Ireland. It is incredible to think that such a proposal will not have an adverse effect on Belfast waiting lists. He will have seen some of the evidence adduced by the Mater Hospital Trust, which shows that waiting lists would increase.

Some people have suggested that it might be a good idea to turn the hospital into a local hospital, but given the services that will be lost, the word "local" needs to be explained. Let us consider what will happen if the proposals are implemented. We will lose accident and emergency services, intensive care, intensive general medicine, the in-patient cardiology and coronary care unit, in-patient diabetic services, in-patient respiratory medicine, in-patient general surgery, in-patient gynaecology and the laboratory and anaesthetic services. Other services will also go. That is not acceptable.

The report suggests ways to develop better services, such as the hospital taking on rehabilitation beds, intermediate care and step-down beds. I cannot understand how those services could be provided if all the other services have gone. Who on earth will provide the back-up in an emergency or when someone needs intensive care if there are no doctors, medical staff or beds? It has also been suggested that maternity services can stay, but if everything that is needed to have a maternity unit in situ is removed, then the report is simply paying lip service to that idea.

For many decades, the Mater hospital has provided an environment for the training and teaching of nurses and medical staff. That proud tradition will go if the proposals are implemented. Paragraph 4.35 of the report says that the Mater

"will be ideally placed to play an even more significant role in contributing to the training of doctors, nurses and other health professionals of the future",

but that is not feasible if the range of services that I outline disappear.

It is clear that the proposals run counter to the suggestions of Dr. Hayes's acute hospital review group. He suggested a partnership between Whiteabbey and the Mater. That idea has disappeared. He suggested that acute services be retained for the foreseeable future. Indeed, he opposes the idea of a transitional phase that leads to the establishment of a local hospital. He referred to a regional service located in the Mater. That idea seems to have disappeared too.

The health and social care needs of the local community must be a priority. The people of north Belfast and the Newtonabbey area, which are served by Whiteabbey hospital, deserve better. I accept that there are issues that the Minister must address for Northern Ireland, but the proposals run counter to the general thrust of Government policy on north Belfast given the amount of attention, resources and efforts that are focused there to deal with deep underlying social, economic and political problems.

It is wrong to rip from the heart of a community a hospital that has served everyone. It has the support of the entire community—nationalist and Unionist, Protestant and Catholic. Indeed, nationalists, Unionists, Protestants and Catholics all work in it. The idea that it should be run down and that the investment and years of proud tradition should be cast aside without a consistent argument to support the proposition up to now cannot be allowed to stand. I know that the Minister has taken the trouble to speak to people about the proposal and that he is interested in the issue. I urge him to reconsider and to discard the proposals in the report.

7.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) on securing the debate. I am grateful to him for his comments, which have allowed me to hear the concerns for the future of hospital services in his constituency. I stress that I have made no decisions in relation to the proposals for acute hospital services set out in "Developing Better Services: Modernising Hospitals and Reforming Structures", but I am mindful

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of the real deprivation in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and in other constituencies in Northern Ireland, and I will want to reflect carefully on his comments. I know that the issue of the future of the Mater hospital was the subject of an Adjournment debate in the Northern Ireland Assembly—it was the last debate before suspension—which drew strong cross-party support for the retention of acute services at the hospital. I am aware also of Belfast city council's position on the issue.

The proposals for modernising hospitals set out in "Developing Better Services" are a recognition that the complexities of hospital services, and what they can deliver, have changed enormously over the past 30 years. However, the fact is that in Northern Ireland the necessary investment has not been made to keep up with the pace of change. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain services in some hospitals and the service is facing critical and mounting problems. Far too many people are waiting too long for hospital treatment, with pressures growing annually on hospital beds. What were once considered winter pressures have become an all-year-round occurrence.

The fabric of many hospitals is in disrepair and staff are trying to cope with outdated equipment and facilities. That is not acceptable and cannot be allowed to continue. It will require radical and sustained change in the operation and delivery of hospital services if we are to achieve the sort of modern dynamic hospital service that is capable of delivering the very highest standards of care, to meet the health care needs of the 21st century.

Some of the pressures facing our hospital system are inescapable. People are living longer and in their later years they are more likely to suffer from chronic illness such as heart disease, diabetes or arthritis. Consequently, they require more care by a wide range of staff in hospitals, the allied health professions and by those in the community. At the other end of the spectrum, many more children and young people are suffering chronic health problems such as asthma and diabetes. Many conditions require long-term care, often with complex hospital-based treatments throughout their lives.

At the same time, as perhaps never before, we are seeing significant developments in health care, with new medicines available to treat and relieve the symptoms of both chronic and acute conditions, such as malignant disease, heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis. There are also advances in surgical techniques, with less invasive forms of surgery requiring shorter hospital stays, with many procedures now being carried out as an out-patient or day procedure, which previously would have required a long hospital stay.

Perhaps one of the most significant changes in the past 20 years has been the advance of medical engineering technology, such as medical imaging using CT, MRI and recently, PET scanners. Advances also in information and communications technology are beginning to transform how information is used and shared in and between hospitals. Telemedicine in particular, which allows images to be transmitted from a GP surgery to a consultant for advice, perhaps many miles away, is already making an impact on the way in which care is being provided.

We cannot expect doctors and other hospital staff to become expert in every new method of working. Instead, many are now focusing their interests on particular specialties or sub-specialties, bringing with them increased expertise and even greater advances in treatment and care. It also means that the era of the medical generalist trained to provide a wide range of clinical services is coming to an end.

We must also embrace the much more stringent requirements covering the degree of supervision and the specific nature of the work that is being undertaken by medical trainees. Increasingly the jobs available to junior doctors and other professional staff do not provide the opportunity to develop the sort of skills and experience that are necessary for modern practice.

Improving the standard of hospital care and the environment in which care is provided must be a major priority. The requirement for trusts to provide quality care will soon become a statutory responsibility, and accountability for the delivery of services will be strengthened by robust clinical and social care governance arrangements. The proposals in "Developing Better Services" recognise those inescapable drivers for change, and set out a pattern of hospital care which aims to concentrate regional and specialist acute care in an acute hospital network which can foster and develop the range of specialist skills required to deliver modern high-quality acute care. But the proposals also recognise that advances in medical treatment and technology mean that many procedures which currently require attendance at an acute hospital no longer need to be provided in that setting. The majority of out-patient and day procedures can now be completed safely outside an acute hospital setting, and so too can high-quality diagnostics, linking to the acute network through telemedicine or linked digital imaging systems. Those are not advances of tomorrow, but opportunities for today, and I agree with the underlying logic of the proposals.

"Developing Better Services" has proposed that the present pattern of 15 acute hospitals should be reconfigured to nine, with the remaining hospitals providing a wide range of local services, such as a minor injuries unit, out-patient and day procedures, high-quality diagnostic services and a number of step-down beds for people who have received treatment in an acute hospital, but no longer need to be there for the remainder of their hospital convalescence, thus freeing up much needed beds for others. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is proposed that the Mater and Whiteabbey hospitals be reconfigured to provide a range of local services, such as those that I have outlined, and operate as local hospitals linked to the acute hospital network.

I am aware that the proposals for the Mater hospital in particular have engendered widespread concern, not only within the Mater Hospital Trust and its staff, but

also across the community in north Belfast, as well as among elected representatives across the political spectrum, who have united with the Mater to support the retention of its acute services. The Mater hospital has a special place in the hearts of the community in north Belfast, fostered through the worst of the civil conflict in Northern Ireland over the past 30 years, and has provided a neutral haven of care for north Belfast, an area which has some of the worst deprivation in Northern Ireland, as we have heard. To date, some 35,000 letters and petitions have been received by the Department in support of retaining acute services at the Mater, as well as a number of detailed submissions which are being carefully considered as part of the post-consultation process.

No decisions have been taken on any of the proposals in "Developing Better Services", and before coming to a final decision, I will want to satisfy myself about the proposals to remove acute services from the Mater and whether the hospital, networking with the Royal group of hospitals and Belfast city hospital, could meet the longer-term needs of the north Belfast community. No one can be in any doubt of the significant effect of years of community strife on the community in north Belfast, which has suffered some of the worst sectarian violence of the past 30 years. Nor are such days behind us, alas. The legacy of sectarian strife will remain with the community, particularly the young people of the area, for many years to come, manifesting itself in mental health problems and drug and alcohol abuse. I pay tribute to the work of the many cross-community groups in north Belfast that are working tirelessly to lift north Belfast out of the legacy of the past and give new hope to the rising generation.

It is well recognised that areas of high deprivation such as north Belfast bring with them a range of chronic health care problems. I know that, for many, the Mater has become a lifeline for the diagnosis, treatment and care of chronic conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which is associated with emphysema and smoking. One of the other manifestations of deprivation is unemployment—the Mater hospital is a significant employer in north Belfast—and the proposals for change have brought with them a very real fear for job losses in the hospital. I would be extremely concerned if the net effect of the proposals were to mean job losses in north Belfast, and I want to look very carefully at that aspect of the proposals before coming to any final decision.

The Mater has given north Belfast long and distinguished service since it was established in 1883, and up until the deed of arrangement in 1971 was funded entirely by the Young Philanthropists, mostly by small donations invested in trust funds for the future. Many people in north Belfast have a very real sense of ownership of the Mater, and I understand why the proposals have generated such strong feeling in the community. Some £17 million has been raised entirely by the Mater Trust and the community to develop new facilities such the McAuley wing in the hospital, which has some of the most modern facilities of any hospital in Northern Ireland. I have not yet had the privilege of seeing those facilities, but in view of the number of responses and the concerns expressed about the proposals in "Developing Better Services", I hope to visit the Mater to see the McAuley wing for myself, as well as to take the opportunity to talk to staff and members of the wider community. I want to do that before reaching decisions at the end of January.

However, I know that both the acute hospitals review group and "Developing Better Services" proposed that acute services should continue at the Mater for some years to come. I would certainly agree with that. It has not been lost on me that, in an area so divided by sectarian strife in recent times, the Mater issue has united the entire community. Therefore, I can say now that for a considerable period ahead, the Mater will continue to provide a full range of acute services to the north Belfast area. My hope is that in declaring that intention now, I can significantly reduce the concerns of the very large numbers of people who have campaigned for the retention of acute services at the Mater ahead of final decisions.

Having said that, I also referred to the enormous changes that have taken place in hospital services in recent years and to the drivers for further significant change. It will be essential to regularly review the profile and configuration of hospital services, and it will equally be essential that the Mater develops close working relationships with the Royal Victoria and the Belfast city hospitals so that it becomes an integral part of a Belfast teaching hospitals clinical network.

Whiteabbey hospital provides a limited range of acute services and "Developing Better Services" proposed that it should become a local hospital providing a range of local services as I outlined, linked to the acute hospital network. Whiteabbey is situated between Antrim hospital and the acute hospital network in Belfast. I know that the acute hospitals review group report suggested that Whiteabbey should network with the Mater to provide hospital services. "Developing Better Services" did not address that recommendation, but it is worth considering such a network. If the Mater were to continue to provide a full range of acute services, there would be merit in developing Whiteabbey as a modern local hospital delivering a wide range of local services and networking both with Antrim hospital and the Mater, since I understand that many people in the Whiteabbey and Newtownabbey areas look to Belfast rather than Antrim for acute hospital services.

Once again, I want to reflect on the responses to the consultation and consider the long-term viability of the acute services that are currently delivered at Whiteabbey and the opportunities that a local hospital might bring to the wider Whiteabbey community. I do not want to pre-empt the outcome of the consultative process and I realise that I cannot give the hon. Member for Belfast, North all the assurances that he requires. However, I am very much alive to the concerns of the people in his constituency and have sympathy with them. My

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overriding aim is to get the best possible outcome from the proposals in "Developing Better Services" that will address the compelling need for change in hospital care.

I can, however, give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that, in common with all the proposals in "Developing Better Services", I will not come lightly to any decisions that will set the future direction of hospital services in Northern Ireland for many years to come.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Eight o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 26 November 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Heroin Addicts

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Lammy.]*

9.30 am

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I should like to thank Mr. Speaker for timetabling this debate and agreeing to my request that it should last for one and a half hours. The number of hon. Members present indicates the interest in this matter, which, in recent weeks, has been raised a number of times on the Floor of the House in discussion and questions.

Hon. Members will know that I have made a fairly detailed analysis of heroin use in my constituency, but I do not propose to go through the 300-page background document, the 150 case studies or the 39 recommendations. All that is available and I believe that a copy has been sent to all hon. Members. Anyone who wants a copy is more than welcome to have one.

I want to take the opportunity to thank those who contributed to my public inquiry, for which I received a lot of local public support. Many hundreds of people contributed personally and many thousands contributed in writing. However, when dealing with one section of the community and professions—the health service—I sometimes wondered whether I was looking into dental services because obtaining information was like pulling teeth. That is why I called for this debate on treatment services for heroin addicts.

Until the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) appeared at 9.25 am, I did not know which Minister would respond to this debate. I chose not to inquire because I did not want to skew my comments according to whether the response was coming from a Home Office Minister or a Health Minister. The provision of drug treatment services is a major issue and is a dilemma here and throughout Europe.

Yesterday I went to GOAN where I discussed CAD and the links between CDPs and DRGs under the auspices of DATS and, in Nottinghamshire, DAATS. GOAM is not responsible for the NTA so I did not discuss CDTs, but I could discuss DDTOs and the role of the LSP and the SRP of EMDA. SORTID and HETTIS may be interested, but Framework and Hope less so. Tomorrow, I shall be at the PCT. There are two PCTs involved and mine does not commission the DAAT. NCC chairs the DAAT but BDC chairs the DRG. GPs are covered by one strategic health authority and DAAT by another. Some GPs fall under a third PCT, but, thankfully, there is only one LEA and one police force, although that has two emergency numbers and two separate control rooms. Most people in those bodies want to discuss funding streams. I am a simple man and to me a stream is running water, although if it were left to the EA and NCB in my constituency, that might not be so. How on earth are we to tackle the problem of drug addiction with that plethora of semi-detached organisations?

In my area there are far more than I have listed. When we knew that my mother was terminally ill with cancer, we received a call and a visit from a Macmillan nurse, who dealt with the other organisations. I put it to the Minister that in drug treatment, someone fulfilling the equivalent of the Macmillan nurse's role would bring about a major breakthrough in handling the plethora of organisations involved. The fact that there is not someone like that in drug treatment has contributed to the frustration and anger that has built up in my community and others.

Let me set the scene. In my constituency most of the pits shut between the late 1980s and 1992. They provided the majority of jobs in many parts of the constituency. In some villages, every male was working, or had worked in the pits, usually from the age of 15 to 65. When the pits shut, there was nothing. There were attempts at regeneration and there still are. Some were successful and some were not. The certainty of life was removed. I accept that that certainty had some downsides in terms of aspiration. 'Pit fodder' is the term that was used in schools, and was still used when I entered the House 18 months ago and it showed how the kids in those villages were perceived by the educational establishment. However, they were certain of a job for life in the community, and it had become an increasingly well-paid job over its last 30 years. That was taken away and, as predicted in the House in 1992, there has been a rise in drug addiction, specifically heroin.

The comparison between the pit villages and the more affluent rural areas is quite stark. Less than 10 per cent. of the cases dealt with by the probation service in Retford, which is a predominately rural area, involve criminals addicted to heroin. In Worksop, that figure is 92 per cent, and accounts for two thirds of all reported crime. When I met the chief constable on Monday he agreed with me that drug addiction probably accounts for virtually all the unreported crime as well.

We do not have treatment services in my constituency; they are at a distance. The philosophy of the drugs treatment service is one of harm reduction. I will come back to that because I challenge the whole ethos of the National Treatment Agency, and the whole drugs treatment business. We know the results. I could give chapter and verse, and describe the individuals who inject into their eyeballs because they have no veins left that they can use. Women have given up their children for adoption because they cannot cope with heroin addiction. Large numbers of grandmothers are caring for children. I could go on and on. I could paint a more evocative picture of the real state of play because those examples are not isolated, but I will not do so because I do not have enough time. The vast majority of criminals in my constituency are addicts. Only a few clubbing drugs are used in my constituency; there is hardly any cocaine, or crack cocaine. The drug being used time and again, and in hundreds of cases, is heroin.

There are several things that I would like to be able to say to a Home Office Minister. I want to see drugs courts because many addicts are drugs criminals. Only one of the 150 people I met was not involved in crime. That one person had a partner who funded his addiction and had done for nine years. I want addicts to be given a choice:

[John Mann]

prison or treatment. That is what we recommended in our report. It is a false choice at the moment because treatment is not being provided.

Fortuitously, Professor Howard Parker of Manchester university has recently produced a new report—he has produced many over the years. I ask for your forbearance, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that of other hon. Members, while I explore the work of Professor Parker. There is a particularly poignant and important reason for doing so. His paper in *Sociology* magazine, which was released, I believe, on Sunday and which I accessed yesterday, is entitled "The Normalization of 'Sensible' Recreational Drug Use". According to the references, Professor Parker started writing articles on the normalisation of drug use in 1994 and he refers to Mr. Van Vliet of the Netherlands, who wrote of the concept of the normalisation of drug use in 1990.

In a wonderful throw-away phrase explaining why he did not get all the responses that he had anticipated from the young people he had studied, Professor Parker writes that of his cohort—his evidence base—"up to half" went away to university, which meant that he had some problems in getting them to respond to his survey. So by his own definition, up to half the young people he surveyed in the north-west went to university. That must play a part in the debate.

Professor Parker and others who write on the normalisation of sensible recreational drug use, talk time and time again of clubbing. Well, we do not have clubbing in my constituency. Virtually nobody goes clubbing because the clubs do not exist. It is 30 or 40 miles to the nearest one and the buses that go to the clubs in Doncaster and Nottingham are infrequent and increasingly rare.

Significant numbers of people in the mining villages and other parts of the community start by experimenting with cigarettes, alcohol and cannabis and then move on to experimenting with heroin, often realising too late that they are addicted. The vast majority move on to injecting eight times a day and their whole lifestyle is based around funding that addiction. The cycle cannot be broken without treatment. According to police estimates, if someone has a criminal income of £15,000, that translates to £70,000 or £80,000 worth of stolen goods. That is per person, per year. That means £20 million worth of stolen goods in my constituency alone. Yet treatment is still not being provided.

I want to move on to the reason why I referred to Professor Parker and made what I suppose was an attack on him. The people he studied were not the same as the people who live in my constituency, so perhaps attacking him is unfair in abstract. He studied students. However, his name was cited four times in evidence to my inquiry, so I had to find out who he was and what he stood for. His philosophy of harm reduction goes right to the core of the work of the National Treatment Agency. It is central to what is going on in drugs treatment services in my constituency and it is not acceptable.

It is unacceptable for professionals to say, "I am in favour of harm minimisation." People who are in favour of harm minimisation suggest that we need needle exchanges. Well, we do, but the national health service does not provide a needle exchange in my constituency. That was left to a homeless charity because the NHS did not get its act together. Together with the panel of five people from the church, the business community and the community who comprise my inquiry team—there were six of us in total—I have called for more needle exchanges. We have to cover 360 sq miles. I am not against harm minimisation or harm reduction, but I am against the whole philosophy that what is needed—to put it in the extreme—is to show people how to inject into their eyeball because they have no veins left. That is not a coherent approach or an answer to the drugs epidemic that we face. The fact that people such as Howard Parker have been cited by professionals—four times by four different people—is a very worrying sign.

I have taken the opportunity, and will do so again, to make comparisons with what happens abroad. Last week, I met the head of drugs co-ordination for the European Union to consider the evidence base. I am not a medical expert—I do not know what forms of treatment are most effective—but the research base says that different treatments work for different people. I, and others, have called for a menu of treatment options, but that is not available.

"Changing Habits", the Audit Commission report published in February, highlighted six weaknesses, the first of which was the difficulty of accessing drugs treatment. In my area, there are transport problems for people who want to go to Mansfield or Doncaster but have no money because they are spending it all on heroin. Indeed, the most common excuse used when tapping young people for money is, "Give me money for my bus fare or train fare." That happens all the time in my constituency—it is part of the daily intimidation of drug-free young people.

What is the role of general practitioners? There is a target stating that 30 per cent. of GPs should be trained in drugs treatment. That has not been met in my area of Nottinghamshire, and in Bassetlaw we are below the Nottinghamshire average. We need trained GPs. Some are good; some are brilliant—two of them took part in my inquiry and were happy to do so—but what about those who are bad? What sanctions are we applying to ensure that GPs have the knowledge base within their practice to deal with the problem? I want new clinics on a local base that can feed back into the National Treatment Agency.

Like me, the Audit Commission found that there were lengthy delays in treatment. That has been mentioned by other hon. Members, and I will allow them to present their own facts and figures. If I, a member of my family or any of my constituents have cancer, we should receive immediate diagnosis and treatment. I do not expect to be told to come back in six months or a year. One of the more puzzling, and prevalent, official phrases that I came across was "presenting". The addict must present himself, as if to say, "Here I am, sir: I have come to present myself because I want to come off this drug". If they do "present" themselves they are often told, "Go away sonny. Come back tomorrow and present yourself again, and again and again, to prove that you are genuine."

Let me describe the case study written up in my report as that of Miss A. I do not know whether Miss A was involved in prostitution, but my evidence base suggests

that almost every young woman who is a heroin addict—there are more than 200 in my constituency—is so involved. Miss A's father buys her heroin because he does not want his daughter prostituting herself on the streets to get the money. She is in what I would call a relatively stable family situation. The mother and father are married and have been for a long time and they have other children. I listened to the answerphone messages that Miss A received from the treatment services, and frankly they were an absolute disgrace. Appointments were broken. One message said, "Meet us at Boots at 10 o'clock", but the drugs worker was not there at that time. Other messages said, "Meet us next week," "Meet us the week after" and "Oh, I'm going on holiday for three weeks." Because her phone was not on at 1 o'clock, there was a message at two minutes past claiming that she was obviously not serious about drugs treatment, so was not going to get it.

The parents of Mr. Y, who is from a stable family background, came to me just over a year ago. The father buys him drugs to stabilise his intake and to get him away from the criminals. He has spent more than a year trying to reduce his son's intake and has to take him to accident and emergency every time he overdoses, which is about once a month because the family are not professionals so are not managing matters properly. That is a great expense to the NHS. Those petrified parents wanted residential rehabilitation for their son. In the nine months before my inquiry, I could not find a single case of residential rehab in my constituency—not one. Amazingly, in the week after the inquiry, Mr. Y went into residential rehab. That was, of course, going to happen anyway, but I want to know on what basis decisions are being made, and who is making them. Those are real case studies.

The National Audit Office found, as I have, that assessment procedures are chaotic across the country. In some places assessments are made by a team, but in my area just one person seems to be making assessments on who should get what treatment, and there is no right of appeal.

I should like quantified statistics. What is the definition of treatment for the 118,000 people currently being treated in this country—that is the number according to the information that has been given? I should like to know how many in my constituency are being treated because I have not been given those statistics. I asked publicly for the figures, but they were not given, even when I asked again. What quantifies success? How many are going into residential rehabilitation and why? How many are being treated in the community, and how? How are we measuring success? I want to see comparisons of success, because it can be defined in different ways. For some individuals it might be defined as reducing heroin intake and stabilising. They might not ever be drug free, but might be stable for a long period of time, out of the crime cycle and fit enough to get back into work. For others—hopefully a majority—success means being drug free. That quantifying is not there in anything I have been given. Perhaps the Minister can help me on that.

Such comparisons are critical, and are needed across Europe. The Council of Ministers is meeting to discuss this matter on Thursday and Friday this week, and I believe that either the Home Secretary or a Health Minister is going to the meeting. There will there be a paper on the EU action plan on drugs. I should like to see consideration there of one of the six principles of the UN General Assembly's special session on drugs, which is

> "To increase substantially the number of successfully treated addicts".

The quantifying of such success is missing in the EU action plan on drugs, although it has plenty on cross-border smuggling. I propose that the Government put the quantifying of success back into the plan. In its action plan the EU has signed up to the six principles of the UN General Assembly special session on drugs, so that quantifying should be part of its policy. There must be a follow-up to analyse what treatments work, and Europe seems a better data bank than Britain alone. Let us learn from best practice. I propose that that measure be built in for consideration at the Council of Ministers meeting on Thursday and Friday. It could then be passed on to the Heads of State, who meet in December, although I suppose the papers will go in front of them only briefly.

I should like to see the database of the Exchange on Drug Demand Reduction Activities quantified. It is rather difficult to access it. That might just be because of my internet prowess, but I have been repeatedly unable to access the EDDRA database on drug demand reduction programmes. Certainly, the EU has been concentrating on supply.

As I have said, I should like to see the equivalent of a Macmillan nurse in drug treatment services—one person who is there to advise the families of addicts. I should like to see the notion of people having to "present" themselves for treatment knocked on the head. Treatment should just be made available.

My next comment is directed at the Home Office. I should like to see drugs courts and drug testing in the custody suites of my local police stations. Those measures have been piloted in Nottingham, and there is nothing wrong with doing things in the cities, but we want the same priority. I want to see those measures in my constituency.

More than 3,000 people have responded to my inquiry, and I have met 150 heroin addicts both on a one-to-one basis and in groups, which is a reasonable evidence base. I have written up the results and given the Department of Health and the Home Office CDs containing the case studies, in which we have masked the names to preserve confidentiality. The case studies follow a pattern, which is repeated and repeated and repeated, of low aspirations and mobility.

Young people who experiment with a range of drugs compare their control of taking cannabis with their initial control of taking heroin. That is what they said, not what I said, and they said it repeatedly. Young people who experiment with smoking heroin find themselves addicted and move on to injecting. Heroin was £5 a hit in September, but it is now £2, and one can get a free lump of crack with it, if one really wants it. Ironically, although it is free, heroin addicts are not taking it. Some addicts inject themselves eight times a day and there have been nine heroin overdoses.

Families are being torn apart, and large extended families in mining communities are being hit by crime carried out by their own family members—there is £20 million worth of drug-related crime. My drugs action

[John Mann]

team, along with others, has not even discussed the National Audit Office report of February 2002. The National Treatment Agency should come under the Department of Health rather than the Home Office, and I am pleased that a Health Minister is replying to the debate. In my community, we are not prepared to accept no provision of treatment services. We demand treatment services and we demand that their successes be quantified. The issue is not going to go away and I am not going to go away; my panel is permanently in situ, and we will hound Ministers. Hopefully, we will not need to do that because I hope that they are with us. We need to get on top of the problem to allow my community and addicts to get the chance that they deserve, in which case crime will come down accordingly.

9.57 am

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I commend the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) for securing the debate, for the power and passion of his speech and for his commitment to the vital subject of drug addiction in our country. Although I cannot match his level of commitment in looking into the matter through his inquiry, none the less, I have started my own investigation into what I consider to be one of the most serious menaces to the coherence of our society. I strongly agree with him that one issue affecting efforts to tackle this big social problem is the incoherent approach to providing a response displayed by the Government, local government and health authorities.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron), whose first outing on the Front Bench this is. I am delighted that he is here, and having watched him in the Chamber on a number of occasions, I know that this will not be his last such outing. I am sure that I will be sitting behind him for many years to come.

At the beginning of this year, I decided to undertake some research into drugs and youth crime both in Plymouth, which is in my constituency, and in Vauxhall, which is the part of London in which I have my tiny accommodation. I thought that it would be good to balance two different communities in my investigation of drugs, crime and young people. I spent a number of months pottering around both places on my own, talking to local authority officials, the police, voluntary sector agencies—they do a great job trying to tackle the problem—and young people. I met some wonderful people: many of those working in the voluntary and charitable sectors trying to grapple with the problems of some of the most disturbed and troubled youngsters in this country are real heroes and an inspiration to all of us.

The one message that came out loud and clear from the police, local government and voluntary sector agencies was that when a heroin addict makes the brave decision to kick their habit, when they reach that low point in their life that I believe each of them reaches at least once, when they are so steeped in misery that they want to end their terrible addiction, there must be immediate access to help. That simply is not available at present. It is certainly not available in Plymouth, in parts of London or—picking up on what the hon. Member for Bassetlaw said—in many parts of the country.

We know that drug addiction causes acquisitive crime—the police in Plymouth tell me that 80 per cent. of burglaries and thefts are drug-related. We know the human misery that is involved. We know that heroin addiction is a family breaker. All the agencies say that it is a massive social problem, but the response to it is incoherent. Immediate access to appropriate treatment simply is not available. It is very much a matter of catching the moment at which an addict decides to kick the habit, and help must be immediate. Six months later is far too late—six days later is too late. We must catch the moment.

In Plymouth, heroin addiction is now an enormous problem, and the police tell me that crack cocaine use is well on the way—in their words, not mine, "You ain't seen nothing yet." They believe that crack cocaine use in Plymouth will put heroin addiction in the shade. On the horizon is a massive problem for many parts of the country, and I call on the Government to come to grips with it now. They must improve their responses and try to solve the problem before it drags us down.

I began my personal researches a few weeks ago. As I started to talk about the issue through sections of my local media, a gentleman came to see me in my surgery to discuss a problem with one of his family members. We had a long session together and I asked him to go away and write to me with the details. If the Committee will forgive me, I shall read out part of his letter in which sets out his experiences, as it says everything that must be said about what is happening out there and the existing responses and available treatment.

"I am a 59 year old great-grandfather, who on 20th August 2002 discovered that one of my granddaughters was appearing in court charged with theft. To my horror, on arriving at the Court, I was soon to find out that not only was she stealing, but she was doing it to fund her heroin addiction. My natural instinct was to help, but the only help that is wanted by an addict is the money to pay for the next fix and when you witness your own flesh and blood writhing on the floor in agony; the only option your emotions allows is to supply the cash. However, I was not prepared to fund her habit and after some discussions we agreed together to find some help to start 'getting clean'."

The family are standing together and embarking on what ought to be a straightforward approach to coming off heroin. The letter continues:

"Our first port of call was Narcotics Anonymous who advised me not to provide her with any money with which to buy drugs. They directed us to the Community Drugs Service (CDS).

We then visited the CDS, who informed us that they could help if the addict is willing. My granddaughter categorically stated that she wants to be clean and we were then advised that the current waiting list to start a detox course is 6 months. We were further informed that the wait is due to current shortages in manpower and lack of funding. The local Harbour Centre is able to provide an instruction to GPs to prescribe the heroin alternatives, DFs and methadone. However, very few GPs are willing to do so because they don't want the addicts, with associated problems and disruptive behaviour, in their surgery. I was also told that 'Going cold turkey can and does kill addicts and is not to be entered into under any circumstances'. To my absolute amazement we were then given the only remaining option, which is apparently given to all addicts, 'Commit crime and get caught in order to fast track the system, as there is no treatment available in the short term'. Once within the legal system the Probation Officer can apply for a DTTO (Detoxification Testing and Treatment Order)."

The gentleman continues his letter by setting out the journey that they undertook together to get help, but as I stand here this morning, his granddaughter still has not received treatment.

I do not point the finger at the current Government any more than at past Governments. The problem has crept up on us in the past few years and has now become the biggest social problem that we have ever faced. We know that the cost of funding a heroin addiction can be as much as £100 to £200 a day. One remarkable man—Mark Williams, who works for Centrepoint—told me that many of the people he was trying to help were selling their bodies at night in Soho or committing burglary to raise money for their heroin addiction.

The problem is of huge importance and access to immediate treatment is the real solution, so the Government must redirect resources and move them upstream. Let us not debate whether I am calling for taxes to be increased—as it happens, I am not, but I would if it were the only solution to this massive problem. However, there are areas from which resources can be redirected: for example, in a sitting last week of the Select Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, we realised that there was an underspend of £350 million. That would do for starters.

There are other avenues of action. First, what about insurance companies? We all know that they are struggling at the moment, and they would make a massive saving if some of these problems were nipped in the bud. Why do we not tap them for some funding? We must move resources upstream to ensure that money is available. Secondly, the Government must call a summit with all the treatment centres, including the rehab and detox centres in the voluntary and private sectors, to ask them how best to expand their capacity to provide sufficient access to treatment.

Thirdly, more coherence in the Government response is vital, in particular by having one funding conduit. I cannot tell hon. Members whether in Plymouth primary funding comes from the local authority, from the health authority or directly from the Home Office—there is real confusion. Likewise, I did not know which Minister would respond to today's debate, but I am delighted that a Minister is here.

We need more coherent funding mechanisms. I understand that one reason why there is such a delay in getting access to treatment in London is because local authorities bounce what we could call customers off each other. For example, if someone with a family home in Croydon is caught up on the streets of Lambeth and wants to access treatment, a debate takes place between Croydon and Lambeth authorities about which of them is to pay for it. That can take months to resolve, which is no good when that young addict has made the brave decision to kick the habit. Perhaps providing a central funding agency in London should be the Government's response.

We place a statutory duty on local authorities to house homeless people, so perhaps we should place a statutory duty on them to ensure that addicts who want to kick the habit have access to treatment. Someone must take responsibility for the problem. Local authorities should not be providing treatment; in my view, they should do almost nothing but act as enabling authorities. However, in the right climate, some wonderful organisations in the voluntary and private sector could expand.

My final point is really for another debate. It is that a great deal more international action could be taken to crack down on drug barons. Most policemen in this country will tell you that arresting a few drug dealers will not solve the problem. They say that access to treatment and education are the key weapons in this war. We see NATO out there looking for a role: perhaps declaring war on drug barons deserves higher priority.

The Government face no more important a task than to put in place a coherent and immediate system to tackle the problem of drug addition. The great advantage for any Government who made progress in that field is that, within a very short time, the crime figures would plummet—and the Government would get the glory.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. The matter that we are debating this morning is of immense importance, and a number of hon. Members want to speak. If they use considerable self-discipline, I might be able to call them all, but that means contributions of four minutes or less. I call the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant).

10.10 am

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): With that injunction in mind, I shall try to be concise, swift and brief. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) not only for securing this debate, but for speaking with such eloquence on this and other occasions.

I am intrigued that a Minister from the Department of Health should be here today. I represent a Welsh constituency, and although the Minister will probably not be able to answer many of the issues that arise there because they are devolved matters, I intend to speak briefly about the scale and nature of the problem in Wales.

We have about 7,700 problematic heroin and crack cocaine users in south Wales. At least 270 young people died through the use of drugs in 2000, but we still do not have the figures for 2001. At least 28 young people in my constituency have died from drug abuse since I was elected 17 months ago. The market in heroin and crack cocaine in south Wales is worth about £130 million, so whatever resources the Government are able to throw at the problem, they will scarcely match the sums of money invested by dealers and pushers—especially those in the major markets in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol, who are trying to invest in the new market that has developed in the south Wales valleys in the past five to seven years.

In November and December 2001, the vast majority of new prisoners in south Wales jails tested positive for either heroin or crack cocaine, and many of them would still have tested positive when they left—indeed, some would have tested positive on leaving prison who did not test positive on entering. Between 1993 and 2000, south Wales witnessed a 50 per cent. increase in drugs deaths, yet during that time the United Kingdom average fell by 8 per cent. However, I have a word of caution about the figures for drug-related deaths, because the coroners service has a considerable way to go before we can rely on what is counted as a drug-related death. Some coroners will count a death as drugs related only if the needle is stuck in the arm when the

[Mr. Chris Bryant]

body is found, but others will be more liberal. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw said, greater consistency is necessary, not only in the UK but throughout the European Union, if we are to gain a better understanding of the exact nature of the problem.

In the south Wales valleys—in the former mining constituencies—the problem is slightly different. We have close-knit communities where such deaths are not anonymous—everyone in the village knows the person who died and other members of the family. That is significant, not least because it means that everyone knows where drugs are available. Everyone in the community could say where heroin or crack cocaine can be obtained. That is different from what happens in the cities.

Few GPs in south Wales know enough about drug treatment, particularly for heroin abusers, to be confident of ensuring that their patients get the right treatment. The fact that about 40 per cent. of GPs will retire in the next few years will present us with another terrible problem, because many GPs have not been in close touch with the issue throughout their working lives. Ten years ago, only one of the police cells in the Rhondda would have had a note on the door saying that the occupant had a drug problem; now, every single cell door carries such a notice.

South Wales has specific problems and I hope that Ministers or the Welsh Assembly can solve them. There has been a significant increase in the number of my constituents who go to the local community drug and alcohol team and into treatment—indeed, the number is three times greater than in surrounding constituencies. However, the team was closed to new clients four months ago. The problem is not that there is a long waiting list for people in the Rhondda, but that those responsible for providing services have overspent and have been so successful at getting people into treatment that there is no waiting list. The challenge facing Bro Taf health authority and the Welsh Assembly is how to deal with that issue. There is an enormous lack of trust between public sector and voluntary sector agencies, and one does not need to study my constituency long to notice that.

The Prison Service does a good job of weaning people off their various drug dependency problems, but many still return to the community believing that their level of tolerance is the same as when they went into prison, when in fact it is lower. That results in many of the drugs-related deaths in our constituencies. I therefore hope that the Prison Service will build stronger long-term relations with the local health service so that people can receive ongoing treatment.

Some politicians in south Wales confuse the broader issue of treating heroin abusers—let us face it, they often abuse many other substances—and the specific issues of detoxification and rehabilitation. The main issue in my constituency is how to get people into treatment; when they go into detoxification and rehabilitation is a matter for another day.

At present, the major challenges relate to co-ordination between the Welsh Assembly and Westminster, and between the different agencies. It is shocking that Bro Taf health authority and the Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority still have no full, coherent strategy on bringing all the agencies together to deliver decent services. In the past few weeks, the Welsh Assembly has committed money, which is most welcome, but we must ensure that that money is spent on the ground. Every agency to which I have spoken has made it clear that one of the biggest challenges in the next five years will be to ensure that we have enough trained people to employ in the relevant services. It is a question not only of announcing new money, but of ensuring that it is spent.

Finally, housing is an issue. For £8,000, commercial landlords in my constituency can buy a house in a terrible state of repair. They do not do it up, but they move in families—particularly ones with drug dependency problems—who they know will bring in housing benefit at the rate of £4,500 a year. The state is subsidising outrageous, immoral and unscrupulous behaviour on the part of commercial landlords, and the people who suffer most are the families of heroin abusers.

10.17 am

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on keeping this issue alive. It is important that we endlessly discuss the misuse of drugs and, in particular, heroin, which is one of the worst social problems facing Britain today.

The number of heroin users is increasing, prices are down considerably and, tragically, there are more deaths. I subscribe to the view that we need better statistics. Coroners' certificates are completely inadequate, and I understand that the Home Office will change them shortly. The number of deaths recorded for 2000 is 1,162. That figure was given in the *Official Report*, 29 October 2002. I think that that is a gross underestimate, and the figure is probably at least double that. Yesterday, I discovered that there have been almost 8,000 deaths across the European Union, so this is a tragic matter.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw on producing his report, which I have read two or three times. I agree with much of it, but I disagree with a point made on page one, which states:

"We believe that only a policy of zero tolerance of drugs and crime will overcome this blight".

We would all like to realise that ideal, but we are living in the real world, and I do not think that we will adopt zero-tolerance policies in this country. Certain countries, such as Sweden, have adopted zero tolerance, not only towards misuse of heroin and other illicit drugs, but towards alcohol. If one tries to buy decent alcohol in Sweden, one finds that what can be bought in bars and cafés is less than 1 per cent. proof and it is almost impossible to buy the hard stuff. Therefore, I believe that we would have to adopt the same approach towards alcohol and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw suggested, also towards tobacco.

It is difficult to estimate the number of addicts in Britain. According to Home Office statistics, the figure is somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000, but I suspect that the true figure is higher. Before the National Treatment Agency for substance misuse was set up in April 2001, something that I very much welcomed, only

between 6 and 7 per cent. of addicts were in treatment. That is a derisory figure, which has since increased and will continue to increase in future.

I could go on at length about the social consequences of drug misuse in my constituency, which, on all the social indicators, is deprived. In the red-light area alone, there have been three deaths in under nine months. Two young women, one of whom was pregnant and, a few days ago, a young man in my constituency, were murdered. The murders were probably all related to drugs in some way—the deaths of the two women certainly were. They were heroin addicts who were supporting their habit through street prostitution.

Because of the situation in Bolton, we have taken a hard attitude towards getting people into treatment. Political leadership is very important. Drug action teams vary throughout the country, but under Sandie Nesbitt, our very committed drug action team co-ordinator, we have one of the best DATs in the country. However, but for the fact that the chief executive of Bolton metropolitan council chairs the committee that drives the DAT forward in Bolton, it would not be so effective. If DATs are to operate effectively, they must be driven from the top, and chief executives can do that because they have the networks to be able to bring on board the health service, the probation service, the police and the voluntary agencies.

We have an estimated 2,500 drug addicts in Bolton, 84. per cent. of whom are heroin users. Almost half those known drug addicts—some 1,225— are currently in treatment in Bolton. There is an increasing demand for treatment, which I am also pleased about, but the effect is that the waiting list for treatment is getting longer. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw said, we need to aim towards a situation in which no one has to wait for treatment. There should be an open door to treatment, so that when addicts feel that they want to give up the habit, they can receive treatment immediately. Furthermore, if they relapse after initial treatment, as many addicts do, they should not have to wait to receive treatment again. In some areas, drug users have to be out of the system for six months before they can get back in. That is crazy. During that intervening gap, some addicts die because of a lack of tolerance. They start taking doses of heroin that they were formerly used to and overdose. That is a tragedy.

Unfortunately, an increasing number of under-19s in Bolton are using drugs. About 40 schoolchildren in Bolton under the age of 16 have come forward for treatment, as well as 104 16 to 19-year-olds. That also includes the figures for alcohol abuse.

One of the gaps across the country is in treatment for young people under the age of 19. Bolton is getting better at that. I want to tell people about Project 360 Degrees. It has that name because it looks all around—in a circle—and takes on board children who are desperately seeking help for substance misuse, and their parents. The project covers alcohol as well as illicit drugs and has been quite successful.

There is controversy about drugs education. It can be good, but much of it is bad. We need to train teachers. People who know what is happening on the ground have to be brought into schools. Reading passages from textbooks is not enough. When people provide drugs education they have to know about drugs, their misuse and the harm that it creates. I do not object to bringing ex-users or even current users into schools to tell people the bad news; to tell them not only about injecting into eyeballs or other parts of the body when veins have run out, but about gangrene and the loss of legs.

Brighton and Hove has the worst drugs problem in Britain. I congratulate Professor Ghodse from St. George's hospital medical school, who controls the national programme on substance abuse deaths and publishes a document every six months. It is about not only drug deaths, but the worst places in Britain for drug misuse. Brighton and Hove has topped the list for several years. I urge the Minister to put more resources into places where drug use is prevalent.

There has to be a choice of treatment. If someone has been an addict for 20 years, he has to be given access to clinically pure heroin, which is diamorphine. People on that can be stabilised. The Government drugs policy debate will take place a week on Thursday on the Floor of the House. I hope that during that debate the Home Secretary will make announcements about heroin prescribing, because we need more of it.

Methadone has a role, but I am critical of how it has been used as a crime reduction drug rather than a harm minimisation drug. Other drugs should be considered. For three years, I fought with the Department of Health to get buprenorphine on board. Subutex is one of its trade names. It rather than methadone is the drug of choice in France and Australia. If it is given to fairly new heroin users, they can be helped out of addiction much better than through use of methadone. For many people, methadone is very addictive, and it has a narrow toxicity window.

A friend in Manchester is prepared to make L-methadone. Methadone has two molecules. One is toxic and the other has the desired effect. My friend wants to test L-methadone in clinics. I have put that to the Department, but it has not yet responded. I have also argued that LAAM—levo-alpha-acetylmethadol—which is used in America, should be available for some addicts in Britain. Another choice is abstinence and 12-step programmes, for when someone wants to come off heroin but not on to methadone and is willing to accept counselling instead. Why do we not have more abstinence programmes? The answer is not methadone, methadone, methadone. The choices suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw should be available to all addicts.

Things can only get better. They have to, and soon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am prepared to call the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), but I must ask him to keep his comments short. He is an expert on the subject, but if he speaks for only two or three minutes we shall not take up any of the time allocated for Front-Bench spokesmen.

10.29 am

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Things have got better. I have attended debates on this subject since 1987. As recently as 1998, there was absolute unanimity among all the speakers from the three main parties when the 10-year strategy was introduced. Everyone agreed that that was the answer, and only one voice was raised in the Chamber that suggested that it was not. Today all hon.

[Paul Flynn]

Members are talking about the almighty failure of our drugs policies—and I appreciated especially the contribution made by the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter). Our drugs laws are not working.

I received a letter from the Gwent specialist substance misuse service that said that the average waiting list for that service is 11 months, and that the longest wait is 17 months. It is disgraceful that we have arrived at that position.

I disagree with the solutions proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), although he has done a marvellous job in bringing the subject to the attention of the House. Those solutions have already been tried—we tried zero tolerance in 1971. We once had a system that worked well, in which there were fewer than 1,000 heroin addicts, whereas the number of people addicted to heroin and cocaine in this country is now 320,000. Deprivation may be one of the factors, and those who live in poor areas are far more likely to die from their addictions, but for those who can get clean needles the figures are similar, regardless of whether they live in a deprived or a privileged area.

I have studied figures on the subject from all over Europe. Those who can get clean needles and heroin of known strength can go on for a long time. There is the famous example of the writer of "National Velvet", who took prodigious quantities of heroin all her life. She died a serene and peaceful death, in her bed, at the age of 91. The problems with heroin use stem from the situation in which people take it. Two years ago, 50 deaths were caused by one batch of contaminated heroin in Ireland and Scotland.

No one should leap to instant conclusions. Zero tolerance was the answer in America, but in this country our harshest prohibition policies mean that for every 100,000 people, we have a prison population of 130. That is one of the highest prison populations in Europe—it is higher than Turkey's. In the United States, the prison population in that ratio is 700, which is partly the result of zero tolerance. The increased use of heroin is driven by the greed for profit; people make a great deal out of it, and many of the dealers are addicts and are dealing to feed their own addiction.

10.32 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I understand that time is short, and I do not want to take up any of the time that the Minister and the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman need. The subject is one that Back Benchers should have time to discuss, and we all owe a debt of gratitude to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) for securing the debate. An hour and a half is not enough to discuss the matter, and I suspect that the time allocated on the Estimates day next Thursday will not be enough to deal with all the issues.

Rather than express a party position based on a paper that we have published, I want to take time to respond to the passion and content of the speech made by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw. It is a pity that *Hansard* will not reflect the passion with which he spoke, as it affected many of us here. He referred to the lack of coherence between the various agencies involved. That problem does not occur only in respect of drugs, and it represents another strong argument for not only joint working but bringing together health service commissioning with social services under the auspices of a democratically accountable local authority. That would do something to merge the alphabet soup of agencies to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned the huge cost of the problem. That will not be settled by requesting extra funding from the taxpayer. I do not think that that is necessary even though, sadly, the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) could contemplate it. For every person treated, there would be immense savings to the criminal justice system, the health service and the victims of crime, as reflected in insurance premiums. On any judgment, any investment is self-funding and releases far more resources—and that is quite apart from the increase in human happiness and the reduction in human misery for users, families of users and the victims of crime associated with the problem.

Many hon. Members said that there are difficulties accessing treatment. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw raised several issues. For instance, there is the question of transport. Treatment needs to be local, which is why general practice will always have a role, because that is the local, accessible service. There are issues about the quality of that treatment, particularly in general practice, and about delays, not only in terms of access, reduction programmes or acute detoxification, but in getting on to residential rehabilitation. That has been shown, at least for adult users—the evidence is very good—to stop people from simply returning to the position from which they started, by mixing with their old friends and the dealers they know, and going to the places where they had the lifestyle of injection.

I had the privilege of spending a few hours at the surgery of a GP in my constituency who takes a special interest in the treatment of drug users. It was fascinating to see him at work. I have encouraged him to do an audit of his results. However, although he had an interest, he was never funded to do that work. He had to do it in time that he could have spent doing other work in his practice. It was difficult for him to organise the practice because of the problem of people not wanting to share waiting rooms with drug users, an issue raised by other hon. Members and certainly by patients in the practice.

There is a strong argument for additional remuneration of GPs to encourage the best to do such work, not simply those who are committed. There is an argument about the quality of service provided by some GPs offering methadone. I do not think that sanctions are required. More resources are required for training and support. In addition to a GP, a counsellor and testing arrangements are needed to ensure that the contract that is entered into is kept to.

There is the issue of prostitution by drug users. The current restrictive criminalising laws on prostitution make it difficult to provide the help and access to treatment services needed by those involved in prostitution, particularly young women.

Clearly, there is not enough capacity in treatment services. It is not just a question of funding: there are not huge numbers of trained people waiting to fall off trees.

We should have started to undertake the sort of measures that are needed some years ago. Funding has to be increased and we need proper data on outcomes.

The take-home message from the debate is that drug addiction should be seen as an issue for the Department of Health, not the Home Office. I am surprised that there was any doubt about whether a Health Minister would be answering the debate. The problem is that many people consider the issue in terms of crime. The idea that one has to commit a crime to get treatment is heinous. I am not sure that prison is necessarily the right way forward, and one is required to reach a threshold of criminality to access drug treatment and testing orders. The Government are bringing in drug abstinence orders and drug abstinence requirements, which are a lower tier. It might have been better to have done that earlier, alongside the drug treatment and testing orders. In my constituency, so desperate are magistrates to use drug treatment and testing orders that they are using them at a lower threshold, and they run out of money by at least mid-year.

We have to be careful about selective citing of the evidence base. There is now increasing evidence from overseas about the option of maintenance on heroin. We believe that the validity of clean injecting rooms—often called shooting galleries—should be explored. I hope that the Government will not rule that out completely, as I fear they might, because it is a way in which to reduce harm and ensure adequate access to treatment.

Professor Howard Parker will be able to speak for himself, and might write to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw now that his name has been raised. However, I am not sure that talking about the normalisation of sensible recreational drug use—whatever that is—is the same as showing people how to inject into their eyeballs.

We must not confuse—I do not think that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw did—the decriminalisation of soft drugs with the suggestion that hard drug use is in any way sensible or could be considered recreational. It is a health problem and we need health solutions. Sometimes criminal justice solutions prevent people from accessing the most appropriate treatment.

10.40 am

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on having initiated the debate and on having spoken with such passion. The effects of heroin use are devastating and it is extremely sad to hear about their terrible consequences in his constituency. Having read his inquiry report, I offer him my best wishes in his efforts to address the problem.

All hon. Members who have spoken today agree that the issue is serious and requires urgent attention. However, all discussions about the drug, this one included, are hampered by a dearth of reliable research and data. I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point that there are few statistics available for his constituency, but there is a wider issue: there are many gaps in our knowledge of the national problem. Professor Neil McKeganey and Dr. Gordon Hay of the centre for drug misuse research at Glasgow university have said that, nationally, we have no drug survey, no assessment for problem drug use, no reliable record of the numbers in treatment, no school survey, no estimate of drug-related crime and no data on hepatitis C prevalence.

Without reliable information and data, we cannot hope to administer the appropriate solutions. Will the Minister address the points raised by McKeganey and Hay, and tell us whether the Government intend to put right the situation with regard to the specific examples that they have given? If so, what are the expected timetables?

As a society, we must recognise the many harmful social effects of both heroin and drugs in general, of which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw spoke so passionately. They include marital breakdown, neglect and abuse of children, poverty and accidents, particularly road traffic accidents. In addition, the links between drugs and crime are widely accepted. It is estimated that the cost of hard-drug related crime is some £20 billion. The hon. Gentleman told us that some two thirds of crime in his constituency is drug related. The criminal justice system must clamp down on those who deal in drugs.

However, as has been said, simply addressing the issue as a crime problem is wrong. That is the fundamental flaw in our drugs strategy. There is a chronic and serious shortage of treatment services at every level and what services there are tend to be provided through the criminal justice system. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) and others, too many users are not helped until they enter the criminal justice system. Society must realise that drug use should not be simply a law and order issue, but should be addressed as a health issue.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw agrees in his inquiry that we spend a fortune dealing with the costs of heroin-related crime—policing and imprisonment—yet we have no coherent treatment service. The Government appear to recognise that, albeit tentatively. However, there is inconsistency between localities in the scope, accessibility and effectiveness of treatments. There is also insecurity about levels of funding, as has been highlighted by nearly all who have spoken.

The Audit Commission report, "Changing Habits" points to the uneven availability of treatment services and the long delays that users face—something that many hon. Members have mentioned. The Home Affairs Committee's report on drugs also suggests the inadequacy of current treatment provision. There are simply too many organisations, methods of funding, bidding rounds and acronyms. That serves only to cause confusion, as the hon. Member for Bassetlaw has testified.

It appears that the Government realise that they are failing in the matters I have outlined. That is confirmed by the fact that according to paragraph 13.21 of the 10-year NHS plan the Government originally hoped to reduce the proportion of people under 25 who were using class A drugs by 25 per cent. by 2005 and 50 per cent. by 2008. That target has now been abandoned. What measures will the Government introduce to provide a seamless treatment service to get people off drugs? Such a service clearly does not exist at present.

There are too many organisations adopting too many approaches with too many different avenues of funding. That confusion needs to be dealt with by clearer communication, fewer organisations and a simpler funding stream. What are the Government going to do to put matters right, and what is the expected timetable?

[Mr. John Baron]

The Conservative party has set out proposals to tackle the problem, and they have been put out for consultation. We have suggested that the number of drug treatment places should be expanded tenfold to be able to offer a treatment and rehabilitation place to every young heroin and cocaine addict. We believe that the current de facto policy of ignoring such users needs to be replaced, and we have suggested that each young heroin or cocaine addict should be given the choice of undergoing treatment or facing criminal proceedings. Some welcome comments have been made about that proposal. The best way of instigating the programme would be through the community and voluntary groups that are active in the relevant context. I pay tribute to the sterling work of those groups, without which things would be so much worse.

However, while a more rounded approach to the problem—one that includes the health and treatment issue—is important, society can also help addicts by ensuring that the law stands firm against drug dealers and pushers. The inquiry into heroin in Bassetlaw heard from heroin users who demanded longer prison sentences to help them break their habit. Many people wrote demanding stronger action by the courts, particularly for dealers.

However, the Government are causing confusion about the law. The Home Secretary announced his decision to declassify cannabis from a class B drug to a class C drug in July. He also announced his decision to increase the maximum sentence for cannabis dealers from 10 to 14 years imprisonment—the same as for class B drugs. That incoherence in policy sends out mixed messages. That needs to be put right, starting in schools, as the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) explained.

Police officers certainly do not understand the policy and nor do young people. Indeed, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) believes that the reclassification of cannabis and the Brixton experiment have effectively handed drug policy and communities over to drug dealers in many areas of her constituency.

I focus on cannabis not only because it shows the incoherence of the Government's message about drugs, but because, according to the inquiry report, the issue was raised time and again by virtually every heroin user interviewed. Each heroin addict had used cannabis at an earlier stage. Heroin just seemed a natural progression. Many addicts informed the inquiry that they felt that they could control heroin use because they could control cannabis use. Those same addicts stressed the fact that the dangers of cannabis needed to be strongly restated.

How and when will the Government end the confusion? When will they send out the message that taking drugs is wrong, that it can destroy lives and that it harms society? The sooner the Government can end the confusion, the sooner lives will no longer be needlessly lost. I hope that the Minister will take the necessary steps today. Such a policy would help to free resources that could be better spent in providing treatment for heroin addicts—indeed, for all drug addicts.

We must significantly reduce heroin addiction in this country. The Government must identify the extent of the problem in order to be able to deal with it. They must provide a clear, coherent and seamless treatment service that is properly funded, end the mixed signals, which are causing confusion, and state loudly and clearly that drugs cause misery, cost lives and harm society. I ask the Minister to address those points.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on raising this important topic and on the dynamic and passionate way in which he has presented the subject.

All our constituencies are touched by the serious problems of hard drug addiction. I am the Member for Tottenham in north London, and in the past few weeks I have been working with the police on the serious problem of heroin trafficking in this country, much of which emanates from my constituency. We all see the serious problems that affect families, young children and others in our constituencies. For me, crack cocaine in London is the problem. I am the youngest Minister in the Government, and my hon. Friends the Members for Bassetlaw and for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) will understand that hard drug addiction, and particularly the problems of crack cocaine and heroin, profoundly affect my generation. The Government are seeking to deal with that problem, which we take very seriously.

According to recent research by York university, the annual economic and social costs of drug misuse to our society are between £10.9 billion and £11.8 billion. Problematic drug users, whom the study isolates, account for 99 per cent. of those costs, which is why getting the issue right matters so much. Examination of the evidence base shows us that treatment works. It reduces drug use and its associated personal and social harms and it reduces drug-related crime. The findings from the national treatment outcome research study show that every £1 spent on treatment saves £3 of expenditure within the criminal justice system. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) was right to raise the associated cost of treatment and its links with the criminal justice system.

Improving treatment for drug misusers was a major element of the 10-year national drug strategy, which was launched in 1998. The strategy was comprehensive and aimed to combat drug misuse in deprived and high-crime areas. At the same time, we set up the National Treatment Agency to drive forward improvements in the quality, availability, accessibility and effectiveness of drug treatment in England.

Much of what has been said this morning relates to greater and faster provision of drug treatment services. The Government accept that, and we are doing as much as we can to deal with the problem. However, we recognise the tremendous challenge ahead of us. Very rapid expansion of drug treatment services, particularly in those areas with the worst substance misuse problems, is required to achieve the targets that we have set. The background of historic underfunding and limited capacity in that area must be borne in mind when we debate the matter.

We must also bear in mind how far we are into the 10-year journey: we are four years into it and one year into a comprehensive system set up by the National Treatment Agency.

We have made significant new funding available to address work force and quality issues in order to deliver successfully on our goals. Four years into the national drugs strategy, we have already made significant progress. Based on current performance, there is no doubt that we are delivering and are on course to reach the treatment target. I stand here today as a Minister in the Department of Health because the subject of the debate is drug treatment, and it is right that a Health Minister should respond. However, we co-ordinate closely with colleagues in the Home Office, and I will ensure that the debate is brought to the attention of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), who is responsible for drugs policy across Government.

Last night in the Library I read the comprehensive report of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw. It has also been read by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who is the Minister responsible for public health. She has written to my hon. Friend and will be responding in detail shortly. We believe that increasing funding for the treatment of drug users is essential to combat drug use, to reduce crime and to make our communities safer. We have ensured that substantial extra funds have been made available for that through the drug treatment pooled budget. That budget now stands at £195.7 million, which allowed each health authority in England to receive an increase of at least 30 per cent. in April, compared to last year's allocation. However, my hon. Friend may be aware that the drug action team in north Nottinghamshire received a 42 per cent. increase in its budget during 2002–03. That has led to a figure for Nottinghamshire of £1.8 million, enabling the development of treatment services in Bassetlaw and the surrounding areas.

Mr. Bryant: As the Minister knows, Bassetlaw and Rhondda are both former mining constituencies. Will he commit the Department to considering the similarities between former mining constituencies—perhaps alongside his Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament colleagues—to see whether there are specific needs that must be met?

Mr. Lammy: In my view, the use and misuse of hard drugs such as heroin is a complex issue. Many hon. Members could make a particular case for the way in which drugs affect their constituencies. My background in Tottenham and Peterborough demonstrates the complexity of the problem. In Tottenham, we are tackling the challenge of drugs in the context of serious inner city deprivation. I visit friends in Peterborough, who talk about the challenges of dealing with heroin addiction in Grantham, and the problems faced in such cities. It is a complex situation, and it is right that we consider the whole picture.

John Mann: The Minister mentioned the increase in budget. How many drug addicts in my constituency are receiving treatment, and how many have been successfully treated?

Mr. Lammy: In his contribution, my hon. Friend raised the issue of successful treatment, and the different measurements of success. Success means different things to people with different types of heroin addiction. It very much depends on the starting point. Success for someone with a 20-year problem will clearly be different from success for someone who has a short history of heroin use and has been able to come off the drug quickly. The number of people in treatment will depend on the starting and end points of the year, but I shall write to my hon. Friend about the specific problem.

Mr. Baron *rose—*

Mr. Lammy: I shall not be able to make progress if I give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw referred to the drug action team, how it is made up and the contribution made by various agencies. That ensures a co-ordinated lead for the local drug strategy. It is important that it includes the police, the probation service, the health service through the PCTs and social service teams. He also referred to harm minimisation. It is vital to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C. Harm reduction is not an add-on—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret that we have run out of time. We thank the Minister for that part of his reply that he was able to give within the time limit. We now move to the next debate.

A-Levels

11 am

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): It is a great pleasure to introduce this debate on A-levels, a subject that, I suspect, has been nearer to our hearts for longer than most things.

When the Government came to office, they inherited an A-level system that was internationally recognised as the gold standard of school leaving and university entrance examinations. The Government inherited proposals for curriculum 2000 to broaden the A-level without losing quality. By mid-September, five and a half years later, we were in the middle of a full-blown A-level crisis; not, as so often in the past, involving allegations of grade inflation, but arbitrary grade boundary rigging to make the achievement of higher grades more difficult.

In this debate I want to unravel the causes of the crisis, to establish whether Ministers are learning lessons, to examine the activities of two specific ministerial aides in making matters worse, to examine whether Ministers made matters worse, to see whether lessons are more broadly applicable throughout the Department and Government and to discover the best way of re-establishing confidence in the A-level as the gold standard.

Curriculum 2000 was proposed by Lord Dearing in 1996 after widespread consultation. Its purpose was to broaden the A-level without losing quality. It was a means of ensuring that more students entered examinations in subjects that were not at the core of their normal activities. The former Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris) said:

> "The previous Conservative Government might have introduced their proposals in 1997, but we delayed until 1999. We then consulted further. After that further consultation, we postponed the implementation of A and AS-level exams for a further year, to 2000. By that time, four years had passed since the publication of Ron Dearing's report on the wider curriculum for 16 to 18-year-olds."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 212.]

The first courses were taught in the year 2000 and the first AS-level examinations were taken in 2001. There were, of course, well-chronicled problems with the effect of AS-levels on schooling and the lower sixth form experience, but that is another story. By this summer, when the first new A-level results were announced, the pass rate had risen from 89.8 per cent. to 94.3 per cent. and the rate of A grades achieved had risen from 18.6 per cent. to 20.7 per cent. The Head Masters' Conference identified five factors that made that likely: the new curriculum's modular structure with several assessment opportunities; the availability of resits; more detailed and specific syllabuses, specifications and assessment objectives; harder work by sixth formers during the course; and the element of self-selection from AS to A2.

In a press release dated 15 August 2002, the Minister congratulated students and their teachers on their achievements in those examinations, but by 1 September there were reports of concern about downgrading; that is, raising the mark required to achieve a particular grade. Some of the concerns were expressed by constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald).

I was in Birmingham with the Select Committee on Education and Skills as the story broke, and I confess that my immediate reaction was that the Select Committee ought to hold an inquiry on the subject. Wiser and—dare I say it—older heads, in the shape of that of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), the Chairman of the Select Committee, declined to make a mountain out of a molehill. However, as we know, the then Secretary of State did not have one of those older nor, regrettably, wiser heads. Her reaction was to set up not one but two inquiries.

First, she asked Ken Boston, the new chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, to undertake an inquiry. The following day, she asked Mike Tomlinson, Her Majesty's former chief inspector of schools, to do so. I do not wish to badmouth the former Secretary of State, because she is an honourable and decent woman, but I believe that her reaction was one of panic. Mike Tomlinson's interim report published on 27 September said that

> "the evidence strongly suggests that the actions taken with regard to the marks to be associated with the key grade boundaries (A/B and E/U) did vary across the three boards. In particular, it seems the balance between judgment based on the standard of marked work and the use of statistical information changed, and for more subjects in one Board (OCR) than in the other two."

The fact is that different boards took different approaches to setting grade boundaries. It appears that, in OCR, those involved pull scripts out at grade boundaries and examine them. They agree the grade boundaries and then apply statistical analysis to determine whether the results match expectations. According to the uncorrected transcript of the evidence to the Select Committee, Dr. McLone, the chief executive of OCR, stated:

> "We have a set of procedures laid down . . . we have looked very closely at what the examiners have said . . . We then apply statistical evidence, GCSE performance, we look at performance from year to year, of course, to see whether or not we are agreeing. This year, some subjects, they would obviously work something out to get to the right place, and other subjects have not."

Later, he stated:

> "The key thing is where you select scripts; and I think that this is what we really need to be looking at, in the future ... The way you select scripts and where you select them depends very much on how much information you put into the system to start with ... I have to say that you could do it, and we could have done it, by looking first of all at statistical evidence".

On that occasion, they first selected the scripts.

AQA and Edexcel, the other examination boards, approached the matter the other way around. They looked first at the statistical evidence and then at the marks and chief examiner's recommendations. The result is that one procedure is more transparent than the other; I do not believe that that has been picked up clearly enough. The OCR procedure is more transparent, and enables examiners to object to the results more easily than they might were the statistics examined before the results were put before examiners. The examiners are told where to look for boundaries whereas, under the OCR system, the examiners select and identify the boundaries and then apply the statistics. Therefore, if an examiner disagrees with the statistics, he

is more likely to object, which is probably why OCR was identified as the board for which things might be going wrong.

Tomlinson recommended that students' marked work in some A2 units be regraded and their overall GCE A-level grade adjusted if necessary. He also recommended that the QCA be asked to provide additional guidance on the standards associated with AS and A2 units, both generically and in some subjects.

That brings us to the second grading problem, which was that the relative values of the AS and A2 papers were unclear. To illustrate that point, the then Secretary of State, in response to a question that I asked on 15 October—on whether an AS-level is half an A-level or not—said:

"There are six modules in an A-level: three at AS-level and three at A2. AS-levels count for half an A-level . . . Due to the linear nature of some subjects, it was deemed that the first year six, usually the AS-levels, would be marginally easier than the old A-level standard. To maintain that standard, therefore, the second year had to be marginally more difficult than the A-level standard. That is where the difficulty lies. What is clear is that the overall standard of AS and A2"—

together, I presume—

"is the same as previous A-level standards."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 217.]

That is indeed where the difficulty lies, and the right hon. Lady could have said that again. Dr. Boston told the Select Committee—I am quoting from an uncorrected transcript of evidence—the following:

"The issue is, we are dealing with A levels as they have been for 50 years; the change is, we are arriving at it now from two papers, one of them is a hard paper, one of them is an easy paper, relatively."

The regrading was announced on 14 October. Grade boundaries were revised in 18 units. A total of 9,800 candidates had unit grades changed, and 1,845 individual students received a changed grade. On 15 November 2002, in the debate on the Address, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who is not here, raised various questions that arose from discussions with Mr. Roger Porkess, an official of the OCR board. I shall not go into the details today, but, in short, the hon. Gentleman blamed the Tomlinson inquiry's terms of reference for the problems arising, suggesting that those terms were too narrow. His words were:

"The inquiry's terms of reference had more to do with saving the face of Ministers than with getting to the truth."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 300.]

I do not, in all honesty, see any evidence for that view. The terms of reference were much broader than simply to examine areas where the grade boundaries had shifted substantially, and Mr. Tomlinson himself decided which grade boundaries to examine in detail.

Some points arise from the hon. Gentleman's remarks, which Ministers have still to consider. First, why did Mr. Tomlinson take no evidence from the chief examiners? Secondly, was the OCR board right to profess pleasure at the fact that only 18 of its examinations had changed, or was it benefiting from a rather narrower inquiry than Ministers had perhaps expected? Finally, and most importantly, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said very clearly to the Secretary of State that

"the Secretary of State must ensure"—

I believe that the QCA should do so as well—

"that no scripts are destroyed until all the lessons have been learned from this year's debacle."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 300.]

Regrettably, it was not only Ministers who showed an element of panic and made things worse. The evidence given by the former chief executive of the QCA, Sir William Stubbs, to the Select Committee, drew attention to what I consider the wholly improper behaviour of a special adviser and a chief press officer—I have occupied one such office—in the Department. He said—again, this is an uncorrected transcript—the following:

"On 19 September I had complained directly to the Secretary of State about the continuing damaging references that were being made by her staff about QCA to the press, and asked her to take action to stop them . . . during the period from the setting up of the Tomlinson inquiry . . . officials . . . were directly briefing the press that QCA was 'dead in the water' and that by the end of that week I would be gone as Chairman."

Later on, he says that he believes that that was said at

"a briefing given to the press by Chris Boffey, the political media adviser"—

I think he was a special adviser—

"and the civil servant who is head of news, D. J. Collins, must surely have taken a lead in this. Those were the ones I asked the Secretary of State the week before when there was malign briefing taking place, particularly during an independent inquiry, would she act to stop it. If she did act, they did not stop."

He goes on to say:

"I knew Collins would give stories to reporters and then imply, 'If you do not report them in a way that is friendly you will get cut off and get no more stories.' I have been told that by reporters."

He continues that

"having had it reported to me direct what was happening, it appeared in the press not once or twice I think but five times, so I do not think there is much doubt there . . . either these people were acting as free agents, in which case they are loose cannons in the departments and this is a big department of state, or they were acting under instructions. Either way that was a flawed system and it should not happen."

I consider his words to be moderate. If officials are bullying and briefing the press in such a way that they are not free to report and print what they wish to, it is far more than a flawed system; it is a disgrace. The Department was rapid—more rapid than I have known it to be for some time—in responding to the Committee. It denied the allegations in an unpublished memorandum. I find it hard to see why a man of such high repute as Sir William Stubbs should make such allegations if they were unsubstantiated.

Everyone, including the former Secretary of State, accepts that curriculum 2000 was introduced too rapidly. As Mike Tomlinson said, it was an accident waiting to happen. That conclusion is of wider application. Grade boundary setting could be attributed to a lack of guidance from QCA. Regrettably, the 50:50 or 60:40 split that is the relative value of AS-levels and A2-levels appears to be a fudge that has not yet been acknowledged or resolved. If there is any explanation for Dr. McLone's behaviour, it is that he was intellectually too honest to be able to cope with the

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

fudge with which he was landed by the claimed 50:50 split in the relative value of the papers. The destruction of papers immediately after A-levels should be prevented at all costs.

Ministers fuelled the crisis and their officials fuelled it disgracefully. The examination was introduced in a rush, and the way ahead is far from clear. We must re-establish confidence in the A-level as the internationally recognised gold standard in school leaving examinations. If we start to talk again about a new system, as the present Secretary of State did this weekend, the A-level will never regain the confidence that it enjoyed for 50 years.

11.18 am

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) is unable to be here to respond to the comments that were made about his contributions to the debate.

I approach the subject with a certain amount of background knowledge and experience. I taught A-levels for about 25 years, examined A-levels in three different subjects, designed A-level questions and dealt with A-level appeals. I recognise that some of the things that the Government are endeavouring to do are highly commendable, and that their education policy is to raise standards. They also want to maintain the integrity of a qualification that has international recognition, which I support.

The Government are also trying to encourage breadth in post-16 qualifications. A good aspect of AS-levels—a desirable one in the view of many education institutions—is that they prevent pupils at the age of 16 from considering themselves as scientists or non-scientists, as linguists or non-linguists, or as interested in, or not interested in, the arts. The narrowness of the English post-16 curriculum has been a deficiency for many years. Although A-levels have maintained a consistent standard, they have been associated with a certain narrowness.

AS-levels found a place because of the necessity to bridge the gap that emerged after the introduction of GCSEs. It was quite evident to those in schools that pupils who had done well in a subject at GCSE were not always competent to proceed to A-level straight away; they needed some form of interim assessment to gauge how well they might do at A-level. In the case of languages, pupils would often get a very good GCSE grade, only to flounder badly at A-level. The AS-level plugged that gap.

I also applaud any attempt by the Government to encourage a parity of esteem between A-level qualification and some of the higher technical and vocational qualifications. It is manifest that this country has a severe skills gap, and anything done to address that is all well and good.

Most Members in the Chamber would therefore support the Government's intentions, but their effect this year has been somewhat dire, particularly for the many students who have had to recalculate their careers and rethink the university courses that they wish to do. They have been surprised and sometimes depressed by their results. The esteem of the system has taken a knock. I recall the Leader of the Opposition saying in the House of Commons—rather unwisely—that many A-level qualifications are no longer thought to be worth the paper that they are written on. That comment was deeply insulting to the people who received those qualifications, but it reflects—in a kind of saloon bar manner—the damage done to the system. The Government would say that that was an entirely unintended consequence, but one can plead that only when an unintended consequence is not foreseeable. The consequence was entirely foreseeable; it was an accident waiting to happen.

The introduction of AS-levels took place against a background of pupils being over-examined, and of schools being more crudely exam-driven, because of the need to figure prominently in local area league tables to attract increasing numbers of pupils. It also took place against a background of exam boards behaving—I am not being unfair—in a more entrepreneurial manner, whereby exams are hawked to any establishment that will take them. That is not a desirable tendency.

There is also a shortage of good examiners. Some desirable improvements have made the examination system more transparent, but they have also made examiners more reluctant to take up their task. I am referring to the system whereby pupils can retain and examine their papers, and return to the examining board with their views on how they have been marked. That is not a bad thing in itself because it leads to greater transparency, but a necessary consequence is that every examiner needs not only to put a justified mark on a paper, but to explain in considerable detail why the mark is justified. That makes additional work, which is fine if it is for additional pay. However, many quality examiners have found that such work is not compensated for, so they have decided to give up, rather than work against a background of the permanent prospect of litigation.

The Government should have been perfectly aware of that background because education institutions, teachers, parents and pupils were. The Government are therefore doubly responsible if they act rashly against a background that they themselves have ensured is rather tricky. Just like the examinee who walks into an exam without having prepared properly, they can be blamed to some extent for the outcome. Moreover, before introducing AS-levels they did not run an adequate pilot. That is a key factor, and one to which many Members will wish to draw attention. The philosophy and principles were there, but the difficulties involved in bedding down the system within a working school were not at all apparent to the Government.

In the Government's defence, it should be said that modular exams were nothing new. They had been running for many years before AS-levels were introduced, but there are differences between the AS-level in its fully-fledged form and previous modular exams. In subjects such as chemistry, it was perfectly possible to believe that a pupil could perform as well at 17 as at 18. That idea was manifest in most results for, and in most evaluations of modular exams in, such subjects. In many arts subjects—I am talking from my own experience—there is an appreciable improvement in a pupil's maturity, ability and grasp between 17 and 18. That means that considering the type of modular

exams used to test science subjects is not a good way to establish how modular exams of the AS-level and A2-level type will run.

In considering specifically what went wrong with AS-levels this year, it is clear that there appears to have been some perverse statistical moderation. I do not want to enter into the details of that. As the Minister will undoubtedly tell us, statistical moderation is nothing new. It has become more sophisticated over the years. At one stage, it might have been a matter merely of setting a crude percentage rate; these days, it is something rather more considerable.

Fundamentally, there is nothing wrong with statistical moderation. One needs to guard oneself against the vagaries of exams. With the best will, and preparation, in the world, exams can still vary from year to year. They can be unduly harsh one year and more lenient the next, but the qualification should be of the same standard. Statistical moderation is also necessary to guard against the vagaries of examiners, who work within very tightly defined schedules, but who can still veer on the side of being stricter than, or more lenient than, their counterparts. There is no reason why pupils whose papers are sent to strict examiners should do worse than pupils whose papers are sent to lenient ones.

Statistical moderation is a well-understood science that is carried out by comparing across examiners, and across exams and years. Interestingly, some of that data would have been missing this year. There were no previous years to consider, so the probability of something going wrong was greater. There was nothing on which to look back, and it appears that panic set in on some boards and among some statisticians. The normal procedure of adjustment led to results that would have looked implausibly good. The examination boards clearly felt that those results could not be presented to the QCA, and that they needed some modification.

The QCA is not considered to be the simple guardian of standards. Within the educational establishment, it is widely regarded as a body with its own agenda. Despite its safeguarding watchdog role, it was initially quite happy with the results. I understand that the whistle was blown by pupils and schools who found the results downright implausible.

Mr. Andrew Turner: The hon. Gentleman has alluded to the QCA's agenda. Will he tell us what that agenda is?

Dr. Pugh: I do not want to go into too much personal and anecdotal detail, but I have spoken to chief examiners and people who have had visits from the boards' statisticians, and I have seen examination prototypes go back and forth to the QCA. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that—apart from the issue of preserving standards—the QCA has fixed views about what it wants, and can be quite prescriptive in terms of modes and types of examination, and so forth. If the hon. Gentleman has time later, I dare say that I can fill out my comments further.

All of us will agree that lessons have been learned. The Tomlinson review has taken place, and schools have drawn their own conclusions to some extent. Some schools are leading a minor stampede towards [illegible] baccalaureate because they feel that the situation cannot be redeemed. I would like to believe that the Government have learned a big lesson: that they must learn a little better, listen a little more and anticipate a little better. However, for as long as schools are evaluated by crude league tables, examiners are overworked and underpaid, exam boards behave like ticket touts when selling their examinations to schools, and the QCA behaves like God, my guess is that such episodes will not be isolated. Although we may not have quite the same debate next year or the year after, and although the difficulties may not be quite the same, the problems associated with A-levels and AS-levels will not go away.

11.30 am

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): As a fellow north-west Member of Parliament, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will be familiar with the overriding characteristic of Southport, which is that the beach goes on and on before you reach the sea. When the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) stood up with 70 minutes of the debate stretching out before him, I was afraid that he might be tempted to be a true physical embodiment of his constituency, so we are grateful to him for being so sparing in his comments. I shall try to follow suit, although the Minister may not be entirely grateful. However, I am sure that he has copious notes.

I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) for raising this important subject. As he made clear, he has been pursuing the matter rigorously and doggedly in the Select Committee, which has been doing a good job in trying to find out the details of exactly what happened in this year's A-level fiasco. My hon. Friend went to some lengths to describe the picture, but his opening comments must stay in the minds of all Members. He said that the A-level inherited by the Government was the internationally renowned gold standard but that, within five years, it had moved to a state of full-blown crisis. We have become used over the years to allegations of grade inflation, but this year the more serious allegations—some of which have been proved—were that grades had been deliberately adjusted and rigged to conceal the process of grade inflation.

The introduction of the AS-level was mishandled. There were, of course, good reasons for looking at ways to expand the breadth of the sixth form curriculum, such as trying to avoid too much specialisation too early. Indeed, Governments of both parties sought to achieve that. However, since the introduction of curriculum 2000 it has become clear not only that it was badly introduced but that, in the round, it has caused more harm than good. That is because it has limited the opportunity for sixth formers to engage in extra-curricular activities in the arts, music and drama. That absurd situation was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) in this Chamber a few months ago when we last debated the AS-level. He told us that his daughter had been forced to withdraw from the school play because the demands of her drama AS-level course were so great. Most sixth forms have experienced that narrowing of their students' overall experience, even if the curriculum has marginally widened.

[Mr. Graham Brady]

The hon. Member for Southport alluded to the fact that that absurdity has led to students who are already heavily examined being grossly over-examined. The constant repetition of public examinations at the ages of 16, 17 and 18 does not simply put extra pressure on sixth-form students; some are able to cope well with the pressure, others less so. It also has the negative effect of squeezing teaching time out of the sixth form. In a classic two-year course to A-level, comprising six terms, one term is effectively lost to examinations. Instead of having five terms to teach up to A-level, schools now find effectively that they have only four terms. They lose a term to the AS exams and a term to A2.

The perverse effect is that students come out at the other end of the process having been taught less. Crucially, they also miss out on what has always been held to be one of the most important parts of teaching people to A-level, by which I mean the little time that it takes to make the bridge from GCSEs to A-level, where the skills required are different, more complex and harder to gain.

A huge additional burden has been added to the marking system, which has been overloaded. The difficulties of finding people to mark the exams and of ensuring that the system retains its integrity have been immense. Against that backdrop, the Opposition have called for the AS-level to be withdrawn. That leads to some continuing problems that the Government need to face about the proper allocation of marks between the two papers; where the boundary should be drawn, and whether AS papers should be graded as a smaller percentage of the marks in recognition of the fact that AS is easier than the A2 stage of the A-level process. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight spoke on that subject. It is clear that the approach taken of pretending that AS is worth 50 per cent. of an A-level has been an instrumental factor in grade inflation. That led to the problems that we have been left to tackle.

The hon. Member for Southport referred to the QCA as having its own agenda, and said that it behaved like God. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight will have time to take him up on his kind offer of letting him hear more of his views later. If so, I would be interested to know what information has been imparted.

Mr. Turner: I had rather hoped that the hon. Member for Southport would use the many minutes available to put his views on the record, so that we could examine them in depth later and so that everyone could share them.

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend is right; we all hoped that the hon. Member for Southport would take advantage of that opportunity. During my brief remarks, there will be an opportunity for him to speak if he wants to intervene, and I am sure that the Minister will extend him the same courtesy. We wait with bated breath until such moment may come.

One of the main responses to this year's A-level crisis has been the suggestions—they have come from Her Majesty's Opposition, but have been echoed by bodies throughout education, such as head teachers' organisations and many interested observers—that the only way in which we can tackle the problem and have confidence in the performance of the QCA is if it is clearly and emphatically removed from ministerial control. The QCA needs to be genuinely independent. We have said that its independence should be much like that of the Bank of England, with a remit set by Parliament that it then has to fulfil without even the possibility of ministerial interference or intervention, such as that which cast a shadow over the A-level marking process this year.

Almost everyone agrees that the system would be greatly improved if the QCA were given that independence. Does the Minister and the Department for Education and Skills agree with that? Or is the QCA the only body standing in the way of what most people feel would be a step towards transparency and independence, which would help to restore the integrity of the A-level system and restore confidence in our whole examination system? I think the Minister agrees, so I hope that, when he responds to the debate, he will announce that there was an unfortunate oversight in the Gracious Address, and that the Government had intended to introduce a Bill this Session to give the QCA that much-needed independence. I suspect that such a welcome surprise awaits us. That would be an important step towards addressing concerns about the status of the A-level system and the difficulties that we have had this year regarding the different treatment of grade boundaries.

Initial reviews have taken place and have taken us a little way forward, but there remains considerable concern and uncertainty about the marking of A-levels this year. It has been suggested that another 20,000 scripts may need to be remarked or regraded. There is evidence that some examination boards—even those that have not seen fit to regrade this year's examination papers—are responding by changing their grade boundaries for next year, which implies that they accept that there is a problem. For example, the OCR is adjusting the grade boundaries for psychology for next year's exams, although this year's psychology papers were not adjusted. Many schools remain concerned about unexpectedly low grades, especially for coursework. One school was shocked to find that 14 out of 20 entrants were given a U grade for their coursework; those 14 candidates had been expected to perform well and the school could see no reason why the results were so poor.

Following the inquiry and the agreement that papers might be returned to schools, one would have thought that there would be a degree of openness and that all those concerns could be swept away. In fact, the process is causing more worry in some instances. I shall refer briefly from a letter sent from one school to Dr. McLone at the OCR. I shall not mention the school's name because I do not have its permission to raise the matter publicly. The letter stated that the second batch of A-level psychology scripts were returned to the school without the cover sheets, so it had no details of the marks awarded. Furthermore, the school was informed that the scripts bore no annotations; neither was there an accompanying report, unlike the returned scripts for other OCR subjects. All of that made it very difficult to understand why the school's candidates did so badly on the coursework element. In fact, the school was hardly any the wiser now than it was on results day.

Many schools and examination candidates remain concerned that they may not have been treated fairly. The fact that detailed information is not being provided and that papers and marks are being withheld is a cause for serious concern.

What is certain is that tens, even hundreds, of thousands of A-level students were left in torment during the summer, not knowing what their grades were worth. University admissions officers were thrown into disarray, not knowing how many students they might have to accept this or next year. It is certain that parents, employers and pupils are worried about the validity of the whole A-level exam, and that many will go on to take their exams next year not confident that the mess has been sorted out. Against that background, Ministers are saying that a form of baccalaureate might be the answer might be the answer and that we should perhaps scrap the A-level and give it up as a bad job.

There is a pressing need for action now to restore confidence in our A-level system. Ministers may be contemplating moving to a different examination system, but that will take some years. The many students who enter their A-level years before such a change takes place deserve to know that their exams will be fair and to be assured of the integrity of the examination and marking systems. I strongly endorse the suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight that speculation about the introduction of a different system is damaging the reputation of the A-level at a time when we must do everything in our power to restore confidence in it and to restore the system's integrity.

11.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): In the short time remaining, I shall endeavour to respond to the points raised in the debate. I join the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) in congratulating the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on giving us the opportunity to discuss this issue, which is important for our education system, before next week's publication of the second Tomlinson report. I thank everyone who has participated in the debate and I shall do my best to respond to their points.

The main priority throughout the recent difficult events was the students who studied for and sat exams in the summer, and those who will study for and sit exams next summer and in future years. In no way do I underestimate how difficult that time was, and thousands of students up and down the country faced uncertainty. That is why it was so important that the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris), responded quickly when allegations first appeared. She responded to the concerns of head teacher associations by inviting Mike Tomlinson to conduct his two inquiries. His first report was published some time ago, and the second is due to be published next week.

Let me make it clear that one wrong result for a student is one wrong result too many, and there must be no complacency about that. It is important that we not only acknowledge and discuss this year's difficulties but that we keep a sense of perspective. I do not concur with the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West when he says that the introduction of the new system has done more harm than good. The number of students whose grades were changed was relatively small. That is not to underestimate the impact on them or to say that such things are acceptable. However, I cannot accept the use of terms such as "crisis" to describe the situation that we faced earlier this year. Nevertheless, we need to learn from what happened, and, in that respect, we have had a good debate. The three Opposition Members who have spoken have contributed to the important process of considering how we can learn from what went wrong this year.

Dr. Pugh: It is statistically certain that the number of appeals this year has been relatively small, but that is not the issue. We are concerned not about the number of appeals, but about their nature and the grounds for them.

Mr. Twigg: Absolutely, and I am coming to that. That is a fair point.

At the instigation of the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), we debated similar issues in Westminster Hall before the summer recess and before the A-level results had come out. We focused in part on the nature of the curriculum 2000 reforms and on how they would progress, and we heard demands to abolish the AS-level. Those demands have been repeated today, but they are a panic reaction to what happened over the summer. Like all hon. Members, I visit schools and colleges week in, week out to see how things are going, and I do not believe that they would welcome such a reaction. Indeed, I understand that head teacher associations, in their recent evidence to the Select Committee, strongly argued against us reacting in that way.

Mr. Brady: Does the Minister believe that it is right and helpful for pupils to be examined three times in major public examinations, at 16, 17 and 18?

Mr. Twigg: Examination and testing form an important part of our secondary and primary education service. However, I accept that there is a case for considering the pattern of examinations, the balance between internal and external examination and testing, the mix between assessment and testing and the timing of testing.

Mr. Brady: Does the Minister think that there is a case for abolition?

Mr. Twigg: I would not argue that any examination necessarily needed to be abolished. We need to consider the mix of testing, examination and assessment available in each examination conducted throughout secondary education, from key stage 3 through GCSEs to A-levels.

I agree with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight and others that we should reaffirm the principle that the A-level is a gold standard. After this summer's difficulties, our first response must be to reaffirm that point. With a new system in place, we need a period of stability. The broader debate about the 14 to 19 curriculum and the qualifications available in that age range involves a wide range of organisations, including many young people. We shall publish our proposals in the new year, as we develop the Green Paper.

[Mr. Twigg]

The hon. Member for Southport referred to the long-standing debate about how to achieve a greater parity of esteem between academic qualifications and subjects and those of a more technical or vocational character. It is clear that the matter needs to be addressed urgently, in terms not only of economics but of providing real opportunities for all young people. That is reflected in the positive response given to our Green Paper for the 14 to 19 age range.

We need to get the balance right. As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight said, we need a period of stability. We have a new system, and we do not want the gold standard of the A-level to be undermined. However, we must also recognise the reasons for introducing the AS-level in the first place. It has undoubtedly broadened the curriculum at 16 and 17, which has been widely welcomed. When I visit sixth forms in secondary schools or further education colleges, I make a point of asking people what they think about the AS-level. Sometimes they complain about the constraints on extra-curricular activity; it would be daft for me to deny that that was an issue. More frequently, however, the young people who sit the examinations welcome the fact that they are studying four rather than three subjects in the lower sixth. I have spoken to several A2 students, in the upper sixth, who say that they have ended up doing three different subjects at that stage from those they would have chosen when they were 16 because of the extra year of experience.

It would be foolish of me to deny that there are downsides and pressures, but the new system overall has some great strengths and has done more good than harm. We must learn from the difficulties of the summer, but I support the changes introduced as a result of curriculum 2000. During Mike Tomlinson's initial inquiry, he found widespread support for those principles. After only the first year of the new A2 examinations, it is far too early to consider abolishing them. We must make a success of them by learning the lessons of this summer.

Mike Tomlinson's initial inquiry made several recommendations, providing a clear way forward for re-establishing confidence in the A-level system. Everyone who has spoken today has said that that was what they wanted to achieve. The Government immediately accepted all Mr. Tomlinson's recommendations, and we suggested that the QCA take them up as a matter of urgency. The authority is doing that under the leadership of Ken Boston and Tony Greener.

Mr. Turner: The Minister said that the Government had accepted all of Mike Tomlinson's recommendations. I refer to the remarks of the former Secretary of State, who said,

"Mike Tomlinson said that the structure had been introduced too quickly, and I have said all along that I accept every one of his recommendations."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 212.]

Does that mean that she accepted—and that the Department, Ministers and Government accept—that the structure had been introduced too quickly?

Mr. Twigg: We accept all of the recommendations that were made by Tomlinson. That does not necessarily mean that we sign up to every phrase in the report concerning evaluation and analysis. Hindsight is a wonderful thing; some said at the time that we were moving faster than we might, but many believed that the pace was sensible. We piloted the AS level in a number of institutions and did not move immediately to implementation after the 1997 election. A month ago, Dr. Nicholas Tate, the headmaster of Winchester college, said in a letter to the permanent secretary of our Department that in his view it was perfectly possible to introduce the new A-levels without major problems in the agreed time scale and that although extra time might have helped, the time scale should not be blamed for the problems this summer. That is his view and Mike Tomlinson expressed a different one. We have accepted the recommendations for the way forward that were set out in Mike Tomlinson's report.

Mr. Turner: Why was the OCR board producing specifications of examinations for the QCA to sign off before the QCA had delivered to it the targets for those examinations?

Mr. Twigg: I would love to be able to answer the hon. Gentleman's question, but I cannot do so now. I shall write to him.

Following Mike Tomlinson's initial inquiry, the QCA has worked with the examination boards, the regulatory authorities and head teacher associations to prepare a clear description of the relationship between the AS and A2 parts of the A-level courses and the standards of the resulting qualifications. Distinct versions will be prepared for practitioners in schools, colleges and higher education as well as for a wider audience including parents, students and employers.

Grade boundaries were, as has been said, central to the problems this year. The QCA has been working with subject specialists across the examination boards to prepare reference collections of exemplar material representative of the A-B and E-U grade boundaries, which are set on the basis of examiner judgment for both AS and A2 qualifications. QCA is also producing performance descriptions reflecting the characteristics of candidates' work at the two grade boundaries. Next year, for the first time, examination boards will have the benefit of archive scripts for A2 units, which will be of assistance. Tomlinson recommended revisions to the code of practice governing the key elements of assessment and award for AS and A2 exams. The QCA is now working on the revisions, paying particular attention to the section that governs the setting of grade boundaries, including the contributions of awarding panels, subject specialists and the accountable officer of the particular examination board.

We understand that the exam boards have assured the QCA that they have arrangements in place to train their examiners in the use of the revised code of practice and exemplar materials in time for the next set of examinations in January 2003. Early next year, in preparation for the summer exams, there will be extensive training, for both teachers and examiners. We are confident that those actions will prevent the repetition in 2003 of this summer's problems. Next week, Mike Tomlinson will report on the second stage of his inquiry, in which he has reviewed the operational pressures on the A-level system. We shall carefully

consider his recommendations and act upon them to ensure that A-levels provide accurate, robust and respected recognition of the attainments of all the young people who take them. Among the issues that Tomlinson is examining is the respective weighting of AS and A2 grades, an issue that has been raised during this debate.

At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Member for Isle of Wight mentioned transparency and the operation of the QCA code of practice. The second Tomlinson report, which will come out next week, will look at the procedures that the hon. Gentleman described and make recommendations on how the current system can be improved further to guarantee standards and consistency.

Why did this year's problems happen? Mike Tomlinson concluded that they were created by the perceived pressure on exam boards from the QCA, the lack of guidance on the level of attainment expected for a particular grade in an individual paper and the lack of common understanding about the standard required to ensure that the overall A-level standard was maintained. Although responsibility for standards rests firmly with the QCA—we are pleased to see its new leadership taking forward Mike Tomlinson's recommendations on clarifying A-level standards—the Government are clearly responsible for addressing the broader policy issues, many of which have come up in today's debate.

I shall address a number of the specific issues that have been raised in the debate.

Dr. Pugh: I should be interested in the Minister's views on the little sideshow debate on the QCA. My view is that the QCA has pursued its own agenda. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) wants it to be independent, which implies that it was pursuing a ministerial agenda. What is the Minister's view of the QCA?

Mr. Twigg: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for a moment because I intend to address that point and a related point made by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West has also raised specific concerns about psychology. The regrading exercise highlighted specific issues concerning syllabus design and assessment and marking schemes that the OCR was using for psychology. We have asked the QCA to look into that issue to make sure that the OCR takes effective action quickly to address it before next year's exams in January and July.

Mr. Brady: Does the Minister agree that in the interests of transparency it is essential that the cover page and the annotated scripts should be available to schools when examination papers are returned to them?

Mr. Twigg: That sounds reasonable, but I shall have to take further advice and write to the hon. Gentleman to ensure that I give a fully accurate and considered response.

The hon. Members for Southport and for Altrincham and Sale, West raised the question of young people in education today being over-tested, and the hon. Member for Southport connected that to the publication of performance tables. I am acutely aware of that concern. Over this term, the Department has been conducting a series of conferences around the country with secondary head teachers in which we have been discussing a number of issues including leadership in schools and how we can best ensure collaboration and the sharing of good practice between schools.

The concerns set out by the hon. Member for Southport came up frequently at those conferences. My Department faces the challenge of looking at how we can balance the proper desire of parents and students to know about schools' performance with the immeasurable outcomes, which can make a real difference for young people, that schools deliver. That point is serious. When I meet employers and employers' organisations—I am sure that other hon. Members will have experienced this—one of their most frequent concerns about young people leaving school and applying for work is weakness in the field of "soft skills"; that is a terrible phrase but we all know what it means. Interpersonal and communication skills are important in achieving success today. They are not necessarily measured by performance tables, and I should like us to debate how we can more effectively encapsulate how successful a school is in making a difference to immeasurable, so-called soft skills, which matter to young people.

The abolition of performance tables is neither viable nor desirable, but the provision of a wider context in which to place information—for example, via value-added measures—and an ability to describe some of the other things that schools do that make a difference to the abilities and outcomes of young people is worth considering. I hope that we can take that forward, and I look forward to hearing the contributions to that debate.

Dr. Pugh: I value the Minister's encouraging noises. What he is saying is totally appropriate. However, when considering what is measurable, there may be a tendency with league tables for students to be entered for examinations that may reflect well on the school and provide a good profile for it. Students may be discouraged from entering exams that are worthwhile but in which it is difficult to attain the highest grades. They may be entered for exams that are of less value in career terms, but in which they are likely to achieve good grades. There is concern that schools may hunt grades per se, instead of putting the needs of pupils first.

Mr. Twigg: I am aware of that concern, but not of how widespread the practice is. I accept that it has been alleged in some cases, but we should tread with care on such allegations. It is vital that young people are entered for the examinations they want to take and are capable of studying for. We must send that message firmly to schools and colleges throughout the country.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight referred in his opening speech to the destruction of examination papers. That is a matter directly for the examination boards and the QCA, but I can reaffirm what the Secretary of State said during the debate on the Queen's Speech; that, in the light of the Tomlinson inquiry, the planned destruction of A-level scripts has not gone ahead and there will be no such destruction before January 2003. I hope that that provides some reassurance for the hon. Gentleman.

[Mr. Twigg]

The hon. Member for Southport referred to the burden on examiners, which is serious and heavy. There has been a significant increase in the number of external examinations for which people are studying and we need to consider the matter. I addressed part of the issue in a direct exchange with the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West about the balance between internal and external assessment. Teachers have always undertaken assessments, and we all remember regular testing from our school days. The modular assessment that typifies A-levels now is that it enables students to obtain an early understanding of how effective their learning has been and to identify areas for improvement enabling them to make firm decisions about their studies. As we take the discussion forward in the light of experience this year and publication of the second Tomlinson report next week, that is one aspect that must be considered.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West raised the question of the QCA's independence. I am not entirely clear whether that would have made a difference. Ken Boston said that he believes that the QCA does act independently and that neither he nor Mike Tomlinson—nor anyone else—has seen any evidence of political interference or pressure on the QCA, so I do not believe that it would have made a difference to recent events. Nevertheless, we are open to that debate and we have asked Mike Tomlinson to consider the matter carefully in the next stage of his review. The key principle for the Government is that the exam system matches public expectations of integrity, fairness, objectivity and consistency.

Mr. Turner: Does the Minister accept that Dr. Boston also said, again in his uncorrected evidence, that there should be greater distance between the Government and the awarding bodies? He was critical and referred to the "quite close contact" between DFES officers and individual officers in awarding bodies at a variety of levels and purposes. He was sure that all of that was benign but felt nevertheless that, in a situation where there was a regulator, the relationship was not a desirable one.

Mr. Twigg: I am aware of Dr. Boston's comments and I have said that we are open to the debate. The hon. Gentleman is tempting me to go further, as did the hon. Member for Southport earlier, but I would go beyond my remit if I did. However, I reiterate for the record that we are open to debate and consider that matter to be an important part of the way forward so that we can guarantee the continued integrity of the A-level and learn the lessons from this year's experience.

I again thank the three hon. Members from Opposition parties who contributed to this debate. It has provided an important opportunity to review the events of the past few months and for the House to learn lessons about those events. I look forward, as I am sure do hon. Members on both sides of the House, to the publication of the second Tomlinson report next week. It will provide an important foundation for taking the debate forward.

12.10 pm

Sitting suspended.

12.30 pm

On resuming—

2012 Olympic Games

12.30 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): I want to use this short debate to add my voice to those supporting a British bid to host the Olympic games in 2012.

The bid would be based in, but not exclusive to London. The sports enthusiast in me would relish the chance to see the world's greatest athletes competing against one another in our great capital city. Which sports fan would not want the chance to see great Olympic performances in their own country, following in the footsteps of Linford Christie, Tanni Gray or more recently the remarkable Steve Redgrave? Enthusiasm for sport alone is not a good enough reason to bid for the Olympic games. We should bid because of the galvanising impact of the Olympics on its host city and nation.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport and his colleague the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The Government have been entirely right in the way that they have approached the issue thus far by working alongside the British Olympic Association, the London development agency and the Mayor of London to commission a full analysis of the cost and benefit implications of bidding for and hosting an Olympic games and a Paralympic games. Given that joint working is one essential prerequisite for a successful bid and event, the joint work thus far has been very encouraging.

I welcome, too, Ministers' determination to assess the legacy of past Olympic games, with visits to Sydney and Barcelona, and to look at the legacy that future games will bring by a visit to Beijing. That is an appropriate way in which to take an open-minded approach to the issue. The early clarity that the Secretary of State gave in a debate on the Gracious Address was welcome, too. She set out criteria that the Government would use in judging whether to back a bid: affordability, deliverability and legacy. She also gave a welcome commitment for a longer debate in Government time to allow the House to consider the merits of an Olympic bid.

The Arup report is very clear. We cannot afford to wait for the chance to host an Olympic games in 2016. We either bid now for 2012, or the next realistic possibility that we will ever have of winning the chance to host the games will be for 2024. Even if a non-European city were chosen for 2012, the bidding experience gained would be invaluable for a 2016 bid. The Arup report estimates that the cost of bidding for the games would be £13 million, of which £6 million could come from the private sector. Given the likely benefits for tourism and other business activity, that is pretty good value. Even if we do not win, an Olympic bid will help to forge new and deeper partnerships to help tackle the regeneration of the Thames gateway area, for example.

The real concerns about affordability centre first on the figure of £2 billion, which is confusingly quoted by some as the net cost of hosting the games, and secondly on whether such a figure is too low given the theoretically inevitable cost overruns. It is worth placing on record that the £2 billion figure is not the predicted net cost as it does not take into account the income from the sale of sporting rights, from ticket sales and so on. There has been much misinformation about the cost of previous Olympic games, which has lead some people to speculate that costs for every Olympic games are likely to overrun. The Sydney games actually made a small profit on running costs, and both Sydney and Atlanta hit their financial targets broadly speaking. The one financial element in Atlanta that did not match the original budget was the cost of security, following the bomb that went off. There were significant differences between the overall costs of the Barcelona games to the public purse and the original estimate of those costs. It is important to remember that a new high-speed rail link and a motorway link are additional benefits that the Olympics helped to deliver once decisions to be more ambitious about the legacy of the games had been taken. Certainly, the Athens games are likely to be substantially more expensive than originally envisaged. Just about every new infrastructure project that the games have required Athens to build has been held up by archaeological issues. That is not a concern that we are likely to have to confront with a London games based in the lower Lea valley and Stratford area.

We can have confidence in Arup's financial modelling, not least because it allows for significant cost overruns in the years closest to the games when the amount of building work will be at its height. Arup estimates that at 2002 prices the games would cost about £1.8 billion, with a likely income of some £1.3 billion—a net cost of almost £500 million. As the excellent British Olympic Association points out, that does not include any income from the European Union. It is worth noting that Athens has managed to secure some £1.4 billion for Olympic-related projects. Given that some of the local authorities where the games would be held have objective 2 status, there remains a real possibility that, like Athens, we could secure additional financial support from the EU.

Another element to factor into any consideration of the financial costs and benefits of hosting an Olympic games is the likely increase in tourism, the value of which Arup conservatively estimates to be up to £610 million. An independent study recently suggested that more than £2 billion in inbound tourism spending in Australia was directly attributable to the staging of the Olympics in Sydney. In summary, Arup estimates that there is a gap of almost £500 million, which could completely, or to a large extent alone, be compensated for by the additional tourism benefits generated—apart from the wider legacy, which I shall discuss now.

The financial appraisal does not include any element of the additional income coming into the UK or any assessment of the extra jobs created. For Barcelona alone, it is estimated that the net economic impact equated to about £11 billion. Arup estimates that some 3,000 full-time jobs would be created just within the east London economy, not including any extra employment generated elsewhere. Nor did the financial analysis cover the regeneration of the Thames gateway area. There would be some 4,000 new housing units, all built on brownfield land, together with large-scale reclamation of contaminated, derelict and under-utilised land. That would have massive regeneration benefits.

[Mr. Gareth Thomas]

Another key aspect of the legacy of the games is the additional facilities that are required for visiting Olympic athletes to train, which can also provide increased opportunities for grassroots sport in the United Kingdom. New swimming pools have been identified as being fundamental. The capital has just one 50 m pool, which could be used for competition, although it is in need of refurbishment. In addition, many sports need all-purpose halls for training, which would necessitate significant investment in the capital's leisure facilities, many of which are in varying degrees of repair.

As the British Olympic Association points out, in the run-up to the games visiting teams would need training camps dotted around the UK. The Americans might want to be based in Manchester, or the Russians in Birmingham, which would inject significant sums of money into those regional economies. Many of the events that will be held during the games do not have to take place in London. Football could be played at a variety of venues around the country—perhaps at Sheffield, which would give my right hon. Friend the Minister's constituents an opportunity to see high-quality football again.

To secure a lasting legacy from the Commonwealth games in Manchester, Sport England developed new training and activity strategies based on the new facilities bequeathed by the games. A new national squash centre was required as part of its funding agreement to produce a clearly thought through development strategy, which, it is predicted, will lead to 8,000 children from the north-west visiting it to play squash. A fundamental part of the games could and should be to develop participation, coaching and club management structures, as well as to improve the sporting infrastructure.

The games in Sydney and Manchester relied on an extensive volunteer pool. The experience of Sydney has shown that that culture of volunteerism has continued, with people becoming auxiliary officers, community workers, teaching assistants and so on. Some 10,000 volunteers were recruited and trained for the Manchester Commonwealth games—the youngest were 16 and the oldest 87. About 15 per cent. of them were recruited from ethnic minorities and 5,000 from disadvantaged areas of the north-west. More than 1,800 achieved a specially devised, nationally accredited qualification. Manchester has re-proven the case that a major sporting event can be a catalyst for economic and social regeneration. In addition, as UK Sport has highlighted, elite sport will also benefit from a home competition, which provides more role models and inspiration to generations of young people.

London and the UK already enjoy a high international profile, but it is likely that the global marketing opportunity offered by the Olympics would generate additional inward investment into the UK. Sydney and Atlanta have highlighted that as a significant benefit from the games hosted in their cities. The last element of the legacy of such games, aside from transport, is the impact on national prestige that hosting the largest sports event in the world brings the host city and nation.

The last criterion that the Government will use to judge whether to bid, which my right hon. Friend announced in her speech, is deliverability. To paraphrase some of the sceptics in the media, after the problems in securing Wembley, the decision to cancel Picketts Lock and the experience of the dome's finances, have we really the capability to deliver such a large sporting event, and will we have sorted out London's transport needs by then? It is worth reminding those sceptics that Britain annually stages Wimbledon, the Open golf championship and the London marathon to global acclaim. The Manchester games were delivered to the very highest standards, and no less a figure than Jacques Rogge, President of the International Olympic Committee, has confirmed his belief that Britain could stage a highly creditable bid. We are bidding with confidence to host the 2007 rugby World cup—which I know all hon. Members will expect Wales to win—and we successfully hosted the 1996 European football championships. We have a good track record in delivering sporting events successfully.

Sceptics also point to London's transport difficulties, but new airport capacity at Heathrow, such as the new terminal 5, or at Stansted will ensure that there is sufficient capacity for overseas arrivals by aeroplane. The channel tunnel rail link through to Stratford will be up and running by then. Although Crossrail is not essential in securing effective transport for the Olympic games, the completion of the central London element will undoubtedly help. Arup remains confident, after discussions with London's transport experts, that the projected number of journeys by transport to and from the Olympic zones can be handled without delays or unacceptable disruption to normal travel patterns in London. Undoubtedly, the deadline of an Olympic games will help further to concentrate minds among London's transport planners, which can only be beneficial to those of us who live in London and experience the daily frustration of commuting at the moment.

Another element of the deliverability calculation could be described as the Ken factor. Can all the myriad forms of government—the local authorities, the London development agency, the Mayor, the Greater London Authority, Sport England, UK Sport, the British Olympic Association and the various Government Departments that would be involved—really be expected to work together effectively? They worked together effectively to make the Manchester games a success and they work together effectively in the various other international sporting events that we continue to host. That does not only happen for other sporting events here; it is worth putting on the record the experience of Barcelona, where many of the same problems were faced and people overcame them successfully, with considerable positive benefit for their city. In Barcelona, the state, provincial, city, port, tourism and redevelopment authorities and agencies all successfully worked together through a single regeneration plan, using the Olympics as a catalyst for what most people recognise as a highly successful example of urban transformation. If they could do it, we can certainly do it in London. Just bidding for the games would help to create additional pressures to promote agency co-operation.

In short, I believe that London could host the Olympic games at a much lower cost than is perhaps widely accepted at the moment. In the process, it could effectively secure a legacy of benefits, including the regeneration of the east London-Thames gateway area, additional certainty about transport quality and significant new social housing units, not to mention the extra investment in sporting facilities for community use and the mass new programmes to increase participation in sport at all levels.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and I am sorry that a prolonged telephone call meant that I missed the first minute or two of his speech. He has made an extremely cogent case and it will be considered by many people who are anxious to see the matter progress.

On deliverability, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept that, notwithstanding the Conservative party's current difficulties, it is possible that between now and 2012 there will be a Conservative Mayor of London and/or a Conservative Government. Although we, like the Government, are not in any position to write blank cheques, I want to reassure the hon. Gentleman, the Minister and those who are watching our deliberations, that we are very supportive of the Government's efforts to progress the bid.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his statement of Conservative support for an Olympics bid. His analysis of the chances of having a Conservative Mayor of London and a Conservative Government is perhaps best suited to dreams, rather than reality.

Hosting the Olympics would be a considerable boost to the tourism industry in both London and the United Kingdom as a whole and would result in a whole range of other benefits for British business. The Olympic games are the greatest sporting event in the world and having them in our country would undoubtedly be a powerful inspiration to get involved in sport. That in turn would help our efforts to tackle obesity, reduce crime and generally raise the aspirations and ambitions of all our communities. I hope that there will be a bid to host the games.

12.47 pm

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I thank the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) for giving me this opportunity to support what has been said so far. Like my hon. Friend, I come at the issue from the point of view of a sports fan. However, we have to have a realistic head on when we approach something as major as the Olympic games. I would love to see the Olympic games in London. I have no doubts about that.

I have not had an opportunity to visit the Olympic games elsewhere in the world. Like many people, I have had to watch them on television. The games inspire a generation of people to watch sport at its best and to see the best competition in the world. There are other world athletics championships and other forums in which people are able to compete, but nothing compares to the magic of the Olympic games and the desire for that gold medal. Money and professionalism have not totally spoiled the Olympic games. Once every four years, there is still that idealistic desire to be the best in the world.

As a non-London Member, I would like to ensure that this is not just a London-focused Olympics bid. I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West has reassured me on that point. He made several comments about the ability of other parts of the country to benefit from the Olympic games. For example, he mentioned Birmingham and Manchester as being suitable sites for the Americans or the Russians. I am sure that Loughborough would probably be considered first, given the excellent facilities at the university and the support that could be provided. I am sure that my constituency would be on the list of places that would benefit from providing such a base for a major nation.

My hon. Friend also rightly pointed out that many of the major sports would not necessarily be based in London. It is possible for many of those sports to be located in the rest of the United Kingdom and still not be that far away. Obviously, the Australian model provides a clear example. Some of the sports were not held at the headquarters, but were spread around. The lack of time differences and the travel distances in the United Kingdom mean that it would be possible for teams to be based centrally and to participate in sports in Birmingham, Manchester and other parts of the country without too many difficulties.

My major concern still comes down to the general or net cost of the Olympics. I fully accept my hon. Friend's arguments that it would not be the £2 billion figure that is bandied around. However, we must identify from where even a net cost of £500 million would come. Based on my experience and that of others who are here today, there would be some cost overrun as well. For example, the Commonwealth games, which were a fantastic success, needed interim and other funding just to ensure that they happened. My fear is that the £500 million might creep up. If it does, we must be clear at an early stage exactly where the shortfall will come from, because there is a real danger that we could fall into the same trap that we have fallen into previously.

I believe that we have the ability to deliver. Anyone who visited the Commonwealth games in Manchester will have seen the enthusiasm of the crowds. I caught a bus with a group of schoolchildren who were going from the railway station to the Commonwealth games. There was a fantastic atmosphere before they arrived, and they spent the rest of the afternoon screaming about absolutely everything that happened. I hope that the legacy of that enthusiasm will be not just an enjoyable afternoon but that those children will be able and willing to carry their enthusiasm into their homes, schools and clubs. I want to hear stories in 10 or 15 years about people collecting gold medals who were inspired to join an athletics club by the Commonwealth games in 2002.

As a general supporter, I believe that there is an enormous amount of work still to be done, but I want to ensure that we get it absolutely right. I was sceptical about our ability to do it and the reasons for doing it until I visited the site in Australia. Recently, I met the mayor of New York, who is enthusiastic about the bid that that city wants to put together. If New York thinks that it can do it with the transport problems that it has, I see no reason why London should not also do so.

It would be a brave decision. I hope that the Government listen very carefully and are not put off by the failure, or whatever one wants to call it, of our 2006

[Mr. Andy Reed]

World cup bid. The unique circumstances of that bid meant that from the beginning it was very difficult, to put it politely, to succeed. We have a fair wind on our side for the 2012 bid. Therefore, we stand a good chance from the beginning, whereas unfortunately our 2006 World cup bid was scuppered right from the start.

Our bid must be such that it is seen worldwide as a great advertisement not only for London but for sport itself. We must ensure that our sporting heroes are involved, because they inspire young people. Key to making it work are club structures and national governing bodies that are ready and willing to pick up individuals who are inspired by the Olympics. There is a small window in which the inspiration of the Olympics can be translated into people joining clubs and in which it can result in a lasting legacy. Wimbledon is an example of that. No one can get a municipal tennis court for the two weeks of Wimbledon, but activity drops off again for the rest of the year. We must ensure that the club structure brings in enthusiastic people.

Finally, I also want to ensure that if money is found for this it is not money that would otherwise be used for the day-to-day grassroots support for sport in this country. We must consider carefully the danger that we may fund a one-off that lasts just a few weeks and offers no lasting legacy of regeneration or benefit for UK sport as a whole.

In conclusion, I am an enthusiast but I am also a realist. I am 90 per cent. convinced. I hope that as the debate continues during the coming weeks and months many of the scepticisms and genuine concerns of people such as me will be eroded and that by the time the Government makes a decision some time in the new year we will be clear about which way we are going and how much it will cost. In that event, the Government and others would have my total and full support.

12.53 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing the debate. He might know a lot about the Olympic games, but he obviously does not know much about football. I invite him to Bramall lane, the mecca of football, to enjoy the delights of watching Sheffield United play any team he wishes.

This is the first debate on the potential bid for 2012. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the Department and I want an ongoing debate in which people can express their points of view, which can then be factored into the final decision. We need an informed debate in the next few months before a final decision is made. The timetable means that we have to indicate to the British Olympic Association early in the new year whether we are supporting a bid. If we are, our intention to bid must be presented to the International Olympic Committee by July next year; the bid itself for the 2012 games can be made up until 2005. That is the broad timetable to which we are working.

I should like to say something about the local and, in particular, the national press. *The Daily Telegraph* has been doing a first-class job in bringing forward the debate objectively. Clearly several issues have to be explored, such as regeneration and the sporting spectacular that is the Olympic games. *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail*, too, have been ensuring that the case is being made and that a proper and informed debate is taking place.

As my hon. Friend said, the summer Olympics are in a league of their own. They are the biggest sporting event in the world with more than 10,000 athletes, and 300 events and 28 sports being represented. No other sporting event covers such a wide spectrum of sport in such depth and with such competition. The games attract millions of spectators to the host city and billions of television viewers worldwide, and they have an impact well outside the sporting world. I have just come back from Sydney and have seen the impact that they have had on inward investment, tourism and the like. For a month or six weeks—perhaps a little longer—the host city is a massive window for the world, so it is important to get it right. The systematic way in which we are evaluating the bid and the UK's potential is correct.

In making its bid, Britain should be seen to be competent. In response to what my hon. Friend said about the Commonwealth games, one could argue that prior to those games our reputation had been slightly tarnished by what had happened in 2006 and the subsequent decision on Picketts Lock and the International Amateur Athletics Federation world athletics. However, since then the Commonwealth games have been described by the President of the International Olympic Committee, Jacques Rogge, as probably one of the most competent Commonwealth games that have been held for many years.

The Commonwealth games were hugely successful in every respect, even financially—there were reserves at the end, as the contingency fund did not have to be fully used. After 11 September, such an achievement is a credit to all those who managed the games in Manchester and their financing. However, to put that into perspective, the total cost of the games was about £330 million, of which some £30 million came from the private sector and £300 million from the public sector. Arup's estimate for the Olympics in 2012 is about £2 billion, which is a factor of about six greater than the cost of the Commonwealth games.

After the great euphoria of Manchester, people were asking Sports Ministers and the Secretary of State, "Why not Manchester?". That question might be justified, but one must consider that the British Olympic Association has concluded that the Olympics should be staged in London because a key requirement is that the staging city should be able to provide sufficient accommodation. First, the Olympic family is huge, numbering up to 40,000. Beyond that, the number of spectators will be vast—perhaps millions over the relevant period. A fairly large city or a conglomerate is needed to accommodate such numbers efficiently. That is why the Arup report was commissioned.

Hong Kong Basic Law

1 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I am grateful for the opportunity to focus on the Hong Kong Government's proposals to implement article 23 of the Basic Law; those are important and controversial constitutional issues in Hong Kong. I have requested this Adjournment debate to raise the issues and concerns of many in Hong Kong. Also, I have the privilege of being joint chairman of the all-party House of Commons Hong Kong committee, which recently visited Hong Kong and engaged in extensive discussions with most of the key civil servants and politicians, and has since met Martin Lee.

The debate centres on whether the proposals are essentially a modernisation of archaic laws—which is, broadly, the Hong Kong Government's argument—or whether they are a beginning of the application of mainland concepts of national security, under something of a disguise.

The background to article 23 is the Sino-British joint declaration, signed by the British and Chinese Governments in 1984, which is registered as an international treaty with the United Nations. That lays down that Hong Kong's way of life and capitalist system should remain unchanged for 50 years post 1997, while the Hong Kong Government should remain fully autonomous except in the areas of foreign policy and national defence. The principles of the joint declaration form those of the Basic Law. The joint declaration, however, provided that

"the laws currently in force in Hong Kong"

should

"remain basically unchanged"

and that

"rights and freedoms, including those of the person, of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of travel, of movement, of correspondence, of strike, of choice of occupation, of academic research and of religious belief will be insured by the law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region."

Article 23 was included in the Basic Law as something new and additional on the insistence of the mainland Government. There is an argument of principle that it is in breach of the provisions of the joint declaration, as it calls for the application to Hong Kong of legal concepts that are incompatible with the freedoms guaranteed by article 3(5) of the joint declaration. Article 23 states:

"The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government or theft of State secrets, to prohibit foreign political organisations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region and to prohibit political organisations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign or political organisations or bodies".

It is argued that the Hong Kong laws that would prohibit subversion against the mainland Central People's Government could be contrary to the articles of the international covenant on civil and political rights relating to freedom of expression.

In June, matters came to a head when the Chinese Vice-Premier Qian Qichen was reported as saying that the Government of Hong Kong should get a move on with enacting article 23, but that the people of Hong Kong should not worry about it and that it was not intended to restrict democratic rights in Hong Kong. He claimed, however, that it would be illegal for Falun Gong members to retain links with Falun Gong practitioners outside Hong Kong—that is, on the mainland.

The Hong Kong Secretary for Justice, Elsie Leung, has responded to comments made by the British Government by promising that there would be full public consultation—which is now taking place—before draft legislation was introduced; that any legislation would comply with the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights; that freedom of speech, association and religion would be upheld; and that legislation would not be aimed at imposing sanctions on any group such as Falun Gong. She also pointed out that the current criminal code could be amended to cover some of the elements outlined in article 23.

Hong Kong already has domestic legislation on treason, sedition, official secrets and activities, and ties with foreign political organisations. However, some of those provisions are clearly outdated and are also potentially very wide. There are no offences of secession or subversion in Hong Kong law. Before 1997, Governor Chris Patten attempted to introduce legislation in those areas, but those efforts foundered in the face of opposition. Although the Legislative Council passed a Bill before handover, it was not enacted by the incoming Administration.

The Hong Kong Government now intend to put draft legislation to the Legislative Council in the new year, with a view to its being enacted next summer. There has been a debate as to whether it should be a White Paper or a Blue Paper. It has ended up as a Blue Paper, though it seemed to us that more of a White Paper approach was being followed, in terms of consultation. A main concern is that the legislative proposals could potentially allow the Government to ban any organisation of which the Beijing Government disapprove, where provisions in the area are not even specifically required by article 23 of the Basic Law.

Few states have express laws against secession and many do not have laws against subversion. The mainland concept of national security is very different from what we are all used to in democratic countries. The deal agreed under the joint declaration was that the PRC concept of national security would not be applied to Hong Kong. Under the treason section, it appears that any business person who trades with Taiwan could risk prosecution if their products end up being used by Taiwan's armed forces or otherwise to assist in Taiwan's defence. There is also a proposal to contain and modernise the archaic offence of misprision of treason, that is, the failure to inform the authorities of treason being committed by someone else. The new treason offence would also apply to all persons who are voluntarily in the Hong Kong SAR, where it is questionable for treason laws to be applied to persons who are not citizens and owe Hong Kong no loyalty.

The proposed new offence of secession includes extra-territorial jurisdiction powers, and could widen considerably the number of people who would not be admitted to Hong Kong or who might not be regarded as safe to enter Hong Kong. The proposed offence of

[Mr. Howard Flight]

sedition is broadly similar to the existing common law offence, but is arguably unnecessary, as the last prosecution was 50 years ago. The mainland Government have traditionally used the offence of subversion to persecute and suppress legitimate opposition. The Hong Kong Government's proposals link the offence of subversion to overthrow by violence or serious unlawful means.

The Hong Kong Government are not proposing any extension to the law on relations with foreign political organisations. However, they propose a new mechanism for banning organisations affiliated with a mainland organisation that the central authorities have proscribed in accordance with national law, on the grounds that it would endanger national security. In that context, affiliated means connected. The key concern is that if such an organisation is proscribed on the mainland, Hong Kong is notified. There will inevitably be such evidence of past or present connections between such organisations that the Hong Kong Government are effectively obliged to ban them.

The general impression that the all-party committee formed from its visits was that there was certainly no malign intention by the Hong Kong Government, and that a great deal of what was being proposed was updating out-of-date law, but that it might have been better to use a White Bill. However, there are major constitutional issues to bottom that I certainly think have not been fully bottomed. In a sense, the constitutional challenge to the Hong Kong Government is to set out fully convincing arguments as to why the legislation would comply with the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, and the international covenant on civil and political rights, as they claim is the case. Also, they must demonstrate that we need not worry if the legislation did comply, as they would not be forced to ban organisations that were banned in the mainland. The system for appeals might be better left to the courts than dealt with under the new proposals.

Others want to speak, so I shall finish in a moment. I trust that the United Kingdom Government are well alive to the issues. The consultation in Hong Kong is open and public, but the constitutional issues raised have not yet been fully answered or bottomed.

1.10 pm

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on securing the debate, and thank him for giving me time to contribute. I speak as another co-chairman of the Hong Kong committee. Coincidentally, I am also the chairman of the all-party group on China. My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons), the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs and I were privileged to be part of the delegation that recently visited Hong Kong, and I declare an interest in that regard.

Article 23 is important, but discussion of it must be taken in the context of the situation in Hong Kong and our relations with it as a whole. I hope that we might secure a longer debate on our relations with Hong Kong and, with others, I will try to set that in hand. The House has continuing responsibilities in relation to Hong Kong under the terms of the joint declaration, because of its intrinsic importance and our major investment and commercial, cultural and educational interests there. Also, we have an interest in the 3.4 million British passport holders in Hong Kong, especially the British nationals overseas.

Like everything else in Hong Kong, article 23 needs to be seen in relation to the "one nation, two systems" concept, and against the background of the maintenance of confidence—internal and external—which drives the Special Administrative Region. I fear that Qian Qichen's comments do not seem entirely helpful when put in that context, or in the context of democratisation. The concept of Hong Kong's being allowed to run its own affairs, save in relation to foreign policy and defence, has been nigh on meticulously maintained. The handover and subsequent events have gone at least as well as we might reasonably have hoped.

Hong Kong administrators often tell of the old days when, at the end of the United Kingdom working day, they received floods of telegrams of instruction from London on everything under the sun. Now they receive none from anywhere, and certainly not from Beijing.

I do not underestimate the difficulties that article 23 could involve and the importance of the issues that it covers. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs eruditely set those out. It is right that there are concerns. However, I found—I think that the rest of the delegation that recently visited Hong Kong agrees—that while in hindsight the Government of Hong Kong might reasonably have been best advised to publish a White Bill, they are still engaging in full consultation.

Enacting article 23 of the Basic Law is an imperative. It is not discretionary, although its timing is. I welcome the consultation. I am largely persuaded that the Government of the SAR are fully conscious of the need to maintain a separate regime and to be perceived as so doing. I am assured that the content of article 23 when enacted will be in accordance with international covenants on human rights, and will maintain the differences inherent in the concept of "one nation, two systems". It is, after all, a matter of self-interest for them to do so.

However, other pressing issues face Hong Kong. It is in the economic doldrums, with a budgetary deficit. Its propensity to reinvent itself is challenged. We were told that, even on best forecasts, it would take until 2006–07 to balance the budget; that takes account of soccer betting and border crossing taxes—and people are discussing such issues as a profit tax, a sales tax and even a maids tax, but all of those factors need to be set against the background of the issue of confidence, both internal and external.

Following the transfer of its manufacturing base to booming Guangdong, Hong Kong has transmogrified itself into the ultimate professional service for China—a service that provides a gateway but which is also a massive quarry of unrivalled expertise, possibly the best in the world. Hong Kong, together with its expatriates, has skills in financial services, the law—particularly commercial arbitration—banking, accountancy, information technology and so on. The difficulty is that more of those services and skills, with the possible

exception of the law, are being provided in China. It has a talented people and is developing those services at a rapid rate.

The development of Shanghai may be considered complementary as well as competitive, but it could further restrict Hong Kong's ability to transmogrify itself. It must be said that, when compared with that of China, Hong Kong's economic performance currently looks weak. Property values have weakened massively and could be off their peak by 50 per cent. and more. Hong Kong, the icon of adaptation to free market forces may need to become—dare it be said?—more dirigiste. It may need to plan its future differently. In that context, it was interesting to see that the cyber port, developed at the Government's initiative and with the Government's backing, is heading in that direction by creating a new way forward for Hong Kong.

Perhaps the most important issue facing the SAR is that of democratisation. In my view, the present ministerial system is not sustainable in the long term, nor can it be regarded as other than a stage in the development of democracy in Hong Kong. Progress towards universal suffrage is inadequate. I accept that the Basic Law does not require that until 2007, but it is important that the debate starts now and that progress is made. Many voices in Hong Kong are calling for it—in and outside LegCo. Progress is, again, not least a matter of self-interest and the retention of confidence. It is for me vital not only for the general well-being of the people of Hong Kong, but for its economy. I hope that the Hong Kong Government can be persuaded to move forward as soon as possible.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. For the Minister to be given an adequate chance to respond, I must call him no later than 13.20.

1.17 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I thank the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight). I wrote to him and he kindly offered me two minutes of his time.

I make a declaration of interest. I was recently a guest of the Special Administrative Region in Hong Kong.

I wish to make three brief points. First, I was impressed with the vigour of debate on article 23. Freedom of speech is very much alive in Hong Kong, which is good. Secondly, on the substance of the proposal, I was impressed with the professional job done in the consultation document. Indeed, as an aside, I would say that I am impressed with the civil servants I met there. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs and my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) both said that the debate has not been helped by the official comments, and concern has been expressed about whether there should be a draft Bill. As a lawyer, however, I am not especially shocked at the substance of the proposals—they include provisions on entering premises without a warrant and official secrets—as we have similar provisions in the UK.

That leads me to the third point. It seems to me that the concern is more about how the provisions will be used. At present, the Special Administrative Region is an open society with the rule of law. I was impressed by the quality of the Bar and the judiciary, which augurs well for the future of the rule of law. It is therefore important that Britain and other countries such as the United States should retain an interest in Hong Kong. Some people expressed concern that that interest was waning, and an assurance from the Minister that Her Majesty's Government will retain their special interest in the SAR would be welcome.

1.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), whom I congratulate on having called this debate. I am also genuinely pleased by the all-party group's interest in Hong Kong, which gives people there a clear indication of the continuing Government and Parliamentary interest in their well-being.

As the new Minister with responsibility for Hong Kong, I am delighted that our relationship with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is so strong. There continue to be many high-level exchanges and three Cabinet Ministers have visited Hong Kong in the past five months alone. Hong Kong's Chief Secretary was here in July and we were pleased to welcome Mr. Anthony Leung, Hong Kong's distinguished Financial Secretary, here this week. I met him yesterday morning and I am pleased that he will meet my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon. This debate has testified to the fact that Members of the House regularly visit Hong Kong, and Members of the Legislative Council also make the reverse journey to this country. I hope to visit Hong Kong early in the new year as part of a wider tour of China.

I want to take the opportunity afforded by this important Adjournment debate to get across the message that Hong Kong is a success story despite the current economic difficulties. It is important that that success is maintained as a result of the debate on article 23 and we must be conscious of the factors that have made Hong Kong successful, including the rule of law, guaranteed rights and fundamental freedoms, a level playing field for business, free flows of information and the efficient and effective market regulatory system. Those mechanisms have played a vital role in ensuring that Hong Kong maintains its position and develops as an international business hub. It is crucial that they are preserved when article 23 of the Basic Law is enacted.

That brings me to the key element in Britain's relationship with Hong Kong—our responsibilities under the Sino-British joint declaration on Hong Kong. The declaration provides that Hong Kong should have a high degree of autonomy from mainland China, except in foreign affairs and defence matters. It states that basic rights and freedoms shall be ensured by law in the Hong Kong SAR, and we have followed affairs closely since the handover. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reports twice yearly on the implementation of the joint declaration. Where we have had concerns that its principles might conceivably be undermined, we have raised them with the SAR Government or with Beijing.

Overall, as my right hon. Friend's bi-annual reports have made clear, our assessment of the "one country, two systems" principle remains broadly positive. Hong

[Mr. Bill Rammell]

Kong has generally remained free to exercise its autonomy in all relevant regards, as promised under the joint declaration. However, as debate on the issue has developed, we have noted strong concerns among many sectors of Hong Kong society about the SAR Government's proposals for legislation to meet its obligations under article 23 of the Basic Law. As some hon. Members have clarified—I am grateful to them for doing so—such legislation has been foreshadowed for some time, and the Basic Law says that the SAR shall enact legislation. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly the most sensitive legislation that the SAR has had to enact since the handover.

We have closely followed the matter from the outset, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised article 23 as a general issue with the Chinese Vice-Premier and the Hong Kong Chief Executive during a visit to Hong Kong in July, before the SAR issued its consultation document. Subsequently, my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor discussed the proposals in some detail during a visit to Hong Kong in October, and yesterday I had the opportunity to raise some of those issues with the Hong Kong Financial Secretary.

As a result, on 18 November I issued a public statement welcoming the wide consultation process undertaken by the SAR Government. I made it clear that as a cosignatory to the joint declaration, we had a responsibility to ensure that the rights and freedoms enshrined in the joint declaration were maintained. I went on to say that any new legislation must be compatible with those rights and freedoms and with maintaining Hong Kong's autonomy.

A key concern that has been raised through the process is the proposal to ban organisations in Hong Kong affiliated with mainland organisations proscribed on the mainland on national security grounds. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs referred to that matter. We note that the consultation document says that the Hong Kong Secretary for Security would have discretion not to follow suit. However, there remains a concern that the integrity and independence of Hong Kong's legal system, which are key factors in the region's continuing success, might be compromised by the proposal. We hope and have made it clear that the SAR Government will consider the issue carefully as they draft the legislation in detail.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs mentioned Falun Gong and I know that other hon. Members are also concerned about the impact of that provision on that organisation. The Hong Kong Secretary of Justice has said that the proposals are not aimed at particular groups, but we hope that the draft of the Bill will give us the fundamental reassurance that we need.

Concerns have also been expressed about the impact of the proposals for the media. All hon. Members will agree that a free press is one of Hong Kong's distinctive strengths. Freedom of expression is certainly provided for in the joint declaration and any action that diminishes press freedom would not be in the interests of the people of Hong Kong.

We have highlighted other concerns and we hope that the SAR Government will consider them carefully. They have indicated that they are willing, in principle, to be flexible on at least some of those areas. We warmly welcome that fact.

We are listening to some of the strongest critics of the SAR Government proposals. Last week, the Foreign Secretary and I met Martin Lee, the chairman of the Hong Kong Democratic party. We listened to his concerns, told him that we were following the case carefully and assured him of the importance that we attach to the issue.

This has been an important debate. The proposals show the complexities that arise from Hong Kong's special status under the "one country, two systems" principle. We welcome the SAR Government's assurances that the legislation will be compatible with the international covenant on civil and political rights and that on economic, social and cultural rights, to which Hong Kong is party. That is a vital point, but the test will come with the precise wording of the proposed legislation, without which it is impossible to determine whether there is any conflict with the two United Nations human rights covenants.

Calls have been made for a "white Bill" to set out the detailed legislative proposals before the draft legislation is introduced into the legislative council. Given the intense interest in the proposals, we hope that the SAR Government will provide for full and genuine public consultation on the detailed legislation, whether through a "white Bill" or through some other mechanism. I made that point to the Financial Secretary yesterday.

We have also encouraged the SAR Government to start consultations on other outstanding elements of the basic law. I agree that the ultimate aim is to bring forward democracy, but until that happens it is crucial that the SAR Government should go the extra mile and ensure that no rights and freedoms are eroded in Hong Kong.

In conclusion, people hold contradictory views. Sometimes, we are told that the Government speak out too much on such issues and, on other occasions, we are told that we speak out too little. We will continue to put forward our views on areas of concern in the interests of and as a friend of Hong Kong. Article 23 must be enacted by the SAR Government, but it must be done in such a way as to preserve the tremendous success story of Hong Kong as an international city. We hope that its enactment will contribute to that success.

Crossrail

1.30 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Crossrail 1 is an imaginative project for an east-west railway line through central London. It could increase the capacity of London's underground and national rail services by 15 to 20 per cent. In the west, it will run from a terminus beyond the M25—yet to be decided—but it will certainly serve Heathrow airport. It was announced last week that it would include stations at Paddington, Bond Street, Tottenham Court Road, Farringdon, Liverpool Street and Whitechapel. To the east of Whitechapel, one option is a route north of the Thames, through Ilford and Romford, to Shenfield in Essex. The second option is a route through the Isle of Dogs and along the south bank of the Thames, through the London boroughs of Greenwich, Bexley and Dartford, to a terminus at Ebbsfleet in Kent, the international station on the channel tunnel rail link.

I intend to concentrate on the route from central London to Ebbsfleet. The company responsible for developing and promoting those routes is a 50:50 joint venture of Transport for London and the Strategic Rail Authority, which has been allocated a budget of £154 million by the Government to carry out preparatory work and acquire powers for the lines. It is intended that a decision on the preferred routes will be taken before the end of the year, with the possibility of a hybrid Bill being brought before Parliament in the 2003–04 Session.

The choice of route through east London cannot be made in isolation from the major Government-sponsored project for the development of the Thames gateway. That will regenerate east London on both banks of the Thames and Thameside areas of Kent and Essex through the provision of many thousands of new homes and jobs, mostly on brownfield sites.

One of the largest areas available for business development in London lies in riverside Greenwich and Bexley in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin). That land lies in wards that are among the 10 per cent. worst deprived nationally. Improved transport from east to west and across the river is the key to realising business opportunities and job opportunities for local residents. A new river crossing is already proposed. The crossrail link from central London to Ebbsfleet is exactly what is needed to prime the regeneration of the area, as has been shown in study after study.

One reason why I fear that that opportunity might be overlooked in deciding the route for crossrail is because of the ritual practices of transport planners. Many of their methods of analysis and models are based on identifying latent and unsatisfied demand among existing residents and businesses. They then explore the road and rail links that will satisfy that demand most economically. In many cases, that is the right approach, but it is not the right approach where transport links are intended to promote the development of new communities or to attract new businesses, as in the Thames gateway. In those circumstances, the approach that is appropriate to serving pent-up demand in existing communities leads people to say, "Why put a railway through north Greenwich and Bexley when there are insufficient people and jobs in the area to justify it?" That is the point; regeneration means attracting the development of housing and jobs because they are not there. Exactly that argument raged 25 years ago, about extending the Jubilee line through docklands, which was not done for the reasons that I mentioned. Acres and acres of land remained derelict for two decades until the Jubilee line was extended. We should consider the effect that that has had on the Isle of Dogs and the Greenwich peninsula.

My first plea is for crossrail 1 to be built from Whitechapel to Ebbsfleet. Businesses will then be attracted to Greenwich and Bexley Thameside because the reduced journey times will enable them to pull in skilled employees from the whole of London. For example, the journey from Paddington will be reduced from more than an hour to half an hour. Those businesses would also have easy access to the European Union via Ebbsfleet or internationally via Heathrow as a result of crossrail. The quality of employment available in the area could change dramatically. The same arguments apply in reverse to the residents of the area. Their job opportunities would lie in the whole of London rather than locally or in central London.

There has been talk of taking the crossrail route only as far as Charlton, Woolwich or Abbey Wood and then relying on an interchange with Connex services on the north Kent line. It is well known that such interchanges deter passengers from using the service. What is the point of the line going through the Isle of Dogs—which is doing very nicely—and the developed areas of Charlton and Woolwich, but stopping short of the major areas of regeneration opportunity in Belvedere, Erith and Crayford? At least, the first stage should extend to Slade Green, so that a substantial part of the potential regeneration area would be covered. Such talk is worrying because it makes it look as though the project is being directed with a narrow focus on cash and engineering, without any attention to the wider regeneration issues. It is especially strange for the crossrail service to stop short at that point, as the company responsible for crossrail has told me that the extension to Slade Green would add little cost because the land is already available.

I make the strongest possible plea for the line to be built to Ebbsfleet in continuing stages, with firm dates for the beginning and end of each stage and a firm commitment of money to make those dates credible. Britain, particularly London, has a history of "manana" public projects. No one can be sure when they will be carried out so the private sector is, understandably, unwilling to commit complementary investment until public works are finished. For crossrail to achieve a regeneration objective, it is vital to have a firm and credible construction programme so that companies can plan and invest concurrently.

The consultation document contains two variants on the route from the Isle of Dogs to Ebbsfleet. One goes from the Isle of Dogs past the dome on the Greenwich peninsula to Charlton and the other continues on the north bank of the Thames, through the major development area in the royal docks and crosses the river by a tunnel to Woolwich Arsenal. Thereafter, the routes are the same to Ebbsfleet.

[Mr. Nigel Beard]

The route through Charlton is estimated to be some £400 million cheaper than that through the royal docks. However, the Charlton route is already densely developed, so the potential for new residential or business development is limited. In addition, constructing the Charlton route would prevent Connex services on the north Kent line from going directly to London Bridge as they now do.

In contrast, the royal docks area offers a major regeneration opportunity; crossrail could make it into an extension of the developments on Canary wharf. Access to London City airport and to the Excel exhibition centre would be greatly improved and people from Greenwich and Bexley would have a major new source of job opportunities.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): On behalf of the London borough of Newham, might I underline the enormous significance of the royal docks option? It will be worth a great deal in terms of the thousands of extra jobs and homes for the area. It is right to stress the impact of transport on regeneration. The benefit is already clear in the east end, so I hope that the Minister will pay careful attention to my hon. Friend. Other Members of Parliament from the east end strongly endorse his comments.

Mr. Beard: If it were thought that crossrail should stop at Charlton and not continue to Ebbsfleet until years later, the extension would be unlikely ever to be made. Substantial demolition of houses between Charlton and Woolwich would be involved, whereas the royal docks route involves no such inhibition. The question about the royal docks route is whether the economic gains would make the extra £400 million cost worthwhile. In my judgment, that route has much greater regeneration potential than that through Charlton, as my hon. Friend has just said. If that does not carry enough weight with the Minister, it is also the judgment of my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin) and for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas), the London boroughs of Newham and Bexley, the London development association, the London Transport Users Committee and the Mayor of London.

In summary, it is essential that crossrail 1 through east London be considered as a major contribution to the regeneration of the Thames gateway to London, the greatest foreseeable opportunity for urban regeneration in Britain. To achieve maximum effect in prioritising the development of housing and jobs, crossrail should go from central London to Ebbsfleet via the royal docks as one dedicated railway line. Planning must include a commitment to the necessary finance, so that there is sufficient confidence for private investment to be concurrent with public investment. On that basis, crossrail 1 and the Thames gateway project can be trailblazers for urban regeneration in Britain in the 21st century.

1.41 pm

John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) for allowing me to speak in the debate. He and I represent an area of London that is one of the worst served for public transport and includes some of the 10 most deprived wards in the country. My constituency includes Thamesmead—in effect, a new town designed in the 1960s as a contribution to solving London's housing crisis, but built without any thought of providing an adequate public transport infrastructure. Inadequate bus services developed in an unplanned and uncoordinated way as the population grew, with the result that transport in and out of Thamesmead is poor and within it even poorer. Thamesmead's nearest railway station is Abbey Wood, on the periphery.

Part of my constituency lies in the London borough of Greenwich, and colleagues at Westminster often assume that because of that, I have access to the new Jubilee line station, which serves the Greenwich peninsula. However, where I live, on the boundary of Thamesmead and Belvedere, in the heart of my constituency, there is no direct bus or any other link to the Jubilee line. Even from parts of my constituency that have a direct bus link, the journey time can be an hour or more. Yet Thamesmead and Belvedere, as my hon. Friend said, represent one of the largest employment areas and potential employment areas in London. The Belvedere employment area is the second largest industrial area in London, with potential for more development. Realising the potential of the Thamesmead and Woolwich industrial estates, the Belvedere employment area and, further east, the industrial and development sites in Erith and along the Thames road to north Kent, as well as retaining existing businesses, depends on good transport infrastructure.

The Minister saw for himself on his recent visit the problems caused by the Thames road bottleneck. When he saw the view from the top of the Pirelli vulcanising tower, he could see the development potential. Regrettably, a few days after the Minister left the site, Pirelli served 90-day redundancy notices on the bulk of its staff and the company is in danger of closure. I hope that he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will intervene to ensure that the Government do what they can to protect the submarine cable industry in this country.

Paul Clark (Gillingham): On the point about the potential success of businesses in your constituency, are you not concerned that if the stupid proposal to end the line at Abbey Wood happens, congestion in your constituency will be much greater? Would you agree—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. My constituency is some way from east London.

John Austin: There are problems inherent in that. I would support an Abbey Wood destination and interchange as an interim measure, as long as we had the future plans to Ebbsfleet to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford referred.

Before constituency boundaries were changed, I was the Member for Woolwich. The seat included Woolwich Arsenal, which in its heyday employed more than 80,000 people on one site. It was the largest factory in Europe and it was bigger than the whole of Ford Europe is today. Woolwich Arsenal gradually declined after the

war and was eventually closed in the 1970s. Boundary changes have resulted in it being just outside my constituency, but it borders Thamesmead.

I have been campaigning for almost 20 years for a rail tunnel under the Thames at Woolwich. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford and I would have preferred a heavy rail link, which would have provided the best opportunities for regeneration by linking with the north Kent line to fill in the missing link in the orbital rail network.

The decision to extend the docklands light railway, which will help to boost the local economy in Woolwich and to assist the Woolwich Arsenal development, has been taken. It will not, however, have the major regenerational effect that crossrail would have had. As my hon. Friend said, the choice of crossrail route cannot be made in isolation from the development of the Thames gateway, where there is a large area of development land on both sides of the Thames, which could provide the homes and jobs that London needs.

Crossrail offers an opportunity to redress the east-west imbalance in London, and a route to the royal docks in Newham would support regeneration in what the Mayor's draft London plan identified as the third largest opportunity area in London. East London and the Thames gateway can provide one third of London's total new housing requirement and 40 per cent. of all new jobs. The royals is the largest area of development land in the Thames gateway and opting in favour of a station in Charlton would be short sighted and would jeopardise the regeneration benefits for the royals, which are in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks).

The royals route could also serve London City airport, which would link to the Government's recent report on airport capacity in the United Kingdom. That report proposes a planning policy actively to encourage airports to maximise their potential capacity by utilising their existing runways. At present, City airport serves 1.6 million people a year and the Government's consultation paper suggests that that figure could reach 5 million by 2030. That figure could be achieved sooner with crossrail, which has a possible throughput of 7 million passengers per annum by 2030. The extension of the docklands light railway to the airport by 2005 will certainly provide better access, but it will be insufficient to support either the airport's growth in capacity or the full development of the royals.

I live under City airport's flight path. The airport is a few miles away, but whether I travel by public or private transport I can get to Gatwick more quickly than I can get to it. Crossrail will massively cut journey times in east London. The journey time from the royals to Paddington would be down from 58 minutes to just 18, and that from Tottenham Court road to the royals would be down from 49 minutes to 14. The royals option is important for London, but the scale of the potential development, the key visitor attractions and the university make it nationally significant.

I know Charlton because I lived there for 15 years and represented it on Greenwich council for nearly 20 years. I lived a few hundred yards from Charlton station and the sacred turf of the Valley. There is a highly developed residential area to the south of the Woolwich road. The area to the north of the Woolwich road is largely industrial and again it has little scope for residential, commercial or office development, or the generation of the jobs, which the royals would provide. Greenwich council argues that crossrail might not terminate at Charlton and could be extended to Woolwich, but there is no scope, or plans, for additional track eastwards from Charlton. Crossrail could go from Canary wharf to Charlton and Woolwich only if it were to take over the track that currently serves the Connex services from Woolwich into London Bridge and Cannon Street. In that case, there would be no direct trains from Erith, Belvedere, Abbey Wood or Plumstead into London Bridge, and a shuttle bus would replace them. Only the royals route guarantees a service to Woolwich that would not interfere with the existing north Kent line services.

Originally, there was talk of a terminus and interchange at Woolwich, but current opinion seems to favour a major interchange with the north Kent line at either Plumstead or Abbey Wood. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford suggests an interchange further east at Slade Green and I have no argument with that. My constituents want access to the new crossrail and continued access to the north Kent line. Only the royals guarantee a link to Woolwich.

Crossrail services could begin in 2012 and obviously the major benefits will accrue close to opening. However, as my hon. Friend said, an early announcement and an early commitment by the Government would provide significant pre-opening benefits in anticipation. For Woolwich and Abbey Wood, a decision to choose the royals would boost confidence, assist in retaining employment and enable developers to bring forward proposals sooner or to revise their master plans to reflect crossrail. Only the royals route offers the best prospect of maximising the full potential of the royals themselves, as well as enhancing the prospects for regeneration and development in Havering, Barking and Dagenham north of the Thames, and in Woolwich, Plumstead, Thamesmead, Belvedere, Erith and on to north Kent in the south. The Government must make a clear decision on the route of crossrail and it must be via the royals through to Woolwich and beyond.

1.50 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) on securing the debate and giving the Chamber an opportunity to discuss proposals for a cross-London rail link from east to west. We heard useful contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin), for West Ham (Mr. Banks) and for Gillingham (Paul Clark). I am pleased also to see my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen). That demonstrates the widespread interest in the subject among Members of Parliament.

My hon. Friends are aware of the work that is being undertaken by the Strategic Rail Authority and Transport for London through Cross London Rail Links Limited, a joint company set up by the SRA and TFL with the remit of examining alternative route options and developing the business case for the project. I shall shortly return to the route options under consideration, especially in relation to the east of London, but first I want to make three points.

[Mr. John Spellar]

First, the Government support viable proposals for a new east-west crossrail link. The transport 10-year plan indicates that such a project could contribute up to a 15 per cent. increase in seating capacity on rail and underground into central London during the morning peak. Hon. Members will agree that such a contribution is much needed. However, we must be sure that the project has a robust business case and will provide value for money. The work that CLRL is doing is vital in ensuring viability.

Secondly, I should make it clear that work is taking a little longer than CLRL originally envisaged. It had hoped to be in a position to finalise the business case and to recommend a preferred route by the end of the year. It now looks as though it will not be in a position to make recommendations until the first part of next year. I fully understand the concerns felt by hon. Members and their constituents who are potentially affected by the project about the continued uncertainty over the outcome of the work on the business case and the assessment of the route options. However, it would be generally agreed that such decisions cannot and should not be rushed. Crossrail would be a very expensive project—of the order of £10 billion, depending on the preferred option—with commensurate benefits. It is therefore vital to get the scheme right. Evaluating the business case for such a major project, with all its economic, financial, social and environmental impacts—several of which were highlighted during the debate—is a complex and difficult process. The choice between route options will not be easy, given the strength of the arguments that were made today and have been articulated by other hon. Members and boroughs. Forecast costs and benefits must be thoroughly bottomed out.

Moreover, as my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead said, the interface with the existing infrastructure and services must be thoroughly understood. Looking further ahead, we must put the mechanisms in place to ensure that any project is delivered to time and to budget. Time that is spent now on getting crossrail properly scoped and defined is time well spent and need not delay the overall implementation programme.

Thirdly, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford will be disappointed, but not surprised, that I cannot anticipate what recommendations CLRL will make, nor how the Government will respond to them. Nevertheless, I certainly heard the points that he and other hon. Members made and I am sure that he and others involved will put their case to CLRL with equal conviction during the stakeholder consultation and any future public consultation. On next steps, I understand that before the end of the year, the board of CLRL intends to make a statement of progress to date on the work to develop crossrail.

Before we consider what a crossrail route might be, we must decide the objectives that crossrail is meant to achieve. In May, before setting out to consult key stakeholders and local authorities, CLRL agreed several objectives for crossrail with the Government, the Mayor of London and the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority.

We said that a proposal for crossrail should aim to support the wider transport, social and environmental objectives of the Government's 10-year plan, the Mayor's strategy for London, the SRA's strategic plan and regional planning guidance. It should also relieve congestion and overcrowding on existing national rail and underground networks and support the development of strategic interchanges. It should facilitate the continued development of London's primary finance and business service activities located in both the City and docklands. It should facilitate the improvements of London's international links including, looking to the west, Heathrow. It should facilitate the regeneration of priority areas such as the Thames gateway and the Lea valley, and it should provide improved east-west access into and across London from the east and south-east regions. To meet those objectives, proposals for crossrail must be feasible from an operational and an engineering perspective, must be environmentally acceptable and must represent value for money and be affordable.

I turn to the route and service options that CLRL is considering. Given the objectives that the joint company has been set and the work done in the 1990s on earlier proposals for a new east-west link across London, it quickly became clear that there was a core route for the project based broadly on the previously safeguarded route, which would link Heathrow with Stratford and docklands. Around that core, CLRL examined a wide range of possible route options before selecting for further study a shortlist of corridors along which route and service patterns could be analysed in depth. In the west, those included Aylesbury, Watford Junction and Reading. To the east, they included Shenfield out to Ebbsfleet via north Kent. Within these five corridors there are of course multiple possible variants. For example, north Kent could be accessed either through the royal docks on the Isle of Dogs, or a more southerly approach via Charlton.

My hon. Friend mentioned alternatives in north Kent and CLRL is looking at a range of service patterns and frequencies for the royal docks and Charlton options. If the route were to be via the royal docks, new tunnels would be required from Custom House to Stepney Green and to link Silvertown and Woolwich. Depending on how far along the corridor the route extended, the north Kent line would be used from Abbey Wood. New stations would be constructed at Woolwich and the Isle of Dogs, as well as an interchange at Ebbsfleet.

If the chosen route were to be via Charlton, the north Kent line would be used as far as Charlton. Charlton station would be rebuilt, and a new line and tunnel built from there to the Isle of Dogs via the north Greenwich peninsula. There would be connecting services to London Bridge.

Those are the route options that CLRL consulted stakeholders about from spring to summer this year. CLRL is digesting the results of that consultation and undertaking the analysis. We await the outcome of that work.

As my hon. Friends will be aware, I have received many representations on crossrail from Members and local authorities, business interests and private individuals. Advocates have pointed to the need to provide a large increase in rail capacity to docklands,

particularly—as my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham has pointed out—to support the growing business and finance sectors. They have argued for crossrail to facilitate regeneration in the Thames gateway to serve key development sites, including those in the royal docks, but also on Kent Thameside. It would also have the desirable effect of freeing capacity at Liverpool Street station. Proponents argue that crossrail can become the regional transport spine along Kent Thameside, providing significant journey savings from north Kent and can form an integrated transport network with much increased opportunity for modal interchange.

I understand the strength with which advocates of crossrail and its several potential routes put their cases. We will not be able to satisfy every competing interest. We are awaiting the work. The CLRL board will, I hope, be in a position to make an announcement before the end of the year on progress. I ask for some patience about that, but I understand that the debate is still to be advanced

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 27 November 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Equitable Life

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

9.30 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this debate on Equitable Life. Today's debate is the third on the subject, but I make no apologies for returning to it. The company has about 800,000 policyholders, many of whom have suffered severe loss—and many of them are my constituents. I return to the subject not simply to rehearse the old arguments but because there are good reasons to believe that the society's position is deteriorating badly and that the future of the society may be in doubt. I am not financially qualified to judge whether that is the case, but those who read the financial pages of the national newspapers will know that there is a great deal of speculation about the society's basic solvency.

I welcome the fact that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is here. When she had her well deserved promotion a few months ago, she took this portfolio with her. I do not know whether that was an act of gallantry on her part, or whether her colleagues believed that she was the only person who understood financial services matters, but I am glad that we have a Minister here who understands what Equitable Life is about.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): None of the other Ministers wanted to touch it.

Dr. Cable: That is a plausible explanation.

Because we have debated the subject before, I do not need to rehearse its history. Much of the information is available in the report of the Select Committee on the Treasury and the Baird report as it applies to the work of the Financial Services Authority. It will be useful to start by chronicling the key episode that led to the crisis three years ago—the House of Lords ruling and the realisation that the society had liabilities to its guaranteed annuity holders of £1.5 billion for which it had put aside only £50 million, later raised to £200 million. The society was hopelessly ill-prepared.

It quickly became apparent that it was not simply a stroke of bad luck but that it involved an extreme degree of negligence and mismanagement. Much of the subsequent debate, including today's debate, revolved around who was responsible. The current management rather graphically summed up the problem a few days ago, when the chief executive said that Equitable Life was a high-risk company operating in a high-risk manner but that no one seemed to have noticed. It certainly was not noticed by the management, who led it into that crisis. Nor was it noticed by the auditors Ernst and Young, who cheerfully signed off accounts that bore a passing resemblance to Alice in Wonderland. It does not appear to have been noticed either by the regulators—the Department of Trade and Industry until the beginning of 1999, then the Treasury and lastly the Financial Services Authority.

The reason for returning to the subject is that the position has deteriorated. That is partly because financial markets generally have deteriorated. There has been a fall at the stock exchange, and all those who have investments in money purchase schemes or endowments will be painfully aware of the cuts in terminal bonuses. However, the position in Equitable Life is significantly worse than in other societies. Its with-profits fund has lost about half its value. It is not only that people have lost their bonuses; they are locked into the society through exit penalties.

Within the last few weeks, we have heard several indications that the position is even worse than was hitherto realised. The first major indication, which came at the time of the interim statement, was the big cut in the payments made to about 50,000 of the society's annuitants. That is especially significant because annuitants, unlike other policyholders, cannot leave. They are trapped in the society. They face a situation in which they will lose up to 30 per cent. of their pensions, and many of them are pensioners in their 70s. A pensioner who received £500 a month on an Equitable annuity may in future take home only £375, which shows what a big cut there could be in people's income.

On top of that, there has been growing speculation about the basic solvency of the company. I talked to the management of the present company after the changes in December 2000 when it was closed to new entrants and the current rescue operation was under way. I was told that insolvency was hard to achieve in an insurance company, unlike in manufacturing companies. It is rather difficult to get into a position where one's liabilities are fundamentally greater than one's assets, because insurance companies have the option—in this case, the company has already taken it—of cutting bonus payments more or less indefinitely. In addition, they can resort to the measures that Equitable Life has already taken, such as moving most of their assets from equities into securities.

None the less, it was argued explicitly in *The Sunday Times* a few weeks ago, although Equitable Life subsequently disowned the article, that the company had breached its capital adequacy ratios as set down by the FSA—the 4 per cent. margin over solvency—at least once. The society has denied that, but it acknowledges that its insolvency margin is "uncomfortably thin". That is a matter of concern in itself but it is compounded by the fact that a great deal of risk still hangs over the company. Risk on liabilities results from the fact that there are many—about 800,000, but that number could rise—claims on the company from mis-selling. There are also risks on the asset side, partly because the company still has equities, but also because of what might happen this afternoon when the Chancellor speaks.

Most of us expect that the Chancellor will tell us that the Budget position is nothing like as healthy as it was and that there will be substantial additional Government borrowing. If the Government borrow heavily in the gilts market, bond yields are likely to rise and gilt prices will fall. The portfolio that Equitable Life has assumed, now heavily laden with bonds, will deteriorate in value, which will pile an asset risk on the

[Dr. Cable]

other risks run by the company. The policyholders are confronted with an openly discussed and debated possibility of insolvency, perhaps leading to the company's going into administration.

We benefit from having recent comments from the Financial Services Authority as to what administration might mean in the case of Equitable Life, and they are pretty grim. To some extent the territory is uncharted, but it could be exceedingly messy. There is enormous uncertainty about it, but there could be large legal fees. The prospect is very grim for policyholders. At least theoretically, they are protected by an insurance policy protection scheme run by the industry, but that is pretty minimal and would strip away most, if not all, of the bonuses that they have acquired. Annuitants would find that they were no longer paid. Life cover would cease. Savings contracts would be terminated. Those people with savings in Equitable Life would almost certainly lose most of them. That is clearly a fate to be avoided.

I now come to the two questions of what should be done and who is responsible for the mess. Is it possible, even at this late stage, to contemplate rescuing Equitable Life—that is, heading off the risk of insolvency. When, 18 months ago, I raised the possibility of a lifeboat operation to rescue Equitable Life, the industry and, I think, Ministers contemptuously dismissed it as something that was beyond consideration. I think that the situation is now sufficiently serious for serious people in the City to consider that option, although I do not know whether they will do it. However, we should think about the issues involved in that and whether it should be openly advocated.

The reasons why there is a wider interest in saving Equitable Life and not treating the case as that of an unfortunate company without implications for others are as follows. The industry's reputation has been terribly damaged by Equitable Life. It was the oldest and most venerated company in the industry. Many people put their money into Equitable Life, not as a high-risk, speculative investment, but because it was considered fundamentally sound. Those people have been terribly disappointed, and people's confidence in investment products, particularly pensions, has generally been undermined by Equitable Life.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): The hon. Gentleman has spent the last 10 minutes talking about the grim outlook. I draw his attention to matters that relate to the Government and to how they can get involved. The industry was regulated, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury were involved, and there was guidance from the Treasury saying that the Equitable was conducting itself acceptably. Despite that, however, in three days the House of Lords reached the conclusion that its practice was not acceptable. If the Government, as a regulatory authority, take such a stance, surely they have some degree of responsibility in the matter.

Dr. Cable: I am coming to that point. The purpose of the Penrose inquiry is to investigate such matters, but the hon. Gentleman's key point must be right. In the period up to 1999, when it was clear that inflation rates were falling and that many of the assumptions on which guaranteed annuities were based were being undermined, at no point, it would appear, did the regulators advise Equitable Life that it had to make much greater provision for those guaranteed annuities. Prima facie, serious negligence was involved.

From the industry point of view, there is clearly an interest in preventing Equitable Life from going bust. There is probably also an interest from the Government's standpoint. I believe that we shall get the response to the Pickering report in a few days' time. The Government's pension policy hinges on millions of people being able to provide for themselves. From experiences in our constituencies, we know that hundreds of thousands of people are losing their defined benefit final salary schemes. In many cases, their only option is to go for a money purchase scheme like the Equitable Life products, which have been terribly undermined. Any coherent attempt by the Government to plan a savings strategy for the future has to confront the loss of confidence that the episode under discussion has entailed.

When I first raised the issue of a lifeboat operation, the City and insurance industry response was, "Why should we bail out one of our competitors?" Equitable Life is of course no longer a competitor, because it is not taking new policyholders. There was also concern that there were large black holes in the company. Most of those have been identified, however, if not finally plugged. Also, there have been precedents. Some 15 years ago, a company called Iala was bought by the insurance industry as a way of heading off an insolvency situation.

I am not necessarily suggesting that the Government bail out the company. Having chastised the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for finding £660 million for British Energy, I am not about to suggest that the Financial Secretary do the same thing for the insurance industry. None the less, I think that the Government have a responsibility to orchestrate an attempt by the industry to provide what would probably be very limited amounts of lines of credit or guarantees, in order to prevent the insolvency ratios from being breached. I hope that the Minister will respond a bit more constructively than she has in the past.

I now come to the issue of the responsibility of the Treasury and other Departments in this matter. The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) has made the point that, prima facie, during the long periods in which the economic basis of annuities was being undermined by lower inflation, the regulator failed in its duty—it did not recognise that a risk arose from guaranteed annuities and it allowed the company to continue to sell unguaranteed annuities without giving a clear warning about the risk that that entailed for the company.

The Government's response was to set up the Penrose inquiry. Some of us welcomed that at the time, but everybody concerned has been disillusioned by the exercise.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Does my hon. Friend agree that the reasons for the delays to date should be clearly published and that, for the future, deadlines and milestones should be

imposed? If those are missed, the reasons for that, too, should be published so that those who are suffering as a result of the debacle know what is going on.

Dr. Cable: My colleague makes a good point. It is unfortunate that deadlines and milestones were not included when the inquiry was established. I understand that Lord Penrose is still deeply immersed in his work. He has been given 500,000 pages to read by Equitable Life. I have no doubt that he is a speed reader, but people who have talked to him believe that he might well take at least another year to complete the work. That is hopeless from the point of view of the policyholders. What is emerging is an epic PhD thesis, not a snappy investigation into the fundamental causes of the problem, as far as the Government are concerned.

Will the Minister clarify where Penrose is leading? When the inquiry was launched she received credit for producing a rabbit from a hat, but it is becoming a nightmare. It is not producing results within any reasonable time frame. It is not even independent—although it is being conducted in an independent way, when material comes back to the Minister, she is not obliged to publish it. Will she at least give us some indication that an interim report will be published as soon as possible?

The other agency involved in the matter is the Financial Services Authority. Its record as a regulator has already been exhumed by the Baird report. I was intrigued by a reference to it in a recent press statement, which said:

"The City watchdog has announced it is backing troubled insurer Equitable Life and will not be asking for the firm to be wound up."

What is meant by the FSA backing Equitable Life? Presumably it is not backing it with money, so what backing is it giving? It is a regulator and has ongoing responsibility. What is it doing in that role?

My last point concerns the parliamentary ombudsman. Her function is not the direct responsibility of the Minister, but it provides hope to many constituents. What is happening? Some 250 cases have been referred to her office, probably by all of us here. One of them has been being investigated as a test case for the best part of a year and we are not yet close to seeing a resolution to that inquiry.

I am in correspondence with the Minister about whether the ombudsman's inquiries are being retarded or undermined by the delays in the Penrose inquiry. However, we seem to be at cross-purposes: the Minister asserts, rightly, that the investigation now being undertaken by the ombudsman into a case relating to mismanagement in the period 1999–2000 is not being impeded—it is not clear why it is delayed, but it is not due to the delay in Penrose. My point is more fundamental. The ombudsman cannot pursue the many cases before her without understanding the whole pre-1999 period, and it is clear that the delays to the Penrose report are seriously obstructing investigations.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I entirely endorse what the hon. Gentleman says. My understanding is, however, that the ombudsman's inquiries have been stayed pending the resolution, in any form, of the Penrose inquiry. What does the hon. Gentleman say about that?

Dr. Cable: I think that I have partly answered the point. The fact that the Penrose report is not available is a serious impediment to the progress in the bulk of the ombudsman's inquiries.

Richard Ottaway: Let me take up the excellent point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field). Is not the important point that the ombudsman reports to Parliament, while Penrose reports to the Government? If the reports that we have heard are true, it would be utterly inappropriate for the ombudsman to hold back from reporting to Parliament while she waited for a report to be made to the Government.

Dr. Cable: Well, it would certainly be very unfortunate for those of our constituents who are waiting for her report. Perhaps the best way of answering the hon. Gentleman is simply to quote what the previous ombudsman said a few weeks ago. He was very explicit:

"As far as events before 1 January 1999 are concerned, the position remains that the Ombudsman intends to await the outcome of Lord Penrose's Inquiry before deciding whether intervention would be useful."

That is very clear, and the implication is that the ombudsman can do absolutely nothing for at least a year and possibly longer.

To conclude, I want to draw further on the former ombudsman's statement, because it raises issues for which the Minister is accountable and for which she will have to answer. Before he retired, Sir Michael Buckley was under attack for not acting more expeditiously on the cases that we are discussing. In a press notice, he was quoted as saying:

"I do not agree with the critics. It seems to me plainly inefficient, and potentially unfair, to have two simultaneous but separate investigations covering much the same ground and taking evidence from much the same sources."

The press notice continued:

"The Ombudsman added that he had drawn the attention of the Select Committee on Public Administration to what he saw as the root cause of the problem".

I shall read the next sentence carefully because the Minister must answer the point that it raises. The press notice added that the then ombudsman identified the root cause as

"the failure of the authorities to establish at the outset a single inquiry with terms of reference covering all aspects of the Equitable Life affair."

It is clear that he meant the Treasury and the Minister when he referred to "the authorities". I hope that the Minister will give an effective response to that strong rebuke, because the ombudsman acts on our behalf and that of our constituents.

9.52 am

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing the debate. The subject is of deep concern to many constituents who have contacted me over the past year.

[Mr. Mark Lazarowicz]

I must declare an interest, although it is fairly marginal. I have a term life policy with Equitable Life that has only a couple of years left to run. The irony is that I probably would not have had to declare it a year ago, when the issue was the with-profits fund. Now, however, the problem extends from the fund's viability and the interests of fund policyholders to the viability of the whole company. I now have an at least theoretical interest in the issue, which demonstrates how the problem has grown from one that could have been managed, albeit with difficulty, to one with much wider ramifications. The extension of the problem demonstrates the seriousness of the situation and the need for action even at what might be described as the eleventh hour.

I shall make only a brief contribution. I agree with most of the comments made by the hon. Member for Twickenham. The failure of the regulatory agencies to take action at an early stage has created a crisis. If the governmental and non-governmental bodies that have a role in regulating the financial services industry had taken a more proactive role earlier in the crisis, it would have been easier to manage; now it will be much harder.

I endorse the view that although a rescue package of some sort may now be much harder to put together, there is a strong case for such a package and for the agencies involved, including the Government, to take an active role in putting it together. That rescue package, or lifeboat, is needed now. We cannot simply wait for the conclusion of the Penrose inquiry. I agree with the hon. Member for Twickenham that it may take several months for that inquiry to come to a conclusion. In the meantime, the possibility of insolvency becomes greater, and not only will policyholders lose out but there will be a knock-on effect on the pensions and savings industry as a whole. The entire culture that encourages people to save and invest in their pensions will be seriously jeopardised. The hundreds of thousands of people who work in the financial services industry will also be affected. Many of them live in my constituency, where the industry is the biggest private sector employer.

For all those reasons, I ask the Minister to assure us that the Government will take a proactive role in resolving the crisis, even at this late stage, and to encourage the establishment of some form of rescue package, as the hon. Member for Twickenham suggested.

9.56 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing this important debate, the third that we have had on the matter. Next to me sits my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), who introduced a debate on the subject this year. I fear that we shall need to debate the matter again in the months and years ahead.

Pensions are a highly technical matter, but the problems surrounding Equitable Life and other pension schemes are human. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) rightly pointed out that a significant number of jobs are at stake in his constituency. My constituency contains the City of London, where the pensions and insurance industry has an important part to play. All hon. Members must have received letters on the subject of Equitable Life, which may not exactly have filled our mailbags but have come in a drip-drip approach over the past year or so. Several of my constituents are in desperate straits. That especially applies to elderly folk, from whom I have received a great number of impassioned pleas regarding the uncertainty about Equitable Life.

Like the hon. Member for Twickenham, I was especially concerned by recent announcements. We seem to have reached a crossroads. The fact that existing rather than simply future pensioners find that there are cuts of 30 per cent. in their annuities shows that we have reached a fateful point in the history of Equitable Life. It comes as no surprise that the business pages of last weekend's newspapers talked about the stampede to the exit in Equitable Life. I shall return to the issue of confidence in a moment.

Last June, shortly after my election, I wrote an article in the national press, saying that the real fear was that the crisis in Equitable Life might be the first of many similar high-profile crises in the sector. Some issues may be specific to Equitable Life, but I fear that they may not be quite as unusual as we have been led to believe. The problem has all the ingredients for a major collapse in confidence in the savings industry.

The sorry tale of what happened in Equitable Life has been well documented, but I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) will go into some detail later, but before the Financial Services Authority took over responsibility for insurance industry regulation in January 1999, those duties rested with the Treasury and, before that time, with the DTI.

During the crucial period to the end of 1998, Equitable Life advertised and sold annuities without adequate reserves and without informing new savers of the vast pre-existing liabilities. That continued after January 1999, under the auspices, by that stage, of the FSA, until December 2000, when the House of Lords decided that Equitable was obliged to honour its guaranteed annuities in full. I have great sympathy with the Financial Secretary given the situation in which she and the Government find themselves, but they cannot wash their hands of responsibility for the fate of many of those with-profits policyholders who are now trapped.

The way forward is to end the obfuscation and delay that have been integral to the developments of the past 16 months, since the launch of the Penrose inquiry. The Treasury must now be open and honest about its role in the Equitable crisis. I have submitted many of the 253 outstanding ombudsman inquiry notifications, all of which have been stayed since August last year and the launch of the inquiry. I hope that the Financial Secretary will be able to suggest a timetable today. Her protestations in the national newspapers earlier in the year, when she said that Lord Penrose's investigations should be conducted in the due course of time, will fail to inspire confidence, and that will have an effect well beyond the issue of Equitable Life. That is one of the main concerns: the problems in the pensions industry as a whole are crucial to the way in which we proceed. The issue goes beyond the issues that relate specifically to Equitable.

Several of my constituents who are with-profits annuitants put their case succinctly. First, the Government have forced pensioners to take out annuities by the age of 75, which is yet another reason why the Conservatives are keen to end the strict rule. Secondly, Equitable Life annuitants were unaware, in taking out their policies before December 1998, that there was any potential problem. Thirdly, to save the company, those very annuitants, who are often relying on relatively small incomes to enable them to live happily in retirement, voted for the compromise agreement a year or so ago, thus depriving themselves of any right to sue for mis-selling. Yet those same annuitants are now unable to transfer to another provider, and their income is therefore reduced dramatically—perhaps even terminally. Many of them are worried sick. Realistically, they will be unable to build another pot of capital for their retirement. The sheer uncertainty over what is to come in the months and years ahead is the killer.

There is clearly a crisis of confidence in the entire pensions industry. I do not necessarily blame the present Government more than others for that, although, if I dare talk in such terms, £5 billion raids in 1997 clearly did not help. However, the issue should be beyond party politics. What message will the Government now put out to young folk who might want to save for the future? Most people of my generation, and the Financial Secretary's—she is at least two or three years younger than I am—take the view that there is little point in buying shares, given the depressed stock market, or investing at this stage in any sort of pension. In London the property market is overheated, and that is where most young and middle-aged folk are putting much of their money. There is a real reason for the Government to try to restore confidence.

The Government must grasp the nettle and take responsibility in relation to Equitable. There is little doubt that they will have to pick up the pieces in the end anyway, so why not do so now instead of delaying? The hon. Member for Twickenham rightly used as an analogy the secondary banking crisis in 1974, which required the Treasury to lead the way with a lifeboat-type rescue. My fear is that failure to act now will do great damage to the whole pensions and insurance sector, and that that damage could take a decade or more to rectify. There is little doubt that the Financial Services Authority lacks the authority shown by the Bank of England, for example, in its work almost three decades ago during the secondary banking crisis to which I referred. The Government now need to act in the national interest, because the problem extends well beyond the business of insurance and pensions, to ensure that we get the matter right.

10.5 am

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing this important debate. The number of hon. Members attending the debate shows the importance that we attach to the debacle that is the Equitable Life saga. I want to declare an interest, although I am not entirely sure whether I am any longer required to do so, because I did have an Equitable Life pension plan, but I recently transferred its dwindling value to another pension fund.

Many of my constituents, however, remain policyholders with Equitable Life. Their bonuses have been eliminated, their policies have been substantially reduced in value and they are facing an extremely uncertain retirement. The key fact that my constituents want to know is whether there was a regulatory failure. If there was, that would constitute a failure by the Government, because the DTI was the previous regulator, followed by the Treasury, and now the regulator is the FSA. Furthermore, if there was a regulatory failure, are my constituents entitled to compensation as a result?

My constituents are also extremely unhappy about the way in which the investigation is being carried out. As the hon. Member for Twickenham mentioned, the inquiry by the parliamentary ombudsman into the complaints that have been raised has been put on hold pending the outcome of the inquiry set up by Lord Penrose. My constituents are dismayed by the continuing delay in the reporting of that inquiry, and I hope that the Minister will shed some light this morning on what on earth is happening. Will the Minister give us a ballpark estimate of when we may expect the inquiry to report? I understand that the report will be submitted to the Treasury, but will she also say whether the full report will be made public? Equitable Life policyholders have a direct interest in knowing whether they will be able to see and consider the report, when they have had to wait for so many years for any action to be taken.

I should also like to comment on the remit of the parliamentary ombudsman. I do not want to revisit history and cover the background to the decision regarding the period from January 1999 to December 2000, but I understand that there have recently been calls for the Government to consider whether the remit is too narrowly drawn, in the light of the regulatory history of Equitable Life.

I should also like to say something about the role of the prudential regulator. A regulator is not subject to some sort of best efforts standard. A regulator in the financial services industry is subject to various legal requirements. Have those legal requirements been met? It is not totally clear on what basis Equitable Life has been authorised, in terms of how the EC law regime applies to it. Either it falls within direct EC single-market financial services directives or it falls within the general EC treaty regime. In either case there are implications for the United Kingdom Government as regulator. Will the Minister tell us her understanding of the implications for Equitable Life of EC financial services law? I suspect that that angle has been overlooked, and therein lie potential remedies for policyholders who feel that the Government, as prime regulator, have not properly protected their interests.

As to recent developments, I wonder how long Equitable Life will be allowed to continue to trade when it is failing to meet the solvency requirements that are legally incumbent upon it. Presumably, the fact that it can continue to trade although it is not currently meeting some solvency requirements means that it has a transitional exceptional derogation from the general rules. However, by definition, a transitional exceptional derogation cannot go on ad infinitum. What will the Financial Services Authority be required to do should Equitable Life continue to be in breach of the solvency rules applicable to it in the medium to longer term?

[Annabelle Ewing]

The situation is getting worse daily and is deeply damaging to the reputation of UK-authorised financial institutions, including, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) said, the excellent Scottish-based institutions in major cities in Scotland. It is in no one's interests for this debacle to drag on and on and for the Government to allow it do so. I hope that the Minister will reply to the questions that I and other hon. Members have asked in the debate because our constituents want answers to those questions.

With respect to Government policy, I wonder how the Government handling of this matter squares with their stated objective of encouraging people to plan for their retirement. Is there not a danger that the longer the situation drags on, the less attractive it will be to take out a pension? That cannot be in the Government's interests as it would defeat their approach to pensions policy.

10.12 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing). I hope that the Minister will give an unequivocal answer to her key question: when the Penrose report is eventually published, will it be published in full? If the Government were to give such an assurance, it would allay some of the concerns of a public who are increasingly sceptical on the issue. A subsidiary point about an interim report was made by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), whom I congratulate on raising the matter again. Penrose has taken a lot longer than the Minister expected. I remind her that last year she said:

"I expect Lord Penrose to report as soon as he thinks that he is able to, which I hope will be some time next year."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 17 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 258WH.]

That refers to 2002. We now know that the report will be much delayed—beyond this year—and I hope that in light of the Minister's earlier hopes she will say that it would be sensible and prudent to have an interim report from Lord Penrose. That would enable people who are waiting for the outcome of the report to know the present position.

I want to comment on the ombudsman's report because it was a great relief that the ombudsman, having initially decided that he was not going to start an investigation until after Penrose, relented in October 2001 and said that he would start an investigation into the two years 1999 and 2000. We are much concerned by the delay in the publication of that report and hon. Members have had correspondence with the ombudsman about the reasons for that delay. On 24 October I received a letter from the deputy parliamentary ombudsman stating that the investigative fieldwork—the examination of papers, interviews with officials and so on—had been completed but he still had to analyse the information obtained to establish precisely what took place, as opposed to what should have taken place, and then translate the result into findings for the ombudsman's report. He said that the change of ombudsman from Sir Michael Buckley to Ann Abraham might cause some delay. I wrote to Ann Abraham to congratulate her on her appointment and to ask her to update me on progress, but I have yet to receive a substantive answer. Let us hope for an early resolution of this part of the inquiry. A clear finding from the ombudsman would encourage the Government to respond positively to recommendations, which would then free up the ombudsman and her staff to start the inquiry into the wider period of regulatory failure.

I drew the ombudsman's attention to another matter—the more than anecdotal evidence that Treasury and other officials had blocked the inquiry's progress. I felt that Members should know the response of the deputy parliamentary ombudsman to those allegations, but he wrote:

"It also would not be helpful for me to comment on rumours related to the other matters you raised."

That is hardly the rejection of the rumours that might have been expected from the deputy parliamentary ombudsman. Are the rumours wholly unfounded? We are worried that the Treasury never wanted the ombudsman to start an investigation parallel with Penrose and has blocked the progress of the inquiry.

Another important issue is the role of the Select Committee on the Treasury, which has an important part to play. An inquiry was started, but then stalled to wait for the outcome of Lord Penrose's report. I tabled early-day motion 1053, which was signed by well over 100 colleagues from all political parties. Published on 21 March 2002, it drew attention to fears that Penrose would take much longer and that the report would drag on into next year. I argued that that was why the Treasury Committee, with its considerable powers, should immediately resume its investigation into regulatory failure.

The Chairman of the Treasury Committee tabled an amendment to the early-day motion, stating that his Committee

"would be concerned if Lord Penrose was unable to complete his report in 2002; and notes that the Treasury Committee decided in January 2002 to continue its inquiry when Lord Penrose has reported."

We now know that Lord Penrose will not report in 2002 and that the Treasury Committee Chairman is worried about it, so I hope that that Committee will immediately resume its investigation into this matter. It has tremendous power to call witnesses and it should not sit back, waiting another year before Penrose produces the report. The Minister will doubtless encourage the Treasury Committee to reopen its inquiry and will co-operate with it in respect of any decisions that it takes.

In today's press—I am looking at page 56 of *Money Mail*—an article states:

"While policyholders suffer death by a thousand cuts, the Government and regulators both shrug their shoulders in a 'Not me, guv' fashion . . . Equitable policyholders are right to be angry with a Government that splurges money on any politically correct cause, yet refuses even to consider engineering a rescue package for them . . . Equitable's policyholders are victims of mismanagement, lies, mis-selling, misinformation, financial manipulation and downright incompetence. It's time the Government and the Financial Services Authority organised a rescue."

I could not have put it better myself.

10.19 am

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): Like other hon. Members, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) for giving us a chance to debate this subject. From the figures, each hon. Member can expect about one per 1,000 of their constituents to be affected; certainly, we have all received several letters. I am also glad that the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) said that the subject was complicated. To a mere retired doctor, it is almost unfathomable. I have therefore come to listen and learn, to ask questions and to stress those that have already been asked by constituents who are annuitants—the elderly, the desperate and the hopeless who have hardly dared write to me because they cannot see a way through.

I want particularly to refer to a retired chartered accountant whom I know well. He has been a respected member of his profession, and has been involved in looking after people's financial affairs and giving them advice. He chose Equitable Life as it was the market leader at the time. His gross pension, which is his main income, has dropped from £14,547 by £3,000. Other people have lost similar amounts. The problem is huge, and the ordinary person is short of weapons to fight it.

Please do not think that I am criticising the parliamentary ombudsman, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the cases that I have tried to refer to him, which have covered several different issues, often fall outside his remit because of certain restrictions. In this case, he is allowed to examine only cases that fall between 1 January 1999 and 8 December 2000.

Enough has been said about the Penrose report, so I shall wait to hear the Minister's comments on it. There was some confusion in a recent House of Lords Question Time about that report and its influence on the ombudsman.

I shall ask a few specific questions, some of which have been asked before but need re-emphasis. What redress has the ordinary annuitant against the company and the Financial Services Authority, which, in the words of one of my constituents, must have been asleep at the wheel? Are such annuitants like the unfortunate employees of a large engineering firm in my constituency that recently went into receivership? The members of the pension fund will find themselves right at the bottom of the list of those who receive payment if the company is wound up. Small points that rankle tremendously are the bonuses that the executives received earlier this year and the generous pay-off for the finance director, who recently resigned.

Yesterday, *The Guardian* referred to the fact that Norwich Union had held talks with the Inland Revenue about the potential transfer of individuals to its books. I quote:

"But Norwich Union said yesterday that although technically possible, any transfer would only be beneficial to policyholders if there were a change in revenue rules to allow it to offer better terms to Equitable's annuitants."

I hope that the Minister can tell us that hope exists there. Can the Government give any other hope to the annuitants?

10.23 am

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing the debate. He presented a clear and lucid analysis of the key issues that have caused so much concern to so many people.

Before I continue, like the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) I should declare an interest. I, too, have just completed the transfer of a pension policy from Equitable Life

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam): Order. I doubt very much that more than one or two Members of Parliament would, because of their dealings with Equitable Life, have to declare an interest in it.

Norman Lamb: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was going on to say that in a sense I have suffered the same dilemma as many others over the past two years. I have been one of the fortunate ones, however, in that I do not have all my eggs in one basket. The scale of my loss has not been as great as for many others. However, as the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) pointed out, those who put all their eggs in that one basket face disaster. We must keep in the forefront of our minds the extent of the distress and hardship that has been caused to so many people as the scandal has unfolded.

Anxiety is now being increased by speculation about insolvency. The company continues to stress that it remains solvent and that at present it does not appear likely to become insolvent. However, that could change. If the with-profits fund shrinks further, the company's room for manoeuvre could disappear and we would then be in uncharted waters. There is great uncertainty as to how the liquidation of a life company the size of Equitable Life would work, and there is no reason to believe that insolvency would in any sense lead to stability.

The case of the life company Oak Life may be instructive. It had just 5,000 policyholders, compared with Equitable Life's 800,000. It went into liquidation in 1993. Almost 10 years later the liquidation continues, and 600 policyholders have still not received their policies. When their compensation eventually arrives, it will be based on policy values frozen way back in 1993. That is a deeply unattractive scenario.

Perhaps the most immediate and serious problem would be for those annuitants currently in receipt of payments. The liquidators could stop all payments until it could be determined who was entitled to what share of the assets. That would spell disaster for many pensioners who rely absolutely on such payments.

Clearly, if Equitable's board decides at some stage to go into administration, the consequences would also be deeply damaging for policyholders. There would obviously be competing claims on the fund, and the administrator would have to be careful to avoid paying out too much to, for example, annuitants. The costs of administration would be vast. The company estimated them at some £100 million, which inevitably would come out of policyholders' funds.

At present, some independent financial advisers appear to be indulging in some fairly disreputable activities, thereby increasing and exploiting the anxieties

[Norman Lamb]

of policyholders. They seek to pull policyholders away from Equitable Life by tactics such as using papers that appear to come from Equitable Life. Such activities must be investigated. There is no reason why IFAs should not seek to persuade people to invest in particular products, but it is important that they do so in a reputable way.

I am conscious that there are several current and potential legal actions; for example, actions by Equitable Life against former directors and against its former auditors, Ernst and Young. Both routes appear to have considerable merit, given the clear warning bells ringing loudly in the late 1990s. As my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham said in a debate in October last year, there is a massive question mark over the clean bill of health given to the company by Ernst and Young in 1999 after so much discussion in the City during the previous financial year.

Indeed, the storm clouds had been gathering for a considerable time. There was a growing body of evidence that the whole structure was unsustainable. Interest rates had been falling, and it was clear that the assumptions on which the guaranteed annuities were based were unsustainable. In 1994, Michael Heseltine—now Lord Heseltine—when President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, was responsible for the actions, or inaction, of the regulators, who failed to notice from annual returns the differential final bonus policy for guaranteed annuities, which was concealed from policyholders and led directly to the present mess. The potential culpability goes back a long way.

Then there are the 2,500 complaints submitted to the financial services ombudsman, mainly from former policyholders who withdrew before the introduction of the compromise scheme earlier this year. Those complaints allege mis-selling. If the ombudsman finds Equitable Life liable for mis-selling in the lead test cases that he is investigating, he must award full compensation—not partial compensation as part of any compromise deal—for the loss suffered. The consequences of that for the other affected group—those who remain with Equitable Life, including those receiving payments from annuities in retirement—could be very serious. As we have heard, those annuitants have already lost about 30 per cent. of their income. That is the awful reality for everyone caught up in this mess. If one group benefits, another loses out massively.

That brings me to the role of the regulator—initially the Department of Trade and Industry, then the Financial Services Authority—and what the Government are doing in the face of the crisis. One is left with a sense of staggering inertia and complacency. The Baird report on the role of the FSA was flawed from the start because it lacked independence. Even so, its criticism of the FSA, together with concerns about its role as regards split capital trusts, hardly provides reassurance about its ability to regulate the industry in future.

The analysis of the earlier period before the FSA took over from the DTI was left to the Penrose inquiry. It had been hoped that the report would be ready for publication this summer—two or three months ago—but nothing has emerged and nothing is expected until well into next year. We have heard that it could take at least another year. That is disastrous and completely unacceptable for those left in a state of anxiety awaiting the outcome. The Government cannot stand by, doing nothing, while we wait for the inquiry to report. It is imperative that urgent progress be made. As was suggested this morning, there should be an interim report. That should be published as soon as possible, and the Government should be responsible for setting a timetable to ensure that we get news of the outcome quickly.

I join other hon. Members in pressing the Minister on the confusion surrounding the parliamentary ombudsman's investigation. In March 2002, the then parliamentary ombudsman, Michael Buckley, stated in a letter to Members:

> "I have made it clear that I intend to await the outcome of the independent inquiry set up under the Chairmanship of Lord Penrose ... before deciding whether I might usefully consider other aspects of this matter, including events before January, 1999."

I appreciate that the core remit of the parliamentary ombudsman's investigation might not be delayed by the Penrose inquiry, but it is unacceptable that other matters that are properly to be considered by the ombudsman will be stayed for possibly more than another year. The Minister has indicated that she does not believe that the investigation by the parliamentary ombudsman has been delayed owing to the Penrose inquiry. We need clarity as to the precise situation, and I should be grateful if she would explain what further steps she proposes to take to expedite matters.

Finally, I want to raise concerns about the state of the insurance and pensions industry in general. Although Equitable may be the worst example, many companies have out-of-date management structures, inadequate computer systems and a reliance on actuarial assessments that have not been independently assessed. Does the Minister share those concerns about the state of the industry in general and the confidence, or lack of it, that that inspires in many ordinary people who simply want to protect their position for their future retirement? Does she consider that a broader inquiry into the industry is needed, given the extent to which people rely on the companies for security in old age? I believe that that is absolutely essential to re-establish confidence in the industry.

10.34 am

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I shall leave my declaration of interests under the blanket declaration that you mentioned earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing this exceptionally timely and important debate. It builds on previous debates, but as these matters, of desperate concern to all our constituents, have deteriorated, I am glad that the hon. Gentleman could secure this debate now.

We have heard a good selection of speeches and points today from Members on both sides of the Chamber, reflecting the deep anxiety of constituents across the United Kingdom. This debate is timely not only because our constituents have rightly appealed to us in their time of concern, but because it is right and fair to pay proper tribute to the Equitable action groups

now under the E7 banner. I had the opportunity to meet those groups when they came to Westminster to continue making their case, which they did very palpably, on 29 October. They have always been serious and compelling, and it is only right that we all work together to fight for the justice of their cause. I salute them and, in particular, Paul Braithwaite, who has shown such leadership.

There is no need to take the House's time by rehearsing the background facts. All hon. Members are very familiar with the consequences of the affair, and the misery visited on policyholders and affected people in all our constituencies. It is right, however, to start by saying that for almost all Equitable members, policy values and annuities have been cut by about one third and that the society's solvency is today in doubt. Annuitants are especially hard hit because, under Equitable's internal rules, common across the industry, they cannot transfer to another pension provider. Other policyholders can transfer, but at the cost of a significant exit fee.

Who is responsible? In my view, the old board and its advising actuaries were reckless and misguided. I understand that legal action against the former directors is being considered but unless they were well insured, there may be nothing worthwhile to gain there. It can be claimed that, over many years, the accounts gave no indication of the scale of the contingent liabilities. The current board has instigated legal action against the accountants, but that will no doubt be contested over a very long period—far too long for the suffering Equitable policyholders. As the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) just mentioned, Mr. Bellringer's departure on Monday with an extraordinarily large and insensitive pay-off after only six months in the job of finance director hardly inspires confidence.

I turn to the responsibility of the regulators. Until 1999, the prudential supervision of the Equitable was exercised directly by the DTI and the Treasury. They are open to a charge of maladministration. First, they allowed the society to sell unguaranteed policies without ring-fencing the funding of GAR policies and without disclosing that those prior guaranteed policies existed and represented huge contingent liabilities.

Secondly, as evidenced by the letter issued by Martin Roberts, director of insurance at the Treasury on 18 December 1998, which was on its website until July 2000, those Departments endorsed the society's attempt to redress the balance to cover the under-reserved costs of GAR policies by paying differential bonuses. That was later ruled illegal by the House of Lords. Thirdly, they allowed the society to trade with totally inadequate reserves and to claim throughout that it was selling a low-risk product coupled with prudent management and the benefits of mutuality. All Members of this House must feel that the shades of Maxwell come to mind. The issue of negligence must be examined urgently. That is not currently being properly investigated—certainly not with the necessary urgency.

The Government have not only encouraged saving in personal pension schemes, but required those schemes to be converted into annuities from which there was and is no escape. Yet the Government are now standing by while pensioners have their current and future incomes slashed.

Since 1999 regulation has been in the hands of the FSA. One might have thought that when the scale of the collapse became apparent, the Government would have mobilised resources from the industry to underwrite the Equitable for a period to stem the flow of funds and to rebuild reserves in an orderly way. After all, if the society becomes insolvent, the industry will meet the cost of whatever compensation is awarded, and the damage to the savings industry and the Government's plans will be enormous. That is the sort of response that the Bank of England and, notably, the present Governor, no less, employed successfully during the secondary banking crisis in 1974 under Denis Healey's Chancellorship. At the very least, the Government should now devise and publish a contingency plan in the event that Equitable becomes insolvent, and I urge the Minister to give a clear answer on that today.

What needs to be done now? First, I urge the Treasury Committee—I am pleased to see the Chairman in his place—to reactivate its inquiry into Equitable.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): For the record, the Select Committee has acted unanimously on every decision that it has taken on this matter. We accepted that Lord Penrose was inquiring into the matter, but two weeks ago I raised the matter in the Committee and we decided to write to the Treasury, the FSA, Lord Penrose and others to assess the situation. We shall then look at the matter again and take it forward.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: I am most grateful to the Chairman of the Treasury Committee and I am sure that all those with a concern in the matter heard what he had to say. We wish him well in his determinations following the responses, or absence of satisfactory responses, that he receives. Given the importance of the Select Committee's work and its powers to command evidence and people to appear before it, it has a real opportunity to advance the cause if that is the right course to take.

I return to what needs to be done. Policyholders and annuitants believe, rightly, that they have been victims of mis-selling and are looking for redress, either through industry support or compensation, especially from the regulators, or both. So far, it is right and fair to say that no one has exercised any leadership to deal with the situation. Given the flight of funds, coupled with today's more litigious environment, the opportunity may already have been lost to mobilise support, a point that has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Twickenham and others. Today we have the added difficulty, compared with 1974, of the fact that an increasing proportion of the relevant parts of the industry is in non-UK domestic ownership. We want mobilisation of that support, if it is still possible, in restoring Equitable to an even keel and salvaging confidence in the UK savings industry generally. If that is not done, it is likely to prove a big mistake because any other solution would be messy, long drawn out and costly.

What is certainly needed is a proper inquiry into the actions of the regulators, but there has been little progress, especially by the Government. The FSA set up an internal audit of its activities after it took over responsibility in 1999. The resulting Baird report was highly critical of the FSA's inactivity but acknowledged that most of the damage had already been done before it came on the scene. The die had been cast.

[Mr. Stephen O'Brien]

In August 2001 the Treasury appointed Lord Penrose with the following terms of reference:

"To inquire into the circumstances leading to the current situation . . . taking account of relevant life market background; to identify any lessons to be learnt for the conduct, administration and regulation of life assurance business; and to give a report thereon to Treasury Ministers."

That is a huge remit.

Looking at other necessary key action, I and other hon. Members wanted the matter to be examined by the parliamentary ombudsman. After considerable, admirable and persistent effort by colleagues in the former shadow Treasury team—my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway), for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison)—I am delighted that their efforts, coupled with those of many other hon. Members on the Opposition Benches and 253 MP referrals from throughout the House, persuaded the parliamentary ombudsman to undertake an inquiry into the limited area covered by the Baird report. The then parliamentary ombudsman refused to look more widely at charges of maladministration by earlier regulators—the DTI and the Treasury—on the grounds that that would be a wasteful duplication of effort, pending the outcome of Lord Penrose's inquiry. That is a depressingly subordinate position to take. It effectively relegates the interests of Parliament and Equitable policyholders to those of the Government. Lord Penrose has been appointed, and given terms of reference, by the Government. He reports to Treasury Ministers, whose Department is one of the regulators under scrutiny. Who has the incentive to internalise this matter? Surely not the regulators for the relevant applicable time: the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Lord Penrose has no powers to compel witnesses to attend or give evidence. His report may or may not be published, in part or in full, and the Government are free to accept or reject his recommendations. His inquiry will take, we all believe, at least another year and perhaps years. We can all urge speed as much as we like and the Minister's refrain will be, "The inquiry is independent. It's up to Lord Penrose." That is not good enough. Today's victims need the Penrose inquiry quickly. At the very least, they need the interim report that has been properly called for during the debate.

The new parliamentary ombudsman—she has just taken up her role and I wish her well—is an Officer of the House and reports to Parliament, independent of Government. Her remit is narrow: the inquiry is into allegations of maladministration and is intended to pinpoint responsibility. Parliament can ensure that her report is published and that she receives co-operation from witnesses. Of course, there will be some overlap with the Penrose inquiry, but there is no reason why the Government's wide-ranging inquiry should take precedence over, and necessarily compromise, Parliament's own inquiry. The new ombudsman has fresh eyes and has an opportunity to accelerate her inquiry, to extend it back to the period before 1999 and to publish before Lord Penrose. I urge her to do that and to have the matter at the top of her in-tray.

It is now well over two years since the House of Lords' decision pulled the rug from under the Equitable. Policyholders and annuitants, many of them elderly and vulnerable, have suffered a series of hammer blows through no fault of their own and when they were doing the right thing. The regulators certainly have much to answer for, yet the upshot of the action so far has been to kick the whole subject into the long grass. There is widespread suspicion that the Treasury is playing for a goal beyond the next general election. This is a shameful episode and a continuing major injustice, which the Treasury is allowing to drift. On behalf of the policyholders and the annuitants, I say that, at this woefully late stage, it is time for the Government to get a grip. Will the Treasury Minister with responsibility for this area now commit herself to doing that today?

10.47 am

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing this important debate. I know of his long-standing interest in these issues on behalf of his constituents and I congratulate him on that.

I will attempt to give as many answers as I can to the individual points that have been raised. First, I should like to express my personal sympathies for those policyholders at Equitable Life who have been affected by difficulties in the society and, in particular, for the 50,000 men and women who have worked hard to save for their retirement and who put their faith in Equitable Life and recently received news that their with-profit annuities would also be the subject of cuts. As a Member of Parliament, I am certainly not alone in receiving many letters on this subject—that is aside from being the Minister with responsibility for this area. I understand the concerns, and even anger, of policyholders at the current state of affairs. I add my congratulations to the action groups on their sterling efforts to draw attention to the issues.

As many hon. Members have recognised, the difficulties at Equitable Life stem at least in part from the guaranteed annuity rates that it, along with other life insurers, offered to with-profit policyholders between the late 1950s and 1988. As the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) lucidly pointed out, the problems arising from those guarantees began to have a material effect in the early 1990s, when, for the first time, movements in interest rates meant that the guaranteed annuity rates were higher than the rates available in the market. In response, Equitable cut the terminal bonuses given to those members who opted for higher annuity rates. In effect, in order to achieve what it saw as fairness between all its members, Equitable gave those members who opted for a guaranteed rate annuity a smaller pot with which to purchase an annuity. Those members who opted for an annuity at the lower, open-market rate had a larger pot. The result of that policy was that savers with similar funds received the same income regardless of whether they had purchased a guarantee.

The society agreed to take to court a test case, in which policyholders argued that the guarantee entitled them to both a terminal bonus at the same level as other members and an annuity at the guaranteed rate. In July 2000, the House of Lords finally ruled in favour of their claim, and in doing so ruled against both the society's

previous policy and any ring-fencing of the liability among the guaranteed annuity option policyholders as proposed by the Court of Appeal.

The financial consequence of that decision exposed the society to unquantified costs for which it had not made provision. The Equitable put itself up for sale, but it was unable to find a buyer and closed to new business in December 2000. A compromise between policyholders was agreed earlier this year. Non-GAR policyholders agreed not to sue over mis-selling in return for GAR policyholders'giving up their guarantees. However, policyholders who had already left can still sue the society, and the Equitable faces considerable claims for compensation. The society is a mutual and has no source of funds other than its policyholders. As the hon. Member for Twickenham has outlined, companies of that kind are currently operating in very difficult market conditions.

I now want to address the points that have been raised about trust in the pensions industry and the possibility of a lifeboat being organised. This Government have done more than any other Government to try to put in place a framework to establish a basis for trust in the financial services industry. On coming to power in the late 1990s, the Government established the inquiry into the mis-selling of pensions, which has refunded £11 billion to policyholders. We set up the Financial Services Authority, which brought together nine separate sectoral regulators. For the first time, it includes a single ombudsman scheme and a single financial services compensation scheme, which is easy for people to use in gaining compensation in the event of insolvency. We are currently working on proposals to extend advice on financial services products to the mass market. We will be developing those proposals and plan to encourage people to save for their pensions, but Members will have to wait for the details in the pensions Green Paper later this year.

On the specific subject of a lifeboat, I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Twickenham on the general situation in the life insurance and pensions industry. In his view, a lifeboat would be desirable, but the key point is that the financial services compensation scheme already provides for 90 per cent. of policy values to be paid out in the event of the insolvency of a life insurance company. There is the possibility of the industry choosing to come together before a life insurance company reaches insolvency in order to take advantage of those provisions and provide a lifeboat, if it deems it to be appropriate in a given situation.

Annabelle Ewing: Is there a ceiling on compensation provided by the scheme? Is there a ceiling on the amount per payment?

Ruth Kelly: No. Compensation is 100 per cent. of the first small amount and 90 per cent. of any subsequent amount up to whatever total is required. The industry could come together and decide that a lifeboat was needed. In fact, the Equitable and other life insurance companies are closely monitored by the FSA, particularly in these difficult times. The hon. Member for Twickenham asked what the FSA was doing to help; it is working extremely closely with the Equitable to help it to quantify any liabilities that it has for mis-selling and decide on future courses of action. If the FSA thought it appropriate, it would approach the industry for those sorts of talks. That is where the responsibility for that sort of action lies.

Mr. Mark Field: May I reiterate my concern that the FSA does not have the authority within the City to take lifeboat action, if lifeboat action were deemed to be the right thing to do? The Bank of England, and therefore the Government, needs to take a more important role in the matter. The FSA's role, and its credibility within the City, is insufficient to take action of that sort.

Ruth Kelly: I might have agreed with the hon. Gentleman if he were referring to the period before the full independence of the FSA. However, the fact of the matter is that the FSA is the only authority with a detailed knowledge of the solvency position of the Equitable, and it is monitoring events intimately. Other than the industry itself, which can take its own view, it is the only authority in a position to come up with and proactively pursue such a course of action if it thought it advisable. At present, the FSA believes that Equitable Life is a solvent going concern; I hope that that view will remain.

I turn now to Penrose and the ombudsman. We understand the concerns of policyholders, hon. Members and the general public about the state of affairs at Equitable, which was why we set up the independent inquiry. Lord Penrose's terms of reference are:

> "To inquire into the circumstances leading to the current situation of the Equitable Life Assurance Society, taking account of relevant life market background; to identify any lessons to be learnt for the conduct, administration and regulation of life assurance business; and to give a report thereon to Treasury Ministers."

The terms of reference have deliberately been drawn wide in order to allow thorough consideration of the root causes of the problem. I wish to stress, however, that Lord Penrose is operating entirely independently of the Government. He is a senior Scottish commercial judge. He has an accountancy background and he was the ideal candidate to lead the inquiry. We listened clearly to his views when asking him to undertake such an inquiry. He thought that it was much better for him immediately to read the background of Equitable without the artificial restrictions that a deadline would impose, for example.

Lord Penrose said that he would produce his findings as quickly as possible and that they would be consistent with a thorough and authoritative account of the events of Equitable Life. He assures us that that is still the case. I look forward to reading the results of his inquiry. The idea of imposing an artificial deadline for the first time would be counter-productive.

Mr. Mark Field: What about an interim report?

Ruth Kelly: I was about to touch on that point. The idea of imposing a deadline and saying, "Yes, come up

[Ruth Kelly]

with an interim report within the next few months," would be counter-productive, given that Lord Penrose is intent on producing his full report as quickly as possible.

Dr. Cable: Given that the Minister has underlined the independence of Lord Penrose, will she give us an assurance that the authoritative report will be published in full?

Ruth Kelly: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked me that question. It is my presumption and that of Lord Penrose that the report will be published in full. However, I must point out to hon. Members that we cannot break the law if certain legal confidentiality restrictions emerge when the final version of the report is shown to our lawyers. I presume that it will be published in full. It will be made clear to people whether that is the case. They can decide whether the report is fully independent or whether some passages have been removed.

The ombudsman is also entirely independent of the Government. It is for her to decide which of the complaints that are referred to her within her jurisdiction she wishes to investigate. The Treasury and the FSA are co-operating fully with the ombudsman. We have not received any complaint that we are not so operating. It has been suggested that her investigation has been delayed until after Lord Penrose has reported. That is not the case. Indeed, the ombudsman made that clear in a press notice on 29 October, which stated that the current investigation's

"finalisation does not depend on the conclusion of Lord Penrose's Inquiry".

The ombudsman has said that no decision will be taken on whether to undertake a further investigation into the period prior to 1 January 1999 until after Lord Penrose has reported. There is no bar to prevent the ombudsman from deciding to conduct a more widespread inquiry that goes further back into the history of events: that is totally within her remit. Lord Penrose's remit is wider than the ombudsman's. That is why we asked him to look at the actions of Equitable during the period. Our main concern is that, during this course of affairs, we learn every lesson possible for future regulation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up. Will hon. Members who are not staying for the next debate please leave quickly and quietly?

European Constitution

11 am

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Good morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This morning I raise the important issue of the European constitution. If we are not careful, history will pass this Parliament by. In less than two years' time, there will be a European constitution and we will either surf that wave or be drowned by it. The European constitution will change for ever the power and status of Parliament as well as the way in which our citizens are governed.

I am glad that hon. Members on both sides of the House have helped to secure this debate on the outline of the European constitution. Five hon. Members requested it with the agreement that we would share the time if one of us were lucky. I send the apologies of the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) who is attending a Select Committee and those of the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) who is—appropriately—involved in a sitting of the European Scrutiny Committee.

I am glad to welcome the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). His view on the subject may be very different from mine, but I respect it just as I respect his often equally impenetrable spin bowling for the House of Commons cricket team.

The fifth person who co-operated in securing the debate is my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross). It is a pleasure and a privilege for me to participate in a debate with him: I regard him as my mentor in Parliament. All my mistakes are my own, but my hon. Friend has been a great friend and support to me over many years.

As usual, I shall try to make my remarks as non-partisan as possible. There is a surprising amount of common ground between what may at first sight appear to be disparate views on the European question, and there may be consensus about the way in which the European constitution should be framed. It will happen, so let us concede that, deal with the reality and make the constitution as effective as possible for British and European democracy.

A great many problems must be tackled in relation to the balance between the executive and legislative arms in Britain and Europe. Currently, some members of the Executives meet, often in Brussels, and carve things up between them. They decide what they want to do and the elected and legislative arms are an afterthought, as is so often the case with European scrutiny in this Parliament. That is a fundamental problem. Perhaps hon. Members have something to bring to the party—our sense of democracy and of involving our people and legislatures rather than decisions merely being left to people who know better because they happen to be in the Government of the day.

Why should we be so concerned about what is in the constitution? It will preserve and entrench the power currently vested in our European institutions and will decide how we participate effectively in future decisions that affect us all. It should also enable us to call to account those who make the decisions and, above all, to change those decisions, if we wish, democratically by voting in elections. I am examining the matter not purely

as a question of Executive power with Presidents and Prime Ministers getting together and working late into the night to cook up a deal that suits them, but as a question of democratic power and how we can involve a wider range of people so that the European project interests and excites people in the UK and throughout Europe.

It is not a matter of not trusting our Prime Ministers or Presidents. In the old communist days in East Germany, when there were riots the Government issued a statement saying that the people had forfeited the Government's confidence—in other words that the people should have somehow tried harder to understand the Executive's difficulties. We should look at things the other way round and ensure that the peoples and electorates of Europe participate in an exciting and potentially ground-breaking project to push Europe further toward consolidating gains that have been made.

There is also a question of defining relationships. Nation states—I say this with an eye to my Conservative colleagues—should be clearly defined in the constitution. If we did that, we could eliminate the fear of federalism that is promoted, especially by centre and centre-right parties in this country, by use of the F-word, as it is called. If we defined what federalism is and what it is not, we could eliminate some of the fear in British politics.

We could place insurmountable roadblocks in the way of the minority who want a superstate by defining the role of the nation state. That minority frightens people, and people at large should be reassured that that is not the concept of Europe in which we want to participate. None of us should fear clarity in a constitution. Clarity will prevent the executive creep that we have at present. The phrase "ever-closer union" implies dynamism and that certain people can decide the direction in which we go, although we might not be consulted. Replacing that executive creep with the concept of a contract between individual nations and a clear, transparent set of rules that bind the nations together would represent real progress.

I hope that we can agree that the European constitution should entrench the doctrine of subsidiarity. That depressing piece of eurobabble conceals one of the most beautiful concepts in democracy: the fundamentally important principle that power should be exercised at the level of democracy that is closest to the people. If my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, whose brilliance in words and print is known to all of us, came up with a different word from subsidiarity, it would no doubt be emblazoned on his grave, but many of us would appreciate it. A beautiful concept hides behind that horrible word, and that concept should be at the head and heart of the new European constitution.

Subsidiarity is often thought of as protecting the rights of national Governments and Parliaments against those of European institutions, but it should also protect the rights of our devolved assemblies, regional assemblies and local government. Although subsidiarity is part of the treaties of the European Union, they have been completely ineffective and inadequate at enforcing the concept. A lower authority has never used subsidiarity to challenge successfully the power or decision of a higher authority in the EU. Several of us will continue to doubt the efficacy of subsidiarity, as it is currently defined, until that happens. In a European constitution, we will require that subsidiarity can be used effectively at many institutional levels in the European Community. The new constitution must bring the concept of subsidiarity to life; otherwise, it will be worthless. The first draft by ex-President Giscard d'Estaing may be an improvement on present treaties but I am afraid that it still falls far short of the clarity and precision that would allow the European courts to arrest and reverse any drift of power from local to regional, from regional to national, or from national to European.

The exercise of framing the European constitution has been likened to that of framing the American constitution several centuries ago by the founding fathers. However, I fear that we have a little further to go before we are in the same league as Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison and Washington. None the less, we should not stop trying. The Americans, of course, had an advantage: they created their constitution before they created a common currency and before they committed themselves to expansion into new territories—I am comparing that with the enlargement of the European Union—whereas the Europeans created a common currency, then decided to expand their territory, and only then, as an afterthought, decided to create a constitution.

We in Europe have an Executive-led, top-down process. Perhaps it had to be that way. We could not start in the same way as the United States of America, and I am not suggesting that, before we start with a clean sheet, we should eliminate all indigenous peoples, as was done in America. In the USA, there was a grass-roots movement. The constitution was a response to Executive over-mightiness rather than a product of Executive over-mightiness. It was an attempt to ensure that the Executive did not dominate and that the legislature and the people had a voice that was taken into account. Only they could create that Executive. The Americans did things the right way round; perhaps we will struggle. However, we can get there, despite the fact that we are doing things differently. The Americans knew that they needed a constitution to secure the will of their people behind the changes that were necessary not only to run a common currency and take in new states, but to provide an agreed system for resolving conflicts of interest between states and local and national interests.

There is one way in which we should draw on the American experience and try to replicate it. When the Americans were drafting their constitution, it was without question the most exciting time in American politics and probably global politics. It provoked a nationwide debate—led by a Briton, Thomas Paine—that engaged almost every American citizen with a vote. I have to admit that, in the pubs and clubs of Nottingham, North, people rarely debate the core competencies of the respective authorities. If you mentioned subsidiarity in Nottingham, most people would think that it was something nasty, related to previous coalmining, that might damage their house.

[Mr. Graham Allen]

I look again to the qualities of my hon. Friend the Minister: we must seek to excite people and involve them in this process. The Minister is well qualified, as is the Secretary of State for Wales and the Foreign Secretary. When they choose to be, all three are powerful advocates. We must not allow this debate to be dry and sterile, dealt with in eurospeak somewhere in Brussels. We should also involve this Parliament. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) and to the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) who have represented the House so well in the European Convention. However, they were selected by the Executive and not by the House, and, although they have done an extremely good job so far, that cannot be the full extent of parliamentary involvement. Parliament must come along with and understand the process. Should it have to give anything up, Parliament must agree to what it is to give up. We need to think very carefully about how the process is managed, otherwise, if Parliament or the public feel that something is being imposed on them, they will reject and resent it. That would be wholly unnecessary.

I hope that we could perhaps use pre-legislative scrutiny, which is coming into fashion in the House—that is very welcome. We could hold sessions to debate the issue while allowing people to view our debates online and to e-mail their comments, which could be filtered through to hon. Members. Instead of having 40 or 50 eminent founding fathers as the United States constitution had, we could have several million founding fathers and mothers of a British input into a European constitution. That is a great prize indeed. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take away that idea and other ideas about how we might involve Parliament and the wider public.

With regard to the American constitution, the founding fathers decided to make their constitution memorable and portable: something that would fit into the hearts, brains and pockets of every American schoolchild. The founding fathers wrote their constitution in clear, uplifting, elegant language to inspire loyalty and sacrifice among their citizens. They created a constitution that people have been prepared to die for. I would be delighted if we in this place were able to contribute to making a European constitution of that nature.

I am afraid that the draft outline that was prepared by ex-President Giscard d'Estaing has all the inspiration of the EU sheep meat directive, with which I know all hon. Members are familiar. The draft outline is dense, opaque and full of eurolocutions that have already brought high levels of stress to readers and listeners throughout Europe. Some will blame the translators for the tortured language, but that is unfair. That document loses a lot in the original.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has a way with words, but his touch must have deserted him, or perhaps he was absent, when the Convention drafted article 14:

"this structure shall ensure the consistency and continuity of the policies and activities carried out in order to attain the Union's objectives—activities both in the areas of competence allocated wholly or partly to the Union and in those areas in which competence belongs to the Member States and is jointly exercised by them"

—and that is one of the highlights.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam): Order. Standing Orders require that a Chairman understands what is said and they also deal with the language that hon. Members use. I am having trouble.

Mr. Allen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you make the point far more eloquently than I do. One thing that I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will take away from the debate is—seriously—the need to look for a poet. We need someone like Madison who, after 40 or 50 people had decided what was needed at the heart of the constitution, was sent away to write it. The founding fathers said, "James, go away and write the draft"—and he did—

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): What about Alistair Campbell?

Mr. Allen: I am already hearing suggestions about who that individual might be. None the less, in all seriousness, I hope that my hon. Friend will find someone somewhere in Europe who can put together with coherence, elegance and inspiration some of the things that are currently being talked about.

I have to compare the language of the draft constitution with the preamble to the United States constitution:

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

Those are words that ring down the centuries.

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): The preamble of the American constitution is written in beautiful English, but if my hon. Friend delves deeper into its articles he will find exactly the lawyers' gobbledegook that was put into it in order to protect government from attacks by its citizens via the courts. All constitutions must, at some stage, have the precision and complex clarity that the constitutional lawyers always insist on. I invite him to read further; if he does so, he will find that a lot of that poetry disappears.

Mr. Allen: I will resist the temptation to read further. Although the functions are defined, the language in which that is done might be thought of in terms of the mists of history. However, as my hon. Friend the Minister is a highly literate person who is very well read, I hope that he will agree that even the worst parts of the American constitution read better than the best parts of the eurobabble draft that Giscard d'Estaing has put together.

I wish to make another point about the elegance of language and the American Declaration of Independence. We are going to sign a declaration of dependence. There is nothing wrong with that, and I hope that in doing so—in subsuming some of our powers within a broader European context—we might consider a form of words such as:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident:

That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed".

If we employ words not only of that beauty, but of that precision, there would not be a European citizen—regardless of whether they were a president or a pauper—who could mistake the intent that the people in Brussels and elsewhere derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. I hope that that sentiment will be expressed in the constitution.

Democracy, subsidiarity and inspiration—rather than process—should be the guiding principles of the European constitution. The first draft has been started and it is going in the right direction, but it has not gone far enough to meet the needs of the peoples of Europe. There is now a great risk that the European constitution will become more fudged, obscure and remote from its citizens, as member states seek forms of words to resolve their differences.

What is to be done? When you want a job to be done, you must do it yourself. In my spare time, I have written a 20-article constitution that is two and a half pages long; I will leave it with my hon. Friend at the end of the debate. It sets out the principles of subsidiarity, democracy and human rights. I tried to imagine how the founding fathers in America might have undertaken their task, and my draft deliberately mimics their language, and directly borrows several of their provisions. I hope that the Europeans will not be too vain to deny themselves the benefit of American constitution making, the results of which have endured successfully for more than 200 years. My hon. Friend the Minister has a copy of those fundamental articles, and they can also be found on the YouGov website, which has a growing and creative list of comments from respondents.

I mention my own modest effort because it illustrates what our Parliament could collectively do—all our citizens could participate in that through e-democracy. The House could generate that debate and thereby excite and involve young people who want to have a stake in our future and say what they want our institutions to look like and how our powers should be exercised in our society. This House should not monopolise the process of constitution making, but it should at least have a stake in that process, and then involve all our citizens in it.

My hon. Friend the Minister is making great efforts to involve the regions, academics, business people, trade unionists, students and many other people, but the Government must go one step further. They must get the British Parliament involved in a serious way—rather than in a nominal way by selecting the people who will represent us at the European Convention, or by having a bit of scrutiny at the European level, or even by having a debate on the Floor of the House on Monday. However, it is commendable that that debate is taking place, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister for having pressed for and achieved it.

Those are welcome steps, but they are only small steps; they do not involve Parliament and people as of right in their own constitution making. We must get this right, or people will turn against the whole concept of the European constitution, which would be totally unnecessary. We must start to see our Parliament and our people as partners in the political process, rather than as threats to it.

Once we have reached the conclusion of a process of national consensus, I hope that the European constitution will be put to a referendum in Britain. If the process has been conducted properly, it will sail through, because we will all have bought into it and put in the safeguards and roadblocks necessary to reassure those who—possibly with good reason in certain circumstances—are sceptical. I think of the right hon. Member for Wokingham. They need to be reassured, just as other people need to be inspired by the European vision. Their views are as valid as those of any pro-European and they need to be taken into account in the process of constitution making. Otherwise, a referendum, which I believe is essential, will fail. Were we to have a referendum today, a European constitution would not be accepted. I should like us to reach a position in which we have convinced people that a European constitution will not only be accepted but will have the support of all hon. Members.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Is reassurance needed because people believe that a constitution will slowly suck us into a position in which one day people wake up and find that their country has gone? Does the hon. Gentleman think that it might be a step in the right direction to add an exit clause to the constitution? That would provide reassurance. Most treaties, NATO, the European Council and the Council of Europe have exit clauses.

Mr. Allen: I very much agree. Having said that we have to learn from other constitution makers, not least the Americans, we should also learn from the experience of the United States during the civil war. Although I hope that we shall never repeat the difficulties of the last century, when European nations were at war, that is why I have included an exit clause in my draft. It cannot be done casually; it has to be worked on carefully. I know that the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) takes great care to think such matters through, as do his Conservative colleagues. If we cannot reassure open-minded, thoughtful colleagues in all parties about the true intent of a European constitution, we should not have one, because it is designed to help them just as much as to further a concept of the European project.

I shall conclude my remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West wishes to catch your eye, as does the right hon. Member for Wokingham, who assisted me in convening the debate. I hope that they will be successful. Governments should not regard debate and scrutiny as a threat, but as an opportunity to strengthen the British contribution to the European Union.

We do not want to arrive late again, being churlish and criticising at the edge because a Franco-German alliance has already sorted something out. We should

[Mr. Allen]

get in there now and put some British constitutional sense into the drafting. Above all, we should make common cause with the peoples of Europe, whose interest in democracy and human rights and in clear inspirational language is as important as ours. If we do that, we will carry not only the majority in the House, who should be partners in the process, but a majority in the country. We will have a constitution that suits not only our nation, but all European peoples, the awful tragedies that afflicted our continent in the last century will not be repeated and in future we shall be able to live together in peace.

11.28 am

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on having secured the debate and on the spirit in which he made his contribution. He was exaggerating in his flattery of my spin bowling. I have never claimed to be a great bowler. I see that I share the problem with some who play for the England team, although they have achieved more in cricket than I have.

I wish to be a voice for democracy—for making decisions in the United Kingdom that make sense for the people whom we represent. I particularly enjoyed the passages in the hon. Gentleman's speech that stressed the need to carry people with us on this massive journey, to explain matters in language that they understand and to ensure that the politicians acting on their behalf do not over-reach or go further than people want, and that they surrender powers to a European Government only when that makes sense and can be sold to the British people as just.

I also enjoyed the fact that the hon. Gentleman introduced executive creep—an interesting character—into the debate. I am particularly worried about this character because it is working away in Brussels day by day. Often, I wake up to discover that Brussels has taken decisions on our behalf, yet we knew little or nothing about them and may not have agreed to them. Our Government may have been alert but lost the argument, or the decision may have gone through because the Commission, which is a very active executive body, with a lot of work to do, was in a hurry and did not carry all elected politicians with it. Equally, our Ministers have many other roles to perform.

Successive Prime Ministers of different persuasions have told us very similar things about Europe, and there is a surprising continuity in our debates with our partners in Brussels. Prime Ministers tell us that Europe is coming our way. They therefore accept that it was not in line with what we wanted when they took office, although they add that, thanks to their negotiating skills, it is definitely coming our way. That is not a party political point; the same thing has happened under Conservative and Labour Prime Ministers.

My worry is that Europe is far from coming our way. What is our way? Again, there is surprising continuity. Prime Ministers right, left and centre nearly always say that they want a Europe of nations and that the most important decisions must be taken in the United Kingdom through a democratic process. They are happy to co-operate with our partners in several respects and to pool sovereignty in other, very modest ways. They want free trade, friendship and, where possible, agreement, but they want the big, life-and-death decisions about military and economic affairs to be taken in Britain.

The draft constitution makes it clear, however, that Europe is far from coming our way. Indeed, many of the big decisions are sliding under European control. It is our duty in the House to expose that process and to cross-examine the Executive, who represent our interests, to find out how they will resist it. How will they deliver the Europe of nations that they say they want? How can they go on claiming that we have a Europe of nations when a group of dedicated men and women are settling on a constitution that goes a long way towards creating a united states of Europe? Indeed, one of the Convention's suggested titles for the EU is the United States of Europe. The phrase is credible, and a united states of Europe would be much more centralised and have a much more powerful Government than the free-trade friendly Europe that is coming our way, according to the euro myth in Britain.

The second argument that we hear from successive Prime Ministers is that our sovereignty is not at risk. What is sovereignty? It sounds like a rather abstract concept. Does it really matter? Of course it does. Sovereignty is the right to make our own decisions, to be boss of our own house and decide how we paint the front door, when we shut it and when we open it. If we are not careful, we will discover that all too many decisions that affect our daily lives are no longer made by a democratically elected Government in Britain, as we had thought.

As a British democrat, I would far rather live under an elected Labour Government, with a majority in the House of Commons, in the belief that I could criticise them, push them, influence them and, one day, I hope, get rid of them. That would be preferable to living under an unelected or indirectly elected Government in Brussels, whom I could scarcely ever influence, get at, cross-examine or throw out of office. Losing our sovereignty is that fundamental. It means that instead of being able to use our vote and our voice to influence those who govern us or to remove them when things go wrong, we are left almost powerless and are governed by people whom we scarcely know, can rarely influence and cannot throw out if they make a mess.

The third argument—in some ways it contradicts the idea that our sovereignty is never at risk—is that pooling sovereignty is "good for you". That is based on people confusing sovereignty with power. It is self-evidently true that if 12 or 15 countries are put together and governed as one, that unit will be more powerful than any of the individual participants that predated it. However, that is not the same as pooled sovereignty, with individual countries being more powerful because they have joined a union. Each country has only one fifteenth of the influence, or a slightly higher proportion for larger countries, on the decisions of the much bigger grouping.

I would compare that to having a bank account with the neighbours. It would give someone more spending power if he and his neighbours had a single bank account. If he were clever at influencing it, it might even give him more direct power. However, people do not do that because they could not guarantee that they could

spend the money in the account when they wanted to. They could not guarantee that they would be able to get their hands on their neighbours' money, or that the neighbour could not get his hands on their money.

Even though people like their neighbours, want to co-operate with them and go to drinks parties with them, they do not have bank accounts with them. Ultimately, people know that that would be confusing power with sovereignty. When it comes to people's own affairs, they would rather be sovereign than potentially more powerful.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): The right hon. Gentleman is wrong about that. The growth of credit unions in this country shows that ordinary people are putting their money together. I am sure that there is a growth of credit unions in his area. Debates on the need to support such unions take place in the House all the time.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman makes my case for me. People volunteer to join a credit union, can leave it at any time, and always have access to their own contribution. I am happy with that kind of Europe. If everything is done by unanimity—if this great House of Commons can decide whether or not it wants to enter into an arrangement, and in future can decide that it no longer wants to continue with such an arrangement—that is wonderful.

I want a Europe of nations in which we co-operate. That means many more decisions taken by unanimity and, I accept, that we would do fewer things and make fewer decisions together. On many occasions, the British view will be different from that of France and Germany, and why should that not be so? The credit union is a perfect analogy. By working together with unanimous agreement on occasions, we will have more power in the world as a whole. We want to do that, but we should not be forced to do it against our will. No hon. Member would join a credit union if it reserved the right to take his money and not give it back.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I am following the right hon. Gentleman's argument with great interest. Does he agree that the best example of a powerful group of nations in which sovereignty was not voluntarily pooled was the Soviet Union? The first thing that happened after the break-up of the Soviet Union was that the countries established their own sovereignty, with their own currencies.

Mr. Redwood: That is a powerful point. If a common currency was so good, would not those countries have kept the rouble? They could not wait to get out of it because they associated it with tyranny. I do not say that the tyranny of the EU will be as massive as that of the Soviet Union, but if we surrender the right of veto, we surrender the right to make our own decisions and have control over our own affairs, and we will come to rue the day. The British people will not thank us for it. At some point in future, an issue will become massive—who knows what it will be? The British people will say to their elected representatives, "How dare you give away our power to sort this matter out? Why did this happen? Why did it take place by stealth? Why weren't we told at the time? Why didn't we have a referendum?"

How right the hon. Member for Nottingham, North was to say that if the Government want to sign away more of our powers in the future constitution—I fear that they do—they should at least have the decency to put the matter not only to the House of Commons to debate and vote, but to the people at large. Too much power has been given away already without their express permission. It is high time that we had a full national debate on the issue, so that we could see where strength of opinion lay. Then we would see whether the Minister was right about what people wanted. He might get his endorsement, and I as a good democrat might have to admit that I had lost the case. However, if I am right—I suspect that I am and that most people are with me—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must not squabble across the Chamber while the right hon. Member is making his speech.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If, as I suspect, I am right, we will have our three weeks in court during the referendum campaign and we will have settled the issue and reconnected the views of the British people to the views of the elected Government.

Mr. MacShane: The right hon. Gentleman's argument is not with me. The draft constitution was drafted by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen)—he is the one who wants a constitution. The right hon. Gentleman should address his remarks to—

Mr. Redwood: Much as I admire the hon. Member for Nottingham, North as a fine democrat in the House, my argument is with the Government because it is they who will sign the real constitution for Europe. I have not heard the Government say that they would veto a single thing in the draft constitution and I have not said that the Government will take their bat away and refuse to play the game. My view is that the Government want to get us into the constitution by stealth. They will then say that the constitution is perfect for us, having played no real part in influencing, fashioning and shaping it. Then they will say that there is no need to put it to the British people because the Government judge that it does not represent much of a change. I think that it will represent a substantial further change.

I want briefly to raise a series of issues that arise under the constitution—

Mr. Allen: I intervene to help the right hon. Member for Wokingham and my hon. Friend the Minister. Reference was made to my European constitution and I am flattered that it has even impinged on my hon. Friend's busy schedule. It may assist the Committee if I quote from article 2, which states:

> "Membership of the European Union shall be reserved to nations which guarantee and provide for all their citizens the rights established in this constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights, and whose Governments are chosen in free and fair elections."

On secession, which I hope will never be on the agenda but must be there as a safeguard, it states:

[Mr. Allen]

"A nation may secede from the Union only at the wish of its people, expressed in an election or referendum held for that purpose."

So there is a way out, although I hope that it will never be necessary. It is there just in case. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will continue in the constructive vein in which he made his points because he sometimes makes the intellectual mistake of some colleagues who are opposed in principle to the European Union and who imagine that everything in the garden is lovely at the moment and that the British Parliament is sovereign and can deal with these matters. Subsidiarity will help him to make—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions are supposed to be just that. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is turning into a speech.

Mr. Redwood: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I must crack on as other hon. Members wish to speak.

I have some questions for the Minister. Have the Government signed up to the idea of five overarching, educational targets? When they do so, will not that mean that we are circumscribed in the education policy that we can follow in the United Kingdom, because our spending priorities and educational priorities will have to be geared to those five targets? Is that another sphere that will move from British national control to European control? Is it true that we have been requested by the European Union to denounce the open-skies agreement that this country successfully negotiated with the United States? I have confirmation in written answers that the EU is not yet empowered to negotiate a Europe-wide open-skies agreement on behalf of all 15 member states, but I have been advised by people who follow the matter carefully that the EU thinks that our open-skies agreement as a separate nation was wrong and is beginning to make moves to get us to rescind it? Why do we have to go through this process? Is not that a power too far for the European Union?

Many of the architects of the new constitution believe that the next big advance to be made by the EU, following in its view the successful introduction of the euro for most member states, is to have more common taxation. It wishes to have common rates of business taxation and to create VAT as the first truly Europe-wide tax collected by Europe and distributed from the European Government back to the member states on a formula of Europe's choosing rather than our own. Proposals for other independent EU taxes are also well advanced. How far will the process go? Will the Minister give an assurance that the Government will veto every proposal that wishes to take away the sovereign right of the House of Commons over taxation and give it in part to influences and control from Brussels?

The European Union is well advanced in wishing to take over what was the third pillar—home affairs and criminal justice. The 32 offences under the European arrest warrant represent a significant advance towards an EU criminal jurisdiction. Will the Minister give us an assurance that we will resist the imploding of the third pillar into EU competence—the takeover by the EU of important parts of our criminal justice system? Or are we to say that the House of Commons and House of Lords are no longer capable of making important decisions about criminal justice in Britain?

Mr. Allen: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that if we define subsidiarity accurately in a European constitution, and it is justiciable, the very examples that he has just given would be illegal? In addition, were a euro state to seek such competences, we could take it to court, either as a nation state, or as a region or as a local government unit? That would be our strongest defence in retaining the integrity of all those subsidiary bodies.

Mr. Redwood: I have some sympathy, but I do not think that I am in favour of subsidiarity. I want to look at it the other way up and ask what powers we, as a sovereign nation, are prepared to entrust for the time being to the European Union. I would be happy to clarify and define those powers, but I would want unanimity. I would like us to propose that qualified majority voting should be rescinded. I see no need for Europe to go on legislating at the current pace. The argument for QMV is that it speeds up legislation, but Britain should now want to slow the pace down. The most obvious way of doing that would be to say, "Let us go back to a system where, if all members do not want a piece of legislation, it will not be rushed through—we will wait until we can get our ducks in a row."

Mr. Tyrie: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Redwood: I really must not, because other hon. Members wish to speak.

Do the Government plan to repatriate our much-maligned and damaged fishing grounds? The only solution is for the British fishing industry to take them back under British control and to have our own regime, so that we can try to nurse our stocks back to former levels. We will have to impose limits, but fishing should benefit the British fishing industry. Have we not been too generous? It is particularly unfair that there is no common fishery in the Mediterranean sea but that there is in the North sea. Why do we not harmonise and standardise by bringing policy for the North sea into line with that for the Mediterranean, and reassert our claim to our own territorial waters? I would trust the Government to manage it better than the EU—no greater praise could I possibly lavish on the Government—although, of course, I am sure that a Conservative Government could do it even better, but we will have to wait a while for that opportunity.

All parties agree that the common agricultural policy should be reformed. All seem to agree with the proposition, which I strongly support, that the common agricultural policy is an affront to the developing world and is not good for consumers or even for farmers in Britain. It achieves the triple whammy of doing damage to our legitimate competitors overseas, doing damage to our farming interests through its regulatory powers and doing damage to our customers by overcharging. It should be possible to design something better. Will the Minister assure us that the Government intend to do that? That should form an important part of negotiations on the convention. Will the Minister agree to veto any further moves towards a common defence

system and a European army? Will he agree that we need unanimity on decisions over common foreign and security policy?

What should the UK do? In the negotiations, we should put forward a positive and forward-looking set of proposals that give reality to the fine words of a Europe of nations. We should say that we want true devolution of power. We would give Europe only those things that we think would make sense. We should base decisions on unanimity, not on qualified majority voting. We should strengthen the democratic checks on the exercise of EU government power. We should slow down the legislative process and open up that process to the press and public. We should be the voice of democracy and ensure that power is exercised where it truly belongs: in countries where people relate to that authority and feel part of that democratic system. Of course, we will need a referendum on such mighty issues, but will the Government not just talk the talk, but walk the walk, by proposing a constitution that creates a proper, open, democratic and fair Europe of nations?

11.49 am

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): First, I pay tribute to my very good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). We have known each other for more than 24 years. Let me tell my hon. Friend the Minister to "watch this space". When the former Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun and I were seeking to redefine the parliamentary Labour party, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North was our secret agent. We were two lone, small voices, with that large person behind us. We bought the parliamentary Labour party to its current point. It now has a constitution and standing orders. The sort of meeting that is taking place right now—and that we are missing—did not take place before we forced it on to the agenda. My hon. Friend has a very good track record on such matters. I would not simply put the proposed constitution on one side; I would look at it very seriously. I am sure that it will contain elements that my hon. Friend the Minister will want to use some time in the future.

It is always difficult—even frightening—to enter a debate on something such as article 14. I agree with the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) that we need to explain ourselves better. I would certainly recommend to everyone the tour undertaken by my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Wales, who was then Minister for Europe. They went round the country explaining what the European Union was about and what they were hoping to achieve. I would ask everyone from Scotland to read the speech that the Foreign Secretary made in Edinburgh on 27 August. It is a powerful speech and gives good reasons why the people in Scotland—polls demonstrate that they are not afraid of Europe—should want to be involved in the European Union. It reflected the fact that as Scots we are proud of our nation. However, that does not make us insular or inward looking. We have always had the advantage of feeling that, as a small country, we need to express ourselves on a wider stage. Whether that is in the Government or in Europe, we have never been afraid to take on those challenges and to look at where Scotland should go. That should not be understood in a narrow, nationalistic or xenophobic sense. The feeling is integrationist, in that we see the benefits of Scotland in Europe. We see the benefits of Scotland in Britain. That is why we argued for a Scottish Parliament in the United Kingdom.

However, we need to reassure the public. Even in Scotland, many members of the public want to know what Europe is about. They want to hear our agenda and to know that the dramatic decline in Britain's standing in Europe that was witnessed during the Labour party's 18 years in opposition has been reversed. As the Prime Minister said, we are now

"a leading partner in shaping the Europe of the future, not following reluctantly the shape moulded by others."

That is important.

If the right hon. Member for Wokingham genuinely wants to take part in the debate, he should join us in going round the country, saying how he thinks that there are difficulties and problems. He says that he is doing that, and I do not doubt it, though I do not hear people in Scotland saying, "We had John Redwood up last week. That's us opposed to Europe." That just does not happen. However, they do say, "We had the Foreign Secretary up, and we agree with a lot of what he said. We see the purpose and reason behind it, and we see it's in Scotland's interest." The Foreign Secretary demonstrated that we have used our own experience in the way in which we have tackled inflation and created jobs. The Labour Government have been good for Scotland.

Mr. Hopkins: My hon. Friend is quite right. The Government have achieved great things economically. Does that not stand in great contrast to the terrible problems that Germany now faces as a result of the eurozone, which the Governor of the Bank of England has today highlighted?

Mr. Ross: The target is to create 20 million new jobs throughout Europe. In the first couple of years, we have not done as well as we should, but that does not mean that we should give in and become more protectionist. It simply means that we must argue our agenda for lighter regulation within the economy to help to create those jobs. That is what the Foreign Secretary said in Edinburgh. We need to argue that our model is a good one, which we could not do under the last Conservative Government because they only wanted the table. We can argue our case, saying "Here is our experience, learn from our experience because it is not a bad one." Of course, we have made mistakes and there have been moments when people did not agree with our policy. However, we can now look back and see that we have created 300,000 jobs.

Mr. Redwood: The present Government are no more at the table on eurozone matters than were the last Conservative Government. Does the hon. Gentleman think that that is a huge mistake? Would he urge his Front Bench to hold a referendum immediately to solve the problem?

Mr. Ross: Obviously not. The Government have laid down clearly the conditions under which we would hold a referendum on the euro. We are not stupid—we know

[Mr. Ross]

that there is work to do and at least we admit that. At least we are at the table with our partners, setting objectives and telling them about the experiences that we have had, which they could learn from and use in their countries.

None the less, the right hon. Member for Wokingham raised concerns that also concern us. The common agricultural policy is probably the issue that causes people most concern. At the recent world summit, with reference to our programme of sustainable development throughout the world, we had to accept that the common agricultural policy was a problem. Interim reform proposals were in the pipeline, and I wonder how far they have progressed and where they are. Are we any closer to those interim proposals, which would help us to do what we want to do in the world?

I part company with my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North, good friend that he is, on the word subsidiarity. He thinks that we need to find a new word, but that is always dangerous. I remember the first time that the word was used in Scotland. A member of the Scottish National party challenged one of my colleagues, on a television programme, to tell people what it meant. My Labour party colleague did not have a clue, and he stumbled and trawled around in trying to find out what it meant. That is not surprising, however, as the word was not generally understood then. I believe that it was first used in the Catholic Church. The religious persuasion of our candidate in Govan is not important, but he had clearly never heard of it. I might have heard of it at that time, but I did not really understand what it meant. It certainly floored my colleague on the television programme, and he never really recovered.

So, we have subsidiarity, and we now understand what it means. The Government have launched the most radical overhaul of our constitution since the Reform Act 1832. Unlike the right hon. Member for Wokingham, who voted against the Regional Assemblies (Preparation) Bill last night, we have given Scotland a Parliament, and Northern Ireland and Wales an Assembly each. We are preparing to give people in English regions assemblies as well, if they wish it.

Mr. Allen: It seems that however consensual one tries to be, there will always be colleagues who stretch the elastic to get back to their partisan positions. Subsidiarity is not an especially appropriate word, as it is confusing and people often do not know what it means—they would have to be in the know to know what it meant. Perhaps the word democracy would be sufficient, but it has been so abused over the years that I shall leave it in the capable hands of my literate hon. Friend the Minister for Europe to provide something that will sparkle and excite the British people.

Mr. Ross: I was about to ask a specific question. In his Edinburgh speech, the Foreign Secretary drew attention to the need for a mechanism to ensure that subsidiarity works, but have we yet found that mechanism? He said that

"the lack of an enforcement mechanism for subsidiarity has meant that the principle can be ignored."

I do wonder whether we have found the mechanism.

When I tried the marvellous exercise of weeding through all this stuff, I just gave up. I realised that if I started to read through it all, I would miss the whole point. Surely a few simple points could be made. Currently, EU treaties are long, complicated, confused and overlapping, but we need clear and concise treaties to clarify what the EU is, what it does and how it does it. That would help to bridge the gap of understanding between Europe and its citizens. A better organised European Union would then be in a better position to deliver practical benefits.

Unlike my hon. Friend, I welcome the draft text. At least we have something to work with and to provide the basis for debate over the next six months. We must build the text up. I do not want to get into name changes. We do not need a united states of Europe or a federal superstate. Let us stick with what we have—dual citizenships—and try to keep it as simple as we can. The Minister should watch this space because whatever my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North says will happen on day one is likely to arrive on day 10.

12.1 pm

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. I shall be brief because other hon. Members want to contribute to the debate.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on securing the debate and I applaud his democratic sentiments. I share them entirely, but I am unsure whether the European Union shares them. I also applaud the statement made many times by the former Minister for Europe, now Secretary of State for Wales, that the British Government support an association of independent democratic states in the EU—precisely what I support. I agree strongly with my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North that if we cannot achieve a democratic constitution for Europe, we should not have a constitution at all. The detail is important.

Parliament was founded—long before it was democratic—to keep control of spending. It was all about the barons trying to control the King's spending. If Governments do not have control over their economies, they are undemocratic and illegitimate. That is the problem with the European Union. We have already seen the problems that have arisen when sovereignty over economic matters has been taken away from members of the eurozone—not yet, one hopes not at all, from our own democratic Parliament.

The European Central Bank—appointed for eight years and outside political control—currently controls interest rates. It was set up at the insistence of the Germans, who have recently tried to press that bank to bring down interest rates, which are too high for their economy. However, they are too low for the Spanish and Irish economies, which causes serious problems. The growth and stability pact represents another attempt to shift power away from democratic Governments towards an agreement that will, through the Commission, automatically control the fiscal stance of member states. Once again, it is a move away from democracy. Some democracy is maintained through the Council of Ministers. I support a strong Council because it allows democratic Governments a major say about what happens in Europe, and I base most of my hope there for the time being.

What of the European Parliament? Today I read a report by a Liberal Democrat MEP, suggesting that the legitimacy of the European Parliament needs to be questioned. Indeed, during the most recent European election when we had for the first time the list system of proportional representation, which I deeply oppose, there was in my constituency an 18 per cent. turnout for a Parliament that is supposed to have a major role in democratic government.

I have seen the European Parliament in operation and believe that it is a farce. There are no thriving, live debates in which hon. Members can intervene on each other and debate the issues in depth. Instead there are three-minute statements by hundreds of Members of the European Parliament from all over Europe who get views and small globules of information on the record but have no real power. The democratic institutions of the European Union are deeply flawed.

I am being signalled that I should conclude my remarks. I have made most of the major points. This very day, Germany is in economic crisis. It wants to reduce interest rates to relax its fiscal policy, but it cannot do so—it has been told to do the opposite. As I mentioned earlier, the Governor of the Bank of England said in *The Times* today that Germany's problems arise from its membership of the eurozone. As long as we have the eurozone and members still joining it, the democratic legitimacy of the European Union will be in question. I suggest that the looser association of member states that should be the future of the European Union will result eventually in the abandonment of the euro and economic and monetary union, and in much more relaxed economic management so that democratic governments can control their economies.

12.6 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I congratulate, as others have, the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on securing the debate, along with a consortium of other hon. Members who are interested in the issue. Clearly, he has not lost his whipping ability of recent time. I also commend him on his recent accolade by *The Spectator* as Back-Bencher of the year. I am sure that he was pleased to receive it and that it is not an embarrassment to him.

We have heard a range of views. Much of the analysis can be shared among and within parties, although perhaps at times aspirations are different. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) specifically agreed with the proposition that any constitution that is put in place must be democratic. I absolutely endorse that view although I also point out that not having a constitution does not necessarily lead to democracy. What we have at present is certainly open to legitimate challenge on the lack of democracy across the EU and its institutions.

The central themes that we are discussing are founded on the basis that the EU is often remote, bossy and unaccountable and that the democratic settlement between the EU and its citizens is deficient. As we contemplate enlargement in the next couple of years, it is vitally important that we address such issues. The future of the European Convention is very significant in that respect. I hope that we will have an opportunity to debate the issues at length in the Chamber before long, because we have had no opportunity since the last discussion before the Seville summit earlier in the year.

It is clear that the Convention's work is gathering momentum and is being taken seriously. Any doubts about that are dispelled by the fact that the German and French Foreign Ministers have become delegates to the convention. I wonder whether our Foreign Secretary has any plans to follow suit. Britain certainly must not miss another opportunity, in the grand British tradition within Europe.

A constitution is undoubtedly necessary because at present we have a series of complex treaties with truckloads of supporting legislation. It is surely questionable whether the experts understand all the documentation, and there is no question of ordinary people doing so. I believe that the Convention's first draft is worth while but rather thin on detail. What we must hope for when it finalises its work is a clear statement of what the European Union is and how its various institutions and member states fit together. That must be the first stage of reconnecting the EU with its citizens. Recognising the rights of EU citizens will be important, too, and in that respect we would support the incorporation of the charter of fundamental rights into the constitution.

Apart from setting out those rights, the most important challenge will be to clarify the competencies of the EU as opposed to member states. There has been a debate about the elegance of the word subsidiarity, but no question about the need for the principle to be at the heart of the EU's activities. Decisions affecting the lives of citizens throughout Europe must be made at the most appropriate level. Lip service is paid to that principle, but too little scrutiny occurs and too much goes by default. There must be not only a clear restatement of subsidiarity, but adequate scrutiny of the reality by Parliaments at national and European levels.

We may not disagree on the nature of the road map to a new European constitution, but we must be absolutely clear that the constitution-building process is a great opportunity for us, not the worrying threat that some portray it to be.

12.10 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on his highly original, interesting and well-prepared speech. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) for making some excellent points that reflected great originality. Several good speeches were made, but I particularly applaud the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) for his work over a number of years as chairman of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's draft constitutional treaty is the result of a considerable amount of hard work and effort by several distinguished European politicians. It is thoughtful and imaginative, but in many ways fundamentally misses the point. The main challenge in Europe is how to address the democratic deficit, and we minimise that challenge at our peril. Europe stands on the brink of a new era. Within the next two years, substantial enlargement will take place. To make the European Union viable for the long term, its structures

[Mr. Richard Spring]

must reflect a decentralised and more flexible union that is much quicker to respond to people's wishes and to respect their national differences. All hon. Members would accept that there is a dangerous disconnection between the peoples of Europe and the architecture and institutions of the European Union. Re-engaging people with that process must be at the heart of whatever we do.

That will require a revision of the treaties, but it does not require a new constitution that, for the first time, would explicitly give the EU an autonomous authority of its own, thus changing the very basis of the structure of relationships that has existed between its members. It was frankly absurd for the Foreign Secretary to compare a European constitution with that of a golf club. A constitution would vastly increase the authority of European Union institutions. He called for a simpler statement of principles, but, as we know, constitutions have a great ability to snowball, gathering more importance over time. Accountability and democracy must be the standards by which we judge any new treaty. Although I am pleased that under article 8 any new competency that is not conferred on the EU by member states remains with member states, the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality must lie at the heart of our thinking. In considering the architecture of the European Union, it is important that national Parliaments play the key role. However imperfect, they are the expression of a country's democratic will, and to override that with a supranational written constitution would be to go in entirely the wrong direction.

There needs to be a clarification of the EU's powers, including a clear set of competencies. That would certainly make the EU more accountable and comprehensible, but I do not believe that a treaty of competencies needs to be reinforced on a constitutional treaty basis.

The EU's proper direction is clear: it must be more accountable, involve national Parliaments and clarify its rules. It does not need a supranational structure, which is the implication of many articles in the draft constitution. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham pointed out, there are also provisions for joint citizenship and the abolition of the EU's three-pillar structure. Could anything more absurd be conceived than having our foreign policy governed by qualified majority voting? That would certainly increase the unelected Commission's authority over justice and home affairs, and make the Union more distant and less democratic.

The draft constitution anticipates the incorporation of the charter of fundamental rights, which would represent a vast increase of the EU's competencies and of judge-led law. Nothing alienates people in this country from the institutions of the European Union more than judge-led law, and the incorporation of the charter in any constitution would see a massive extension of that, exacerbating the question of the democratic deficit.

Since the EU's inception and during its evolution, much has been accomplished, and much of that has been wholly desirable and good for the people of Europe. We are now at a crossroads. We must re-engage people and find an architecture to do that. The idea of a supranational authority in the form of a written constitution, which is constantly tested by judges and to which is attached a charter of fundamental rights, is entirely wrong. The urgency is to bring Europe back to the people and give them a sense of ownership, not create a centralised authority, which would become a bean feast for judges and endanger the precious relationship between acceptability and accountability that links the peoples of Europe with the institutions of the European Union.

12.16 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): This has been an enjoyable debate and I join in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen)—a very good friend, mentor and adviser over many years—on securing the debate. He pooled his independent sovereignty as an MP with other right hon. and hon. Members to command an hour and a half of debating time. On Monday, we will return to this matter in a major debate on the Convention.

Yesterday, the Lords Scrutiny Committee asked me some of the questions that have been raised today. I should love to find another word for subsidiarity, and I promise my hon. Friend that I shall open the Foreign Office thesaurus to find one, but it may be difficult. I invite him to read the Bill of Rights, which is the closest that we have to a constitution. There, he will find language, beyond its rather flowery opening, that is as deeply impenetrable as only an English constitutional lawyer can produce.

Before we drifted back into the dreary swamp of Conservative euro-hostility, which slightly diminished the rarefied quality of the debate, we had been exploring interesting conceptual ideas. A couple of nights ago in the House, I faced 40 or 50 giggling, hysterical Opposition Members chortling about the plight of Gibraltar. I am glad to say that today's debate is being conducted in a more serious and mature fashion.

Several hon. Members referred to the American constitution, which was drawn up by 52 men meeting in secret, which is not a privilege—if that is the right word—that we can grant ourselves in the 21st century. I note that no hon. Lady Members have taken part in this debate, and I am constantly worried that when we set about our business of putting Europe together in a better way we are ignoring the half of Europe's population that is not male.

There is a theory that Britain does not have a constitution. With next Monday's debate in mind, I commend "The English Constitution" by Walter Bagehot to hon. Members. He specifically understood the nature of the British constitution, and he contrasted it—I put this point to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North, who is, like me, a great friend and fan of things American—with the American constitution. Mr. Bagehot wrote:

> "You have got a Congress elected for one fixed period, going out perhaps by fixed instalments, which cannot be accelerated or retarded—you have a President chosen for a fixed period, and immovable during that period: all the arrangements are for *stated* times. There is no *elastic* element, everything is rigid, specified, dated. Come what may, you can quicken nothing, and can retard nothing."

Of course, the American constitution did not protect the United States from its dreadful civil war.

Speaking personally and as a Minister, I think that whatever arrangement we come to in Europe, a European constitution should not be static, fixed or immovable. It has to be elastic and able to change because Europe is an organic process and there is no ultimate European finality.

Mr. Redwood: Will the Minister confirm that the British Government will either negotiate out or veto any proposal that would give the EU power over taxation, criminal justice or the way in which we run our Army?

Mr. MacShane: In the brief time available, I should like to discuss the general issue of a constitution. It is well known that the British Government, along with a number of other Governments, do not favour qualified majority voting and wish to keep the unanimity principle on matters of taxation; of course, that also applies to common foreign and security policies. I shall go on to some of the points that the right hon. Gentleman made in his very interesting speech. He is a distinguished intellectual and a quondam fellow of All Souls.

Mr. Allen: Before my hon. Friend the Minister moves on to further points raised by the right hon. Member for Wokingham, I want to make two points. First, does he accept that a constitution is not static? A constitution is subject to endless interpretation, as the American constitution, the French constitution and others have been. A constitution is like a boxing ring in that it provides a framework in which political, social or judicial conflicts can be played out. The American constitution both permitted and abolished slavery; it moves with the times. Secondly, will he consider starting a competition to find a better word for subsidiarity? We have got to get over to people that subsidiarity is a great boost for democracy, and not a problem for democracy.

Mr. MacShane: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and if he wants to join with me in launching such a competition I would be delighted. He is of course right that constitutions are living things, and judges interpret them all the time. The concluding comment from the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), however, was that we are against judge-led law. I am sorry, but the Supreme Court of the United States is the essence of judge-led interpretive law, and any constitutional arrangements will require checks and balances.

In the short time available to me, I cannot go into all the comments that hon. Members have made. Returning briefly to the right hon. Member for Wokingham, he denounced the notion of sharing sovereignty, but we share it in NATO, the World Trade Organisation and, above all, the United Nations. When the UN orders Britain to do something, we do it and oppose those in breach of UN orders. The right hon. Gentleman's vision was, I have to say, Hobbesian—all against all, each in his individual garden. My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) was right in his comments about people acting together, pooling their rights and their money.

The biggest derogations of national sovereignty in the European Union were those imposed by the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member. The single market was the moment when the harmonisation of directives occurred and pages of new laws exploded into being, which was at the demand of the Confederation of British Industry and British business—and rightly so. We have just obtained the end of national sovereignty over control of energy markets—and rightly so. I want to see similar progress on financial services. Another hon. Member referred to a commitment to educational targets. Those were inserted in the voluntary Lisbon programme, as it is called, for accelerating economic reform in Europe. That was intended precisely to deal with the problems faced by Germany. It would be strange for us now to resile from targets that every British business man then supported.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins), with whom I have exchanged many a friendly word on these and other matters, should look a little at history. The 4 million unemployed in Germany were inherited from the conservative Government of Chancellor Kohl. Interest rates in the eurozone are 1 percentage point lower than ours. There is no great desire in Germany, a country that I know well, for Japanese-level interest rates, which have not helped move the Japanese economy forward. There is a need to break through the structures of vested interests, many of which are on the business side as well as on the employers side and the church side, or connected with subsidiarity—the vested interest of some regional governments that will not accept a compromise with the wider national interests of the German nation. However, if people want to know who was responsible for the disaster in Germany, they should look at its previous right-wing Government. Electing a right-wing conservative Government is always a disaster for any European country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West was absolutely right to say that people want to know. They want facts not fiction, but all they ever hear from the Conservative party—we heard it again this morning and we shall hear it again next Monday—are fictions about Europe. I am happy to paint the European Union, warts and all.

It was very clear from the closing remarks of the hon. Member for West Suffolk and the tone of the remarks of the right hon. Member for Wokingham that they do not want a certain kind of European constitution. They do not want the type suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North; they do not want a Bill of Rights; they do not want the excellent proposals that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary set out in his article in *The Economist* entitled "A Constitution for Europe", which had a marvellous image of him as Thomas Jefferson Straw. They do not want any constitution at all, because they are fundamentally opposed to Europe. That is the real division on which this country will have to make a decision at the next election. The party that stands against the interests of the British people in Europe will be defeated again and again and again.

Of course I support reform of the common agricultural policy. So does the *Socialist Worker*. So does the *Daily Mail*. So does every bishop. So does every Tory—well, at least every Labour Member. However, the reason that we have this common agricultural policy, with its common fisheries policy, is that we were

[Mr. MacShane]

not there in shaping it. The Conservatives want to ensure that we are out of Europe, not in there making it effective.

I think that the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) was discussing the dignified elements of a putative constitution. I want a constitution that is effective and efficient. Europe does not need more pretty words. We want a Europe that delivers for its people and that is what the Government and, I hope, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North will work towards during the next few months.

Mr. Peter Bleach

12.30 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I am glad to have the opportunity to raise a matter this morning. These Adjournment debates provide a unique opportunity for hon. Members to raise matters about which they feel strongly. We enjoy that, but I am always sympathetic to Ministers, because I know that Foreign Office Ministers are extremely busy and have to work morning, afternoon and evening, so it must be a problem for them to have to come to these debates. However, in Parliament it is important that if we feel strongly about a matter, we should have the opportunity of raising it and seeking guidance from Ministers.

I want to discuss the case of Mr. Peter Bleach. I apologise to the Minister for the massive volume of correspondence I have sent to the Foreign Office and the many questions I have asked about him. The reason is simply that I believe that a great injustice has been done, and I am seriously concerned and alarmed about the health and security problems which Peter is having in prison in Calcutta. My object in raising the matter in this debate is to try to persuade the Minister and his Department to do all they can to secure Mr. Bleach's release.

In fairness, I would like to express my gratitude for the way in which Ministers have endeavoured to assist so far. As I was writing this short speech yesterday, a letter was delivered to me from the Prime Minister—I am sure that the Minister has seen it—saying that he has written to the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Vajpayee, raising his concerns about Mr. Bleach's poor health and continued detention. He added that he had also asked Mr. Vajpayee to intervene and recommend that Mr. Bleach be released in the near future.

That is not the only initiative that has been taken, and I should mention that the Foreign Secretary raised the case with the Indian Deputy Prime Minister on 22 August. I was also advised that another Foreign Office Minister—I believe that it was the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien)—had discussed the matter with the Indian Foreign Secretary on 16 October. To that extent, I cannot complain about Government inaction. They seem to have gone out of their way to try to persuade the Indian Government that there is an injustice and something needs to be done. It is rather unusual for the Prime Minister to take so much trouble over the case of one individual in prison, and I am very grateful that he has done so.

In short, the Government have taken a major initiative to secure the release of Mr. Bleach, but sadly, the Government of India—who, in fairness, I must say I have always found to be more responsive and responsible than most foreign Governments—have so far declined to respond. I hope that the Prime Minister's latest initiative will persuade them to respond meaningfully, but in view of the seriousness of Mr. Bleach's health problem, I thought it right to raise the case today.

My first point is that Peter Bleach is a person with a record of high standards. When he was living in Southend, I always found him to be a person of honesty and integrity. When he advised me of the complex and

difficult security operations in which he was involved, he always talked about events in terms of the benefits that they would bring to the community. When he was engaged in a security matter involving pharmaceutical companies in Cyprus, he received a commendation from the police for putting his life at risk to bring criminals to justice. It is only fair to say that Mr. Bleach has been involved in many such interesting events. He has always tried to play fair and straight and to tell things as they are.

I emphasise that Mr. Bleach has advised me time and time again that everything he did in relation to the dropping of arms in Bengal, from the first approach that he received, was notified to the authorities. To protect himself during the preparations for the arms drop, he prudently recorded every word said to him on the telephone by officials. However, as I reported to the House on 2 March 1999, his home and that of a disabled lady in London were raided, and all but one of the tapes disappeared. One of the raids involved 10 constables. Over many years, I have tried to find out the reason why the constables seized the tapes and the evidence was removed. I have never been given a proper explanation. However, it happened: there is no denying that. I do not want to bore the Chamber with the many complaints that have been made about the unusual events of which the raids are just a part, or with details of the unusual activities of Sergeant Etlock. The Minister is well aware that I have given full details of the evidence that that gentleman gave, and the ways in which it seemed to be adjusted.

It would save a lot of time if the Government would simply confirm that officials were advised by Mr. Bleach of the issues relating to the arms drop and it would help even more if they would confirm that the Government of India were advised, too. Mr. Bleach was advised not to get involved. That is the usual practice in such matters. However, the plain fact is that someone who tries to do something of this order and gives all the information about all the events to the Government is rather different from someone who seeks to do the same thing in a secret or malicious way.

Another significant issue relates to the seizure of Mr. Bleach and his five colleagues from Latvia after the Indian air force obliged them to bring down their plane following the arms drop. The Indian authorities carried out that seizure with their usual efficiency, and Peter and his colleagues were seized as they came down the steps of the plane. However, there was one astonishing omission: Mr. Kim Davey—also known by his proper name of Mr. Niels Nielsen—who is a citizen of Denmark, and was the acknowledged and clear leader and organiser of the venture, was permitted to walk away from the plane. He succeeded in travelling out of India and back to Denmark. Of course, I would fully understand someone escaping if they were coming out of a train or a lorry, but when it is case of a plane coming down in an airfield, it is difficult to comprehend how one of the passengers could escape being seized. I have tried to find out from the Indian Government why that happened. Why was that person permitted to get away, particularly as he was the leader of the outfit? I have never been given any explanation at all. The matter seems to get more and more mysterious.

Mr. Davey is alleged to have stayed in Denmark and to have protection there. I have been advised that Interpol has been looking for him. I have also been advised that he has been travelling around quite a bit—he has been particularly active in Sudan—and that he was quite recently in London at Smith's hotel, where he was allegedly in the company of some rather official and well dressed people who are often seen at that excellent establishment. It was there that he allegedly sought to persuade one of my constituents, who resides in Great Wakering and whose details I would be glad to give to the Minister, to engage in some interesting work in Bosnia.

Obviously, I do not expect the Minister to comment on these unusual events, but I would like him to say whether the Government regard Mr. Kim Davey as a person who should be seized and questioned by the authorities, and whether approaches have been made to the Danish Government. The issue is of some significance. It seems unusual that although everyone says that they want to seize this gentleman, nothing seems to happen and he travels around doing rather interesting things.

I would also be grateful if the Minister would raise with the authorities in India the clear injustice of their having agreed to the release of the group of Latvians who were on the plane, although they were all charged with the same offence as Peter Bleach and were all given the same sentence as him. That seems unfair and unjust. There were a number of people on that plane: Mr. Kim Davey, who somehow walked away, even though he was in charge of the whole operation, the Latvians and Peter Bleach. When Mr. Putin, the President of Russia, made representations, the Indian authorities gladly released the Latvians, but Peter Bleach is still in prison.

Will the Minister comment on Peter Bleach's health? I have received many letters from Peter, which I can show the Minister. Peter told me that he had contracted tuberculosis, and that that serious disease had had a severe impact on his health. It is sometimes possible to receive a host of reports from a foreign jail that are misleading and contradictory. However, I know that the high commission staff have kept in close touch. Is the situation serious and have the Government of India been fully advised of the situation? I get the impression from Peter that he is a seriously ill man and that the matter deserves attention. The facts are crucial, and if the Minister can tell us whether Peter Bleach is an ill man, that will help.

I also want advice from the Minister about the alarming reports that I have received from Mr. Bleach, and several of his friends who visited him, about his being viciously attacked and injured in the prison. I know that things are rather difficult in India, but I get the impression that its prisons are pretty well managed compared with those of other countries in the area. None the less, there seems to have been a nasty incident in this specific case. It should be relatively easy to establish whether the reports are true. Mr. Bleach is in the high security block of the jail in Calcutta. There is a group of single cells in the block, numbered 1 to 23. Peter is in cell No. 11, which is in the exact middle of the row. The cells on either side are occupied by people who are accused of the American Centre attack. It is alleged that Mr. Bleach was assaulted seriously in an especially vicious attack at the beginning of this month. Has the Foreign Office heard about the problem, and can it secure any assurances for the future?

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

I believe that the case of Peter Bleach is a great tragedy. If he were simply a rascal who had conspired with others to create strife and suffering by arms dropping, I would have no sympathy for him whatever. However, his case is totally different, for the reasons that I have explained to the Foreign Office time and time again. I am sure that the Minister is aware of all the circumstances. I thank the Minister and Foreign Office for their endeavours, but I ask them to keep up their pressure and to try to persuade the Indian authorities to put right a great injustice.

If the Foreign Office pursues a case too rigorously or too toughly, I know that that can sometimes interfere with relationships between the two countries involved. The Minister is aware that India has been a special case over the years. It has preserved democracy as other nations have not. It has managed to keep such issues as theft and corruption down to a minimum, while other countries appear to be full of such problems. India is a country that has high standards, good education and high principles.

I understand the Indian point of view—that India wants to do something about a person who has been accused of a crime. However, I believe that there has been an injustice in this case. There was an injustice in the original claim, it is an injustice that Peter is kept there although the others were released, and it is an injustice that a person who is suffering severe illness seems to be neglected, and has apparently been attacked in prison in unusual circumstances.

I apologise again to the Foreign Office for the fact that I seem to be harping on this issue time and time again. I am well aware that it has tried hard and put its resources behind the operation. I simply say that the cause is good. I hope that the Foreign Office will keep at it, and manage to persuade the Government of India to put right a grave injustice. I am glad to have had the opportunity to raise the issue. I was told that I had been allocated 15 minutes, but I have used only 14 of them, so I am pleased to give the Minister the bonus of an extra minute for what I hope will be his good reply.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) on securing this debate on the case of Peter Bleach, who has been imprisoned in India since 1995. I also congratulate him on the assiduousness with which he has pursued this case. We share a historical county boundary, and although it is no longer a local government boundary, I know the way in which the hon. Gentleman normally pursues issues of constituency concern. I pay tribute to him for that.

For the record, I should say that my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) has also made strong representations to me about this case and expressed his concerns, as Mr. Bleach's mother resides in his constituency. In response to those representations, and to the comments of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East, I shall set out in detail the actions that we have taken thus far.

As the hon. Gentleman made clear, Peter Bleach was arrested for his involvement in an illegal arms drop over the Purulia district of West Bengal in India in December 1995. As a result, he was arrested on 22 December, along with five Latvians—who subsequently became Russian citizens—after the Indian authorities had forced their plane to land in Bombay. Peter Bleach has consistently alleged that the principal organiser of the arms drop, Kim Davey, managed to evade arrest. The hon. Gentleman referred to that in some detail.

Mr. Bleach was convicted, along with his five Russian co-accused, on 31 January 2000. He was convicted of conspiracy to commit offences against the state of India and offences under the Explosives Act, the Explosive Substances Act and the Arms Act. All six individuals—the five Russians and Mr. Bleach—were given the same sentence of life imprisonment. All six lodged appeals against their conviction in February 2000. Subsequently, the Indian President authorised the release of the Russian nationals in July 2000 following diplomatic pressure from the Russian Government. Since the release of the Russians, we have made strong representations to the Indian Government, questioning what we believe to be the discriminatory treatment of Mr. Bleach. We believe that he should have been released, on the grounds of fair and equal treatment with his Russian co-accused. In court each case was presented and dealt with in exactly the same way, and the charges were the same. I therefore feel that there is a very strong case, based on the need for fair and equal treatment, that Mr. Bleach should be treated in exactly the same way as the five Russians.

Having said that, I would like to make it clear that we are not contesting Mr. Bleach's conviction. However, we believe that we have a duty to ensure that he is not being discriminated against. We are also worried, as the hon. Gentleman is, about Mr. Bleach's health. He was diagnosed in February as having tuberculosis. He is very ill, and I understand that he is at risk of developing the drug-resistant strain of the disease, which has the potential to kill him. We have raised our concerns about Mr. Bleach's health with the Indian Government, asking them to take it into account when considering his case.

The hon. Gentleman acknowledged that we have been extremely active in Mr. Bleach's case. Over the past 18 months we have raised it repeatedly with the Indian Government. It has been raised at every available opportunity at the highest levels—by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and by my ministerial colleague the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien). Unfortunately, my hon. Friend cannot be here today, but he would have wanted me to make his involvement clear. Since January, the case has been raised with Indian Ministers on no fewer than 10 separate occasions.

Let me give hon. Members some details about those representations. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has raised the case four times this year with the Indian Government. He raised our concerns about Mr. Bleach—including concerns about his poor health—with the Indian Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Advani, on 17 February and 29 May. He also wrote to Mr. Advani on 8 July and, when he visited India on 19 July, he raised

the case with Foreign Minister Sinha. Most recently, he raised the case again with Mr. Advani on 22 August. In addition, the Prime Minister has raised Mr. Bleach's case with the Indian Government twice this year. He raised it with Deputy Prime Minister Advani during a visit to India in January 2002 and, most recently, on 4 November he wrote to Prime Minister Vajpayee reiterating our real concern about Mr. Bleach's ill health, and his continued detention, and asking for his release in the near future. In addition to those ministerial representations, our high commission in New Delhi has frequently raised the matter with the Indian Government.

Despite all those efforts, and although we have been working hard on Mr. Bleach's case, the Indian Government have given no indication that they will release him. They have given a number of reasons for their stance; one is that his release will undermine their case against the alleged ringleader of the arms drop, Kim Davey. We understand that the Indian Government are currently trying to extradite Mr. Davey from Denmark, but that the Danish Government have thus far refused that request. We have, however, made it clear to the Indian Government that the investigation of Kim Davey does not affect our strong argument that Mr. Bleach is being discriminated against. The key, fundamental point is that equal judgment by the court must necessarily imply equal treatment for Mr. Bleach and his Russian co-accused. That is the point that we have been making from the beginning of the process, and we will continue to make it.

As I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's speech, I was also interested to hear that he thought that one of his constituents had met Mr. Davey recently in a hotel in the United Kingdom. We have looked into that matter. Interpol in London has advised us that it has received no indication that Mr. Davey is in the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman's constituent should report the incident to the police and request that the information be forwarded to the Interpol bureau in London. That body will notify the appropriate United Kingdom department that deals with extradition matters. For the record, we have not made approaches to the Danish Government concerning the extradition of Kim Davey. That is clearly a matter for the Danish and Indian Governments.

Mr. Bleach has also been pursuing his discrimination case with the Indian courts. He filed a discrimination petition with the Calcutta high court on 5 October 2001, which was dismissed on 20 September 2001. However, his appeal against his conviction and the legality of the charges against him, which began in September 2001, continues. Our deputy high commission in Calcutta has sent representatives to the court hearings and we are monitoring those court hearings and developments very closely indeed.

Mr. Bleach is representing himself at his appeal. I should make it clear that we offered him the services of a British lawyer from our pro bono panel of lawyers to assist him, as is our normal practice. We put prisoners in touch with such lawyers if we have concerns about their access to legal advice, or if there are particular human rights concerns about their cases. Mr. Bleach, however, decided not to accept our offer. That is why he is pursuing his own case. I take this opportunity to comment on the circumstances surrounding the raid on Mr. Bleach's home in the United Kingdom, to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. I say simply and firmly that we have investigated that matter and the raids were carried out strictly in accordance with United Kingdom law.

We are aware of Mr. Bleach's concerns about the evidence that was provided by a North Yorkshire police officer during his trial. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, in his former capacity as Home Secretary, met the hon. Gentleman to discuss this and other allegations against North Yorkshire police. As Foreign Secretary he wrote to the hon. Gentleman on 5 December 2001 concerning the matter. The actions of the police officers during the course of their duties is, as I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware, the operational responsibility of the chief officer of the force concerned. North Yorkshire police and the officer concerned have been aware for some time about the allegations that have been made by Mr. Bleach and they completely refute them. For the record, Mr. Bleach has been advised on several occasions that he can make a complaint if he is unhappy with the conduct of police officers, and he has been notified of the procedures for so doing. That course is also open to the hon. Gentleman. However, no such formal complaint has been received, and we have yet to see any evidence of wrongdoing by the North Yorkshire police.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether Mr. Bleach advised officials of issues relating to the arms drop. I can confirm that he provided details to North Yorkshire police about the arms drop during interviews on three separate occasions—on 14 September, 22 September and 8 December 1995. On 22 September and 8 December the police strongly advised Mr. Bleach to withdraw from the deal and not to go to India. The information given by Mr. Bleach was passed on to the Indian authorities on three separate occasions—10 November, 17 November and 15 December 1995.

We remain very concerned about Mr. Bleach's health. Our deputy high commission in Calcutta is providing full consular support to Mr. Bleach and is doing all that it can to ensure that prison authorities meet his welfare requirements. On learning that his health had deteriorated in February this year, it arranged for an independent doctor to visit him. The tests recommended by the doctor confirmed that Mr. Bleach was suffering from tuberculosis, and as a result, consular staff in Calcutta have visited him more regularly since February—usually twice a month—to monitor his condition. They have also arranged for further visits by an independent doctor.

Consular staff in London have sought advice on Mr. Bleach's treatment from a tuberculosis specialist in the United Kingdom. They have discussed the doctor's recommendations with the prison authorities and have done their utmost to try to ensure that Mr. Bleach receives the medication that he needs. In addition to regular visits by consular staff in Calcutta, Mr. Bleach has also been visited by our high commissioner to India on 3 September this year.

Mr. Bleach has, understandably, become increasingly frustrated about his continued detention, and went on hunger strike for approximately 36 hours in August. We were also concerned to learn at the beginning of October that he had decided to stop taking his medication in protest at the Indian authorities' handling of his case.

[Mr. Bill Rammell]

Unfortunately, our efforts to persuade him to resume his medication have failed. However, we continue to monitor his welfare carefully, and Mr. Bleach has been visited three times this month, most recently by our deputy high commissioner in Calcutta on 21 November.

A consular representative from our high commission in Calcutta was concerned to learn during a visit on 8 November that, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, other inmates had tried to attack Mr. Bleach, and that he had not received his fruit and vegetable ration. The representative immediately reported the problem to the superintendent of the prison, in the presence of Mr. Bleach, and the superintendent said that he would investigate the matter and guarantee Mr. Bleach's safety.

Mr. Bleach contacted our deputy high commission in Calcutta on 14 November to request a further urgent consular visit, and a representative visited him that afternoon. Mr. Bleach reported that the prisoners who had tried to attack him had been put in charge of his yard, and he feared that his life was at risk. We naturally took his concerns seriously. Our deputy high commissioner visited the prison and met the superintendent to discuss the matter again on 21 November. He also handed him a letter expressing our concern about Mr. Bleach's safety, and the non-receipt of some of his food rations. Our deputy high commissioner visited Mr. Bleach the same day to check on his welfare and keep him informed of our actions in his case. He also subsequently raised the matter with the West Bengal Chief Secretary.

We will continue to do all that we can to help Mr. Bleach and are in close contact with his family in the UK. We will also raise our concerns about his health with the Indian Government, and ask for his release on the grounds of fair and equal treatment with the Russian co-accused. As a result of the Prime Minister's letter of 4 November to Prime Minister Vajpayee, we hope that Mr. Bleach will be released in the near future. Finally, I again pay tribute to the way in which the hon. Gentleman has put forward his concerns.

Reusable Carrier Bags

1 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Thank you, Mr. Benton, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this debate. I have spoken before in Adjournment debates in Westminster Hall, but this is the first time I have spoken on a subject of my own choosing.

I approached this subject with an open mind—which is, I accept, unusual for a politician. It presents a challenge to any Government who are genuinely concerned about the environment, particularly as it is estimated that as many as 10 billion plastic carrier bags are used every year by consumers in this country. I am sure that we can all agree about one thing—that it is important to encourage consumers to reuse those bags.

The key question is: how do we do that? Since the beginning of April 2002, the Irish Government have pursued the very radical—and, in some quarters, very popular—policy of imposing a 15 cent tax, which is 9p in real money, on every plastic carrier bag issued by the supermarkets. That tax cannot be absorbed by the supermarkets; it must be passed on to the consumer, or there would be no point in levying it in the first place. The United Kingdom Government have suggested that they might consider imposing a similar tax.

In response to a question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), who is present today, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment described the 90 per cent. reduction in the usage of plastic carrier bags in Ireland as quite daunting, although he went on to say that there might be other ways to reduce the consumption of plastic carrier bags. Five days later, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury said:

"The Government currently have no plans to introduce a plastic bag tax."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2002; Vol. 391, c. 212W.]

The purpose of this debate is to give the Government the opportunity to clarify their position. I do not expect the Minister to say today that they will or will not impose such a tax, but I hope that they will use this opportunity to explain where we are now, and whether we are considering imposing one. Depending on one's point of view, today might be either a good day or a bad day to raise this issue, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be making his pre-Budget statement in the Chamber later, and he might address this subject.

I approach the issue from the point of view of someone who is concerned about jobs not only in my constituency but throughout the United Kingdom. Last week at business questions I raised a matter concerning a company in my constituency called Simpak. Its managing director, Neil Young, first brought this matter to my attention. In this country, private industry is never slow in coming forward to express reservations or to imply that there might be job losses in response to almost any regulation or taxation proposed by any Government, but we must take industry's view seriously, or at least listen to it in the first place.

Simpak manufactures paper bags but imports large quantities of plastic bags from Asia—which is where the vast majority of plastic bags used in this country are made. The threat is credible; Simpak's concern that a

significant decrease in the use of plastic bags on the same scale as in Ireland could result in a loss of jobs in my constituency is credible.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, and also to the Minister for allowing me to intervene. Given his constituency interest, I recognise my hon. Friend's sincerity in relation to such issues; I also understand why manufacturers involved in the production of plastic carrier bags do not believe that a ban would be a good idea. Does my hon. Friend accept that the problem is based not only on the amount of plastic used in the production of bags, but on how the bags are disposed of, and the contribution that such action can make to combating litter and the throwaway society? Given the public support for the early-day motion that I tabled in our previous Session, does he not think that the industry, rather than simply opposing the innovation of carrier bag tax, should look for a way of diversifying its production?

Mr. Harris: I accept that my hon. Friend's views are genuine, and I agree with many of them. He has been a strong supporter of the measure for a long time, and I shall deal with some of his arguments. We must consider whether the sacrifice that may have to be made in terms of the number of jobs throughout the country would be justified by what I consider to be the dubious environmental advantages. I have taken a peculiar—some would say unhealthy—interest in the litter on the streets of my constituency. Far from there being large quantities of used plastic carrier bags, the main culprits are discarded cans that once contained lemonade, and plastic and polystyrene food containers. It is estimated that only 1 per cent. of the litter dropped on the streets of the United Kingdom, and only 1 per cent. of landfill, is taken up by plastic carrier bags. That is because many people already reuse plastic carrier bags. A National Opinion Poll survey in October 2000 found that four out of five consumers already regularly reused the carrier bags that they were given free at supermarkets.

One consequence of the new tax in Ireland is a 90 per cent. reduction in the use of plastic carrier bags, but there has also been a 300 per cent. increase in the number of black plastic bin liners sold in shops. Such bin liners are rarely reused, as the smaller carrier bags are. Furthermore—and we must learn from what has happened—there has been a massive shift in Ireland away from plastic carrier bags to paper carrier bags. Environmentalists will welcome that, because paper bags degrade far more quickly than plastic carrier bags.

However, the environmental disadvantage of that practice is that a paper carrier bag is six times the weight of a modern plastic carrier bag. It also takes up 10 times the storage space of a plastic carrier bag, which has consequences for the transporting of paper bags. In other words, for the number of plastic bags that could be transported in one lorry, it would take 10 lorries to transport the same number of paper bags. I hope that the Government will take that serious point into account when considering the way ahead.

We are politicians and we must be careful not to raise expectations. If only 1 per cent. of landfill and 1 per cent. of street litter is plastic carrier bags, even a decrease of 100 per cent. in the number of plastic bags used would result in a mere 1 per cent. decrease in landfill and a 1 per cent. decrease in litter. Is such a negligible improvement in the environment worth the opprobrium that we would surely suffer from consumers and electors if the tax were to go ahead?

We should acknowledge the hard work done by the industry in recognising that it has environmental responsibilities. The best example of that hard work is the fact that a plastic carrier bag today uses 70 per cent. less plastic than it did 20 years ago. The industry should be congratulated on that achievement, not penalised for it.

As with all consumer taxes, my main anxiety is that a plastic carrier bag tax would be regressive. When I go to the supermarket with my wife to do the monthly shopping, we use as many plastic carrier bags as we need to carry our shopping to the car park. If the tax were introduced, I suspect that my habits would not change, and nor would the behaviour of many other people who are lucky enough to earn a good income. However, such a tax would affect the poorest people in my constituency, who are already living at or below the poverty line. Supermarkets are already planned around the car culture, and the proposed measure would only help to penalise people who do not own a car and already suffer from supermarkets' lack of accessibility.

I shall finish by making what some would consider a cynical point, but one that I consider realistic. All politicians want their political party to benefit and prosper electorally. I accept that taxes are unavoidable, but introducing the proposed tax would hand our opponents a ready-made, custom-built manifesto commitment to abolish the tax. Such a commitment would be popular among the millions of swing voters that the Labour party has been courting assiduously in the last 10 years, and our opponents would seize upon it. The tax would probably be the most unpopular since the poll tax, and we do not have to think back too far to remember the consequences of that tax for the Conservative Government.

I am not one of those Labour Members of Parliament who instinctively welcome all taxes and think that we should raise them left, right and centre; I believe that if we can abolish or reduce a tax we should do so. We only have to think about what happened in 1997 to see the consequences for the Conservative Government of raising taxes that the electorate were not convinced were justified. I approached the matter with an open mind, but the more I learn about the subject, the more I am convinced that imposing the tax would mean the worst of both worlds. We would reap a negligible benefit to the environment, and the unpopularity of imposing an unfair tax on the people whom we were elected to represent.

1.13 pm

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) on securing the debate. We all agree that meaningful and effective steps must be taken to improve the environment. We are required to work within the terms of European directives or pay the penalty for not doing so. I therefore understand the Government's position in taking steps on environmental issues where they can make a significant

[Mr. John MacDougall]

difference, and they have been successful in doing so. I have an open mind, and my right hon. Friend the Minister's argument may well convince me. However, at present I share some of my hon. Friend's concerns.

I had not given a great deal of attention to the subject until I had read some of the relevant documentation. Certain questions remain unanswered—for example, how effective a tax of this nature would be in making a significant change to environmental pollution. My information is that only about 2 per cent. of all the oil consumed in Europe is used for plastic film, and plastic carriers represent a small part of that percentage. The vast bulk of oil—nearly 85 per cent.—is burned as fuel in cars and lorries, or for power and heating. A carrier bag tax will make no real difference to global oil consumption. Such questions need to be answered if anyone is to be convinced that such a tax will make a significant difference.

My hon. Friend outlined some of the issues regarding the purpose of carrier bags. We all take for granted the plastic bags that we are given by the supermarkets every weekend. I do not know what the reaction would be if they were not available, nor how the public would be expected to cope without them. They are a part of people's way of life now, and such a change would lead to questions about why that practice had changed. Any increase in tax would therefore have to be weighed against the benefit to the public, and a clear argument would have to be presented to justify such a measure.

In general, I believe that if taxation is to make a difference it should be as little as possible, yet effective; in this case, it should be applied across industry, so that no particular industry is unfairly targeted. Industries that cause pollution should pay the penalty for that pollution; either a tax should be imposed across the board, or it should relate to the scale of the pollution. We should resist taxation unless it can be shown that polluting industries would make a significant contribution; in that case, taxation would be easily justified, and I am sure that the public would be on board.

I remain to be convinced that putting a tax on carrier bags will be seen as effective. The Minister may have an effective argument against me; he may say that I am wrong and that my fears will not be realised. I hope that he will consider the points raised by my hon. Friend, and I hope that he can reassure me that if taxation is to be applied, it will be done for credible reasons. If not, perhaps the matter should be reconsidered—if it is not too late. No one knows whether my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will make a contribution to this debate this afternoon; we wait with bated breath, but other issues may figure higher on his agenda. I do not want to take time unnecessarily, so I shall let the matter rest there.

1.18 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The three contributions by my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris), for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) and for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) were well made. Before such new measures are introduced, there should be a proper public debate and a general understanding of the rationale behind them. As a result of a leak, information was passed to the media, which ran with the story in a particular way. That is a classic example of a hare being started when the information was largely inaccurate. That is not the best way to conduct a public debate. I am therefore grateful for the opportunity to respond to this debate.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife said, it is somewhat ironic that this debate is being held only a few hours before my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer presents his pre-Budget report. I cannot disclose any of its contents that might be relevant to the debate, but clearly, we shall look both to that and to the strategy unit's waste report, which are both highly relevant.

What I can talk about is why this has become an issue. I receive many letters about packaging, which is probably the issue that most concerns the public in terms of the unnecessary frivolous waste of resources. The Government are taking action to reduce the tonnage that retailers use in packaging by introducing certain measures that will give them incentives to do so. However, in 2001 there were 1.7 million tonnes of plastic packaging in the waste stream—an increase from 1.6 million tonnes in 2000. The figure is slowly rising. Point one is that the proposal would be a way of reducing the use of a form of packaging that many members of the public find unacceptable.

The second point concerns sheer quantity. Research conducted in September 2000 indicated that UK consumers used about 8 billion plastic carrier bags per year—an average of about 134 bags per person. That is a huge number, and it is difficult to justify the use of all of them. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Catheart made a reasoned case from the sceptical side. He suggested that the amount going to landfill might be no more than 1 per cent. and asked what happened to the other 99 per cent.

It is true that if we assume a 20 per cent. replacement of conventional plastic packaging with bioplastics—one solution is to replace non-biodegradable bags with biodegradable ones—the estimated landfill space saving due to the degradation of plastic will be less than 1 per cent. of the volume taken up by municipal sustainable waste each year. Of course we have to take account of the other 99 per cent.—and we are doing so with strict landfill targets, the increase in statutory recycling targets and trading permits in the Bill that we are introducing this year. However, even the 1 per cent. that goes to landfill could still, if all plastic bags ended up there, be about 68,000 tonnes—not an insignificant quantity.

Litter is the issue that concerns most members of the public. The perceived plastic bag disposal problem is based on the view that most go to landfill. Litter is the more obvious issue because discarded bags are very visual, and very unsightly when they blow about in hedgerows or on the street, as they do in my constituency—and, I am sure, everywhere else.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart raised a couple of points that I shall try to deal with immediately. I was puzzled by his saying that the measure could be unpopular. I entirely agree that nothing should be done without a much better public understanding of the rationale behind it. However, if the

measure is as popular in Ireland as it appears to be, and has led to an enormous reduction—about 95 per cent.—in the use of plastic bags, I find it difficult to understand why it should be so unpopular in England. We are not exactly the same as the Irish, but I should have thought that there would be a similar reaction here. My hon. Friend also said that there could well be, as has happened in Ireland, a 300 per cent. increase in the number of bin liners. I am sure that there would be a substantial increase in their use. That is a fair point, but I would suggest that those bin liners would actually be used for transporting waste, whereas the litter issue with so many plastic bags is that although once they are brought home they might be used as bin liners, many find their way to other destinations, where they blow about in the street looking unsightly.

Mr. Harris: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way to me, and giving me a second bite at the cherry. Is he not perhaps confusing popularity with acceptance? Despite the non-payment campaigns, 90 per cent. of people paid the poll tax, but that did not mean that it was popular. I have no doubt that the tax in Ireland has been successful, but whether it is popular is another matter.

Mr. Meacher: Of course I understand that. No one likes paying taxes, and there is no such thing as a popular tax; that is a bit of an oxymoron. To take up the point about acceptability, however, there could be a good reason for us to pay a tax, and it could help us to achieve objectives with which we all agree. That is perhaps as far as I would press the point.

There are alternatives, and the Government want to consider them all before proceeding. We are assessing the extent of the problems created by plastic bags, as well as the possibility of a tax, although my hon. Friends know that tax is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, not for me. The results of our work will be considered alongside the report of the Government's strategy unit, which will be published shortly.

I would be the first to recognise that there are disadvantages to a plastic bag tax, and there is the issue of increased unemployment. Some of my hon. Friends may have plastic bag manufacturers in or near their constituencies, and that is a significant issue. A tax could lead to companies going out of business, although my experience suggests that they are good at finding ways to adjust, provided that they have a sufficient transition period. I also understand the point about there being no conventional plastic manufacturers in Ireland. That is significant.

Several food retailers have introduced "bags for life" schemes, and we are probably all familiar with them from doing our shopping. They all follow the same basic pattern. A charge is made for a strong and durable plastic bag, which is replaced each time it wears out. It takes a long time for the bags to wear out, but when they do, the plastic from them is recycled. Some supermarket schemes have had considerable success; for commercial reasons, I probably should not name the supermarkets involved, although I think that they are familiar to us all. However, those schemes have yet to take off in a major way across the whole retail sector.

I readily admit that retailers see "bags for life" schemes as a better way forward than a tax. Although they recognise the schemes' overall lack of success, they have, through the British Retail Consortium, shown an interest in introducing a well publicised, voluntary national "bags for life" scheme, as advocated by the curator of the Science Museum. Such a scheme would involve putting a national logo and strapline on all bags, which would be customised for all supermarket chains and types of retail outlet, and designed to be as environmentally friendly as possible. Advocates of that approach take the view that what is missing at present is a properly promoted and co-ordinated scheme to cover all retailers throughout the country. They also recognise that it is crucial to motivate consumers if we are to encourage the reuse of bags. Once again, it is important that we carry the public with us.

There is no doubt that a tax-based policy moves consumer behaviour in the right direction. However, it may also encourage consumers to reuse bags for the negative reason of avoiding tax, and it would be much better if they were incentivised for the right reasons. If consumers are to have positive reasons for changing their behaviour, we must raise awareness and convince them of the environmental benefits of reducing waste and recycling used bags.

Finally, the Wales Environmental Trust and Asda have set up a project to encourage the reuse of plastic carrier bags. Its objective is to find an effective means of reducing the number of single-trip plastic supermarket carrier bags used in Wales. It tries to answer two questions in a two-part project over 10 weeks. The first question is whether the attitudes of the general public on the reuse of supermarket carrier bags can change without the introduction of a tax or some other charge, and the second is what is the best reusable option to provide for consumers. For a trial period of six weeks, single-trip carrier bags will be removed from all Asda stores in Wales, and bags for life will be issued free in their place. That is the type of measure that we will consider before we take a final decision.

Local Authority Funding (South-East)

1.30 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I am grateful to the Minister for attending to take part in the debate. I am a Surrey Member of Parliament, but the concerns that I want to raise are shared by Members across the south-east of England. That is why I gave the debate its specific title. Across the political spectrum, we are all profoundly anxious about the implications for our local services of the planned funding review that the Government are undertaking. About 10 days ago, the leaders of Surrey, Kent and Hampshire county councils held a press conference to raise their concerns about the potential impact on the services that they offer.

All 11 Members of Parliament, irrespective of party, who represent the constituencies in Surrey are today sending a joint letter to the Prime Minister, urging him to pay attention to the risks inherent in the Government's proposed funding changes. I want to take advantage of this opportunity to set out some of our concerns. I will speak briefly, so that my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) can raise issues on behalf of his county, Hampshire.

The fundamental issue in the south-east is that we are under pressure in a variety of ways. In the past generation, there has been a huge migration of economic activity and population into the south-east—a trend that is continuing relentlessly year by year. Public services across the different counties in the area are already significantly overstretched, for various reasons. We have a substantial elderly population. Parts of Kent face a significant influx of asylum seekers, who need support within the communities to which they move.

Our police force is under pressure as a result of the increase of resources in London, especially the higher rates of pay offered there. There has been a migration of experienced officers into London and other areas. Our social services face a distinct shortage of care home beds. Against that background, all our public services operate in an environment in which the cost of maintaining them is rising relentlessly.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way so early in his speech. Does he not think it disgraceful that in care homes in my patch in Kent—and, I imagine, in his as well—an elderly person can have two and a half times as much local authority funding as the person in the neighbouring bed? The amount paid depends on whether the person comes from the privileged boroughs of London or from our constituencies.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Minister must be aware that the shortage of beds that has resulted throughout the south-east—in London and outside—as homes have disappeared means that London boroughs with deeper wallets are taking up care home places further out. That means that there is less choice available to the social services departments that try to meet the needs of our constituents. There is a shortage not only of care home places but of carers. People in my constituencies are blocking hospital beds simply because the people are not there to deliver the home-based services that the hospitals and social services believe they require.

Against that backdrop, the review threatens at least to engender a drip-by-drip bleed of finance from our services over the next few years. Several scenarios have been suggested. At worst, my county could lose £60 million in funding. I accept that the Government have said that there will be a floor at zero per cent., so there may not be cash cuts in funding, but even if there are increases, if those increases are significantly below inflation, over several years the consequences for services will be devastating. That is because local authority services do not simply operate according to inflation. For example, there are teachers' pay settlements that are higher than inflation and need fully funding. There are increased pension costs and above-inflation increases in care home costs. There is a whole raft of additional pressures that require additional resources, especially for housing for those who are homeless in our areas, because affordable housing is not available for all those who need it. Such pressures make it almost impossible for local authorities to do their job properly. If they lose significant funding over the next few years, even in a drip-by-drip way, our services will become poorer. The consequences will be damaging both for our region and for the nation as a whole.

My area generates a significant contribution in tax revenues to support the things that the Government are doing in the rest of the country. If we undermine the ability of the south-east to function as an effective economic unit, and we do not have good public services in the parts of the country that create the most wealth, we shall lose business, investment and good people, not to other parts of the country but to continental Europe. If the south-east loses, the country loses. I urge the Minister to take that into account as he and his colleagues work on the review in the weeks ahead.

The policing situation is of particular concern. I refer to the proposed changes in police funding in Surrey, which has recently been a weak receiver of funds. In terms of the funding from central Government, Surrey's police budget has been reduced by 14 per cent. in real terms over the past five years. That funding has had to be made up by increases well above inflation in the police precept.

The force is already underfunded, and it now faces further cuts as a result of Government reviews. Review options vary from Surrey losing a bit to Surrey losing a lot, at a time when the force cannot afford to lose anything at all. The Minister may not be aware of the fact, but varying pay structures in the public sector mean that police in London receive £6,000 a year more than those in Surrey. That structure is repeated in teaching and many other public services, but nowhere is it more acute than in policing.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): In addition to the problem of the difference in salary, is the Minister aware that the Metropolitan police offer incentives such as paying police officers for travelling from many of the home counties into London?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and there are further benefits on top of that, such

as pension rights and fringe benefits, which make the case for moving to London all the more compelling. As a result, forces outside London are often staffed by newly qualified officers. Forces have lost the bulk of their experienced officers, who have moved a short distance up the road to earn significantly more money—and who can blame them? Consequently, we cannot deliver the effective policing that we would want.

The chief constable of Surrey has said publicly that his force is in crisis because of the tendency that I have just described, and that he is not confident that Surrey police forces will be retained in their current form if funding changes are made according to the formulae that the Government have proposed. That is a profound worry in a busy part of the country, which may have less crime than London but is none the less vulnerable to increases in criminality. Policing is needed there, not only for major inquiries such as the tragic Milly Dowler case, but for additional security at Heathrow and Gatwick, and for the M25.

Our schools are the greatest concern, however. One of the infant school heads in my constituency has written a very spontaneous letter, which says:

"Surrey schools are among the best in the country and the loss of funding could have a disastrous effect on standards and morale. You will be aware of the difficulties we face in recruiting and retaining staff, especially teachers. Much of this is due to the high cost of housing and a large increase in Council Tax would make an already difficult situation worse."

There's the rub, because council tax increases—if, indeed, we must have them in Surrey and other parts of the south-east—disproportionately affect those on low and fixed incomes, such as pensioners who have been retired for a long time and who do not have above-inflation pay increases to enable them to pay above-inflation council tax increases. Teachers and other public servants struggling to buy their first houses in the south-east cannot afford significant increases in their council tax.

If the Government cut away funding from Surrey and other counties in the south-east so they have to maintain statutory services through big increases in council tax, ultimately we shall lose more of the people who find it a struggle to get by in the south-east, and our public services will deteriorate still further. The Minister must take into account circumstances in the south-east before he takes steps that will do lasting damage not just to the region but to the economy and the rest of the nation.

1.40 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing the debate, and I concur with many of the points that he made. I shall focus on the impact on Hampshire in particular. Hampshire county council has estimated that in a worst-case scenario it would lose £80 million, which is equivalent to 9 per cent. of its budget. That would lead to a 32.6 per cent. council tax increase, equivalent to an increase of £170 for band D. Even with a mid-point change Hampshire would lose £35 million, which equates to a £98 increase in band D council tax.

Of course, that is only one aspect of the changes facing council tax payers in Hampshire. Changes in police authority funding will affect them too, and in Fareham there is particular concern that the merging of the rate support grant and the non-domestic business rate will lead to a loss of funding; in Fareham that will be about £75,000. When the Minister's colleague gave a seminar before this parliamentary Session, he said that an announcement would be made very shortly about that funding change. I hope that the Minister will suggest when that announcement will be made, and what might be in it.

A 9 per cent. cut in the budget for Hampshire county council would be equivalent to losing 900 teachers—that is, two teachers from every school. That would add to the pressure being placed on schools by the increasing demands made of them by central Government. Social services budgets are already under pressure, and that is already causing beds to be blocked in Hampshire. On one day earlier this month, 60 patients were waiting to be discharged from hospital, with nowhere to go. A 10 per cent. cut in funding for the elderly would lead to a loss of 400 places in residential homes. That would reinforce the pressure that hospitals are under from the closure of nursing home places and the lack of domiciliary care.

It is clear to me from talking to county councillors that the cuts in services that would arise from the shift in funding that the Government have been talking about would hit the most vulnerable people the hardest. Even if a transitional arrangement softened the blow in year one, the cuts would work their way through the system.

My hon. Friend referred to council tax increases. Earlier in the month the Government announced the uprating of pensions for married couples by £160 a year. A 32 per cent. increase in council tax in Hampshire would wipe that out straight away. I have had many letters from constituents—as, I am sure, have many other hon. Members. Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw, who live in central Fareham, wrote to me:

"As pensioners living in a small two bedroomed bungalow, we already pay £820 per annum in council tax and we dread any excessive increase in the future."

They are not alone in that. People on low and fixed incomes fear the effect of the increase in council tax on their income.

Even if the cuts are mitigated by transitional arrangements, even a 15 per cent. cut in funding this year could lead to a £2 a week increase in council tax, which works out at £100 a year—almost two thirds of the Government's uprating in the married couples allowance. Will the Minister think again?

The shift in spending will affect many people in Hampshire—the elderly, children who are reliant on services provided by the county council, schools, old people's homes and children's homes. Council tax increases will also impinge on the incomes of the elderly and others on low or fixed incomes. The consultation period is ending and time is running out for people in Hampshire. Please Minister, think again about the impact on the most vulnerable people in the community, whether they are in Hampshire, Surrey or Kent.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I join in congratulating the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on calling today's debate on an

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

important matter, about which he spoke with passion and conviction. I appreciate that local authority funding, though sometimes quite technical, is the foundation on which many public services are built. It is a matter of concern to his constituents, as it is to all Members in this House, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are assessing all the relevant points carefully before we take final decisions for the next financial year. I am aware that the hon. Gentleman, like the other Members who spoke, is particularly concerned about the high cost of services in the south-east, and I acknowledge the strong feelings on that subject.

At this stage, it would be useful to examine the important formula grant review process, which is about fundamentally examining the formulae according to which we distribute grants to local councils throughout the country. We want a fair distribution of grant; that is our overriding priority in responding to the widespread consultation exercise. The review is also about how best to deal with a fixed pot of money; any changes will mean that some gain more than others. In total, however, more money is available for local authorities overall, with the 2002 spending review providing good increases in council grants for the next three years. That builds on the grant increases—real increases of about 20 per cent., compared with a 7 per cent. reduction in the last three years of the previous Administration—that we have found since we came to office.

The hon. Gentleman worries about the south-east losing out; that is obviously his prime consideration in calling for the debate. Some council leaders in the south-east have made wild claims that funding will be taken away from their authority and given to others purely on the basis of geographical location. That is simply not true. There is no question of shifting resources according to crude political geography. It would be stretching the powers of Machiavelli to discern any such motivation. We want a grant distribution system that takes account of each authority's circumstances and puts the money where it is most needed. We are trying to balance all the different pressures, which is never easy. Evidence and representations have been coming in, including submissions from councils in the south-east, as we move towards taking the final decisions.

The hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) talked about Hampshire council losing significant amounts of grant. Some authorities have spent time speculating that the grant review will mean large cuts. To dispel that myth, let me make it absolutely clear that we have already guaranteed that on a like-for-like basis, no authority will receive less money in the next settlement than they received this year. Counties in the south-east will not get less grant from the Government next year. The figure of 9 per cent. is wrong; it is not on the cards. The hon. Gentleman's speculation about 32 per cent. increases in council tax is no part of our plans, either.

Mr. Hoban: County councillors are concerned about that. Even assuming, as the Minister has, a zero per cent. floor and no reduction of grant in cash terms, that would still translate into a £2 a week increase in council tax, largely because of other funding pressures placed on Hampshire county council by the Government.

Mr. Leslie: I appreciate the fact that the hon Gentleman has neatly moved me on in my argument about our guarantee of no cuts on a like-for-like basis. Obviously we hope to do much better than that, but at this stage, when we are calculating all the formulae and seeing how they pan out, it is the baseline on which we hope and intend to build. We have talked about the concept of floors and ceilings, which will ensure that a level of protection is part of the new system, and that will feature in the local government financial settlement for at least two years. The system is intended to damp the effects of the introduction of any new methodology by smoothing any volatility caused by data changes.

Fears about council tax increases have been raised, but those concerns are premature. In the spending review for the next three years, we have provided increases in funds, which local authorities will be able to use to ensure that they can improve the delivery of key services while setting reasonable tax levels. Of course, decisions on levels of council tax are for local authorities to take. Local authorities are responsible to council tax payers, and they should be talking to them about the level of council tax that they will bear, and where the money is spent.

Chris Grayling: The Minister made a point about operating by formulae, but he needs to understand the background provided by the Government's statement that one of the criteria being used in the review is the ability to increase the tax take. In areas where the tax take is already high—in Surrey it is 45 per cent., compared with a national average of 25 per cent.—there are concerns that the Government sees those areas as milch cows.

Mr. Leslie: I think that the hon. Gentleman is alluding to a part of the equation called resource equalisation. It is a technical term that does not mean cuts in grants for local authorities—in the south-east or anywhere else. We have already guaranteed that no authority will lose out on a like-for-like basis, and resource equalisation is already part of the current system. Resource equalisation involves looking at a council's relative ability to raise resources from council tax, by examining the tax base, and it is right and fair that it remain part of the new system. The question is the extent to which we take the ability to raise council tax into account. Resource equalisation is another part of the system on which we are consulting, and our decision on it will be made alongside other decisions. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the no grant loss guarantee applies to that area of the formula in the same way as it applies to others.

Mr. Oaten: Can the Minister confirm that the consultation and the proposed new formula will take the most recent census data into account?

Mr. Leslie: The Government certainly want to use the most up-to-date evidence on need that we have. We have to make sure that the census information is incorporated, and that the floors and ceilings

arrangements will apply if there are significant changes, because obviously there will be peaks and troughs in crude formula applications, which, if they were taken on their own, could mean significant changes for authorities. One has to bear in mind that the floors and ceilings will kick in after some of those factors have occurred.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I am grateful to the Minister, and I must apologise for my earlier absence, which was due to a shadow ministerial commitment. I heard him talking about counties not losing out on a like-for-like basis, but I am always a little suspicious when such conditions are attached. Precisely, does that mean that next year each county in the south-east will have the same amount of cash as it has had this year, but uprated for inflation: yes or no?

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman is almost there. Every county will have the same level of cash for the coming year as for this year. When I say "on a like-for-like basis", I am talking about the composition of an authority, its size and whether new functions have been added to it. Of course, if an authority suddenly found that it had acquired a social services function, for example, the amount of grant would change. However, if a council's structure and services remain the same, it will get that level of cash increase. That is the minimum guarantee that we are giving for now, but we hope to do much better. So far, we have been able to make sure that we give a real-terms increase for education, which is the largest part of most councils' budgets. The spending review envelope will prove to give significant sums to councils as a whole.

I know that Members are concerned about area cost adjustment. There have been several research programmes and projects to examine that over the years. It affects the south-east considerably. In the studies that have taken place, about 21 variant models of area cost adjustment have been devised, and authorities have not agreed on the merits of each option. There is much strong feeling about the matter. The vast majority of people recognise that pay costs should be recognised in the system. We agree, but the question is how much weighting there should be. The options in the consultation document suggest redesigning and trying to remove something of the existing cliff-edge effect. All I can say now is that we are carefully considering the responses to the consultation.

On education, a very significant issue, I shall give a broader description of where we stand at present. The options for the education formula reflect the fact that for the next three years, the spending review will include significantly more investment. We want a clearer fairer system justified by the educational needs of children and based on more up-to-date evidence of costs and need. Any formula must include an element to allow for deprivation, and for enhancement in areas where schools need to pay more to recruit and retain staff. I appreciate the extra costs faced by authorities in London and the south-east, including Surrey, because of the higher costs of recruiting and retaining staff there. It costs more to live in London and the south-east, and earnings differentials there are higher.

The options set out in the consultation paper are based on evidence that suggests that authorities with significant deprivation and additional staff costs need to spend significantly more to achieve the same results for their children. The four options reflect the scope for different judgments to be made about weighting.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell mentioned his concerns about the police. The aim of the police formula review is to develop a more robust mechanism for the fairer and simpler distribution of grant to ensure that it addresses policing needs in all parts of England. We are aware of differing pressures on policing, especially between rural and metropolitan areas, and of the need to allocate resources as fairly as possible to address varying needs in different areas. There has been a genuine consultation process and the responses are being taken into account. That has taken place against the background of a substantial increase in police resources. By 2005–06, the total provision for policing will be about £1.5 billion higher than in this financial year.

Chris Grayling: Not in Surrey.

Mr. Leslie: Nationally, significant funds will come through from the spending review and filter through to local authorities.

This financial year has seen education spending rise by 8.8 per cent., personal social services spending rise by 3.6 per cent. in real terms, and total police funding increase by 6.1 per cent. During the next three years, local authorities will benefit. Under the spending review, social services funding will increase by a further 6 per cent. in real terms on average, education funding will increase by 6 per cent. and policing funding, as I said before, will also rise.

In Surrey, whereas under the previous Administration the standard spending assessment grant went up by only 2.7 per cent. on average, this Administration have managed to increase the standard spending assessment by 4.8 per cent. As for social services, children's grant has increased by 12.8 per cent. this financial year, and carers grant by 21 per cent. Education spending has increased by £121 million—almost 39 per cent.—over five years, with the capital expenditure allocation rising this year to £38 million. An extra £24 million has so far been allocated for next year.

We have consulted at length on the formula grant review. The no cuts guarantee is there, on a like-for-like basis. I urge hon. Members to wait for and listen to the announcement before speculating and scaring too many people about the future. We want a more transparent formula. We know that we must try to strike the right balance between the competing arguments, and the involvement of not only councillors but Members of Parliament in the debate on the new formula is extremely important. My principle is to give local authorities a decent grant, which matters for the improvement of public services, and I hear the arguments that hon. Members on both sides of the House are making on the subject.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 28 November 2002

[MRS. MARION ROE *in the Chair*]

Transport (10-Year Plan)

[Relevant documents: Eighth Report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee Session 2001–02 HC558 and the Government's response thereto CM5569.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

2.30 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): When the Government came to office, it was clear that transport had not been one of the best-planned or best-organised industries on an island that is not the largest landmass in Europe. It is astonishing how frequently in the past we allowed individual industries to grow like Topsy without a clear idea of their real worth or place in society. Therefore, any Government who set out to produce a plan for the future of transport that goes up to 2010 and beyond are doing something that is desperately needed and will be widely welcomed by the industry and the public.

The then Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee set out to examine closely the Government's proposals and whether the terms of reference and resulting report had produced the results that we thought important. The final Committee report is detailed, exhaustive and critical, highlighting those areas where there are real difficulties. However, the report begins by accepting that, to have an integrated transport system, we must have a clear idea of our objectives and intentions and the timetables to which we will work to achieve the high level of contentment among the public that we all want.

The 10-year plan is based on key objectives and improving choice across all modes of transport. It seeks to reduce negative impacts. The Government set out a vision of modern, high-quality public transport; improved choice about how to travel; well maintained and larger road networks with better information; safer and more secure transport; a transport system that has less impact on the environment; and easier access to jobs through regeneration and town planning. Initially at least, the plan examined some of the difficult choices that previous Governments avoided, because transport impinges on so many areas of our lives that any Government have to take a number of very difficult decisions across the board.

We were therefore disappointed that the 10-year plan was not sufficiently balanced. It should have considered different aspects much more carefully. Why, for example, was so much of the plan predicated on a congestion model that our witnesses, almost without exception, said was flawed? Why was sufficient importance not attached to all the environmental questions, and why are the targets used not necessarily the correct ones?

Any transport plan that relies heavily on congestion targets rather than traffic growth, and does not confront the need to control or manage that growth, almost automatically avoids many very complex but urgent questions. We were not convinced that the document faced up to those arguments.

The first debate is about the car versus public transport. Our report clearly sets out that the costs of private motoring will fall substantially in the next 10 years, or in the time that the plan covers. We have the evidence to back that up. On the other hand, the costs of using public transport, if we can gauge them accurately, will continue to rise. They have already risen substantially under privatisation of the railways and other forms of transport. Frankly, that makes it much more difficult to get people out of their cars and on to public transport and to use public transport to counter social exclusion. The Government appear to be hindering, rather than helping.

The other great lacuna in the report was safety. However, I want to deal first with the argument about the private car versus public transport. This week, the Transport Committee took evidence from the Strategic Rail Authority. If I must make one strong complaint about the 10-year plan, it is about the lack of cohesion. It is strange that a Government constantly under attack for being centralising and full of control freaks who control every form of organisation do not seem to have got their basic planning right in relation to safety.

In giving evidence, the SRA made it clear that it operates to the obvious capital receipts and targets that it was given, but does not take account of the broader social interest. In some instances, it does not appear even to take account of the multi-modal studies, but is continuing along a narrow and targeted path to create change in its own interests. It is odd that in the 10-year plan the Highways Agency is expected to provide 25 per cent. of private capital for its expansion, whereas the rail industry is expected to provide 65 per cent. of its investment.

As soon as we begin to examine the detail, we discover that the original plan insisted that congestion charging schemes, which it expected to be widely available throughout the United Kingdom, would contribute substantially to the amount of money available to develop transport. Much transport planning was based on that assumption, but the Government must know that their attitude to congestion charging is not as clear as the rest of us would like it to be.

The Government wrote into the Transport Bill the right of local authorities to impose congestion charging, and included a great deal of extra cash from congestion charging schemes in their plan for transport. Yet when the Mayor of London appeared to be taking an active interest in setting up a congestion charging scheme, they were extremely careful not to back him too energetically, but did not set out their objections to the detail, interests, or objectives of the scheme. Inevitably, that will confuse those who want a clear view of where we are going.

The Government will have to accept that the 10-year plan must not simply be something set in stone that can be dragged out occasionally so that we can tell people that we have a firm plan for transport. It needs to be a rolling programme that re-examines at almost every

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

point changes in circumstances and the requirements for investment and change brought about by factors over which Governments have little control.

The railway industry is in an extraordinary situation. Private companies that took over franchises on the assumption that they would make considerable commitments to the Treasury are no longer doing so. Indeed, in the case of the west coast main line, the incompetent assessments of the former Railtrack have led to the Strategic Rail Authority giving considerable sums of public money to two companies—Virgin and Stagecoach—on the basis of their inability to deliver the services that were promised under the original contracts. It now appears that they may also be entitled to considerable compensation on top of the writing off of their previous commitments—we are not talking about small sums—and their additional Government funding.

Only this week we were told that eight different franchises within the railway system are running on management contracts. Frankly, when taxpayers and rate payers are examining their needs for transport systems and know that they will have to foot the bill for much of the investment themselves, they will begin to ask, "As I am paying for a management system over whose assets I have no control, and as I can see no evidence of my ability to dictate the standards, speed, cleanliness or security of the services, is it justifiable to continue to shell out at the rate and in the manner that has obtained until now?"

The Government are over-optimistic about how much private funding the plan will deliver. We took evidence from local authorities that are contemplating congestion charging systems. They are not doing so at the rate envisaged in the plan, and it is not enough authorities to make a difference. Inevitably, many of the original targets in the plan will prove unworkable. We must have a detailed debate on the future of charging for road use. Alternatively, we shall have to find other ways of managing the excessive and self-defeating growth of traffic. The Government need to set about those tasks as a matter of urgency—otherwise, the investment decisions within the plan will turn out to be incorrect.

We examined the plan's gaps in great detail. Local charging schemes were the cornerstone of the transport White Paper, but the Department has now decided to downplay the contribution that such schemes will make. If we are to have 20 schemes, we would like to see more evidence of them than is currently available.

I return to motoring costs. If the Government are allowing their attitude to be dictated by fear of the Poujadists of north Wales, they are not facing up to the implications of their policy. If motoring costs were held—not increased; we did not recommend that—at their existing level in real terms, that would not impose any extra costs on motorists than they pay today, but it would begin to address the difference between public transport and motor cars. It is not good enough to tell people that they should use public transport because it has environmental and other benefits. We need first to supply the services that people require and, secondly, to assure them that using public transport will not be more expensive than travelling by their own motor transport.

We need a great deal of clarity about the linkage between regional planning at different levels and transport decisions. I am sure that some of my colleagues will want to mention that today, because there is little point in having multi-modal studies, which go in considerable detail into regional needs and planning and the desires of the population, if they are not married up with the targets of larger transport authorities. There is little evidence that integrated planning is taking place in either the Highways Agency or the Strategic Rail Authority.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way on the issue of multi-modal studies. There is at least one other hon. Member from the south-west here this afternoon. This is an excellent concept, but there has been no consultation with local areas about how their schemes could fit in. It has been very much top down. I want the tracks on the railway line from Cheltenham to Swindon to be doubled, and I am having difficulties getting the proposal back into the process. It has been left out, and now no one else wants to pick it up too willingly as a priority.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I think that the Government want to have a first-class rail system. They want to have it modernised as soon as possible, but that makes nonsense of the idea that the Strategic Rail Authority should take no account of the multi-modal studies or the targets in the 10-year plan. The SRA has already made it clear that several projects originally expected to be delivered through this plan will not be possible without new resources.

I did not intend to use this debate to talk in detail about rail services, but it is extremely worrying that as far as we can see, the enormous costs of the west coast main line have wiped out not just the budget that would have been available for modernisation but many small schemes all over the country that would have produced immediate and positive results. We are getting close to the point at which few companies in the train operating group contribute to national finance, yet taxpayers, who are still shelling out for this system, have not received value for money or any clear idea of how they will see the projected improvements that are so vital for their future. I have already said that we think that the Government are over-optimistic about the level of private funding. They seem to plan the main application of private funding for public transport because of their attitude towards roads.

This study which we undertook at the beginning of the year, accepted that the Government, for the best reasons in the world, were unable to deliver every detail of the plan that we considered essential. We gave them full marks for trying and we thought that their objectives were sensible, but frankly, that makes their failure to achieve what we seek even more worrying. The Government will have to provide a much more urgent plan, which will first need to deal with the practical problems of a transport industry that is close to meltdown. It would be bizarre in the extreme if the Government contributed to lowering motoring costs at the same time as they allowed the cost of travelling by public transport to increase. They must look urgently at a way in which the conclusions of the multi-modal studies can be integrated into the targets and delivery

programmes of the transport system. Passengers are becoming increasingly irritated by the amounts of money that are going into public transport systems without seeing a positive sign of real improvements.

The Committee is most grateful to Professor Phil Goodwin for his support; it was extremely helpful to have him working on the report. We are grateful to all those who gave evidence. They represented a wide range of interests—both the general public and people working in the transport industry. We also put on record our admiration for the work done by Greg Marsden, who is one of our specialist advisers, and by the Clerks.

Having a good idea is not enough. In transport policy, knowing what will be done with an idea is rather more important. Knowing how it will be achieved, how much it will cost and, above all, what will be done when bits of it go badly wrong marks out those Governments who are successful from those who are not. This Government can be successful, but they have to deal with severe time constraints. There is disillusion among the public. The 10-year plan needs to be put into operation in the long term, but needs to be seen to be coming on stream in the short term. I hope that if there is that kind of sensitivity to the needs of the travelling public, in five years' time we will be able to produce a report that has nothing but praise for my right and hon. Friends.

2.51 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on ensuring the publication of a hard-hitting and challenging report. No doubt it was why the Minister was biting his nails, although perhaps the hon. Lady could not see that.

In considering the 10-year plan, the Select Committee's report and the Government's response, we should bear it in mind that the outcome of the plan should, among other things, be a safe, reliable and affordable public transport system. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred to targets and monitoring. The report's list of conclusions on page 53 states:

"It is . . . imperative that the Plan sets yearly or intermediate targets for travel conditions so that progress towards the targets for 2010 can be assessed."

On page 58, it notes that the Department requires local authorities to produce interim targets for 2005 as part of the local transport plan process, but seems reluctant to come up with intermediate targets of its own. We must be able to monitor whether progress is being made so that, if it is not, action can be taken to ensure that the targets are reached within the time frame that was originally agreed.

We must look at the issue of joined-up government. The Government have set out some key objectives—tackling social exclusion, for instance—that the transport policy should be designed to achieve. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred to the need to look at the balance of cost in relation to public transport versus the private motor car. Although the 10-year transport plan identifies the fact that a significant percentage of the poorest households do not have cars—one assumes that the transport policy was designed to tackle social exclusion and assist the poorest people—the Government's response states:

"Given its central aim of improving the transport system, it is not surprising that the Plan can be expected to produce most benefit for those who travel most."

I disagree with the Government. If one of their priorities is to tackle social exclusion—in other words to help people who do not have access to a car and therefore do not travel much—it is surprising that the Government's 10-year transport plan should focus on making travel easier for those who travel most rather than for those who are socially excluded.

With regard to joined-up government, we are in the middle of a Select Committee inquiry into multi-modal studies, and it is unfortunately very clear that there is no real linkage between the 10-year transport plan and the multi-modal studies. We have identified the fact that there is no money available for rail improvements or that, if they are made, they will occur at the tail end of the process, in the last couple of years of the plan, or possibly beyond 2010.

Will the Minister comment on whether there will be enough skilled people available to do the work needed? For instance, if Crossrail, which is due to be delivered by 2011, receives the go-ahead from the Government, it will require between 30 per cent. and 40 per cent. of all the skilled signalling staff available. I suspect that if all the rail improvements proposed by the Government as part of the multi-modal studies were to take place during that same period, there would be no one available to do the work.

The Government say that the environment and sustainability are at the core of their decision-making process. However, it is clear from the evidence that we received that the approach of the Highways Agency is still based on predict and provide for roads and an increase in car use, rather than a more sustainable approach.

The Select Committee report identifies the Government's commitment to improve the quality of service on the tube through a public-private partnership. The summary says that that process is nine months to one year behind schedule. If Mr. Livingstone proceeds with his court challenge, it could be three, four or five years behind—that is if there is any truth in the predictions that the legal battle over the tube will not be completed until 2006.

It must be pointed out that, so far, approximately £400 million has been spent on the tube through PPP without a single new escalator, let alone a new train set being provided. However, I was pleased to hear that the Secretary of State's private office gave him a new train set today, as a birthday present. That may be the only new train set that he has to play with for some years to come.

We heard a long statement and exchange of questions about aviation today. It is worth pointing out that the 10-year transport plan assumed that the White Paper on aviation would be published by the end of this year. Clearly, that deadline will not be met: it seems probable that publication will be deferred to autumn 2003. More worryingly, there seems to be a disconnection between the Government's stated priorities on sustainability and what they are delivering on aviation, which has an almost total absence of emphasis on sustainability.

The Select Committee focused on rail freight and the clear target to increase it by 80 per cent. There has been a welcome increase in the amount of rail freight.

[Tom Brake]

However, that may be a case of putting all the eggs in one basket, because that increase is principally in the transport of coal. I hope that that positive increase in freight will continue, and that the coal market does not move away from rail freight.

I am concerned about the target that has been set for rail freight. There has clearly been a shift away from the 80 per cent. target, because the Government have now said that the substantial increase in rail freight will be up to 80 per cent. That could mean no increase whatever. Can the Minister be more specific about where the increase is in the range between 0 per cent.—or even a decrease—and 80 per cent.?

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich has referred to the need for a clear position statement, and David Begg from the Commission for Integrated Transport has called for leadership from the Government. We need that leadership in relation to both congestion charging and road user charging. Every time the issue of congestion charges is raised, a Minister steps up and says yes in principle, then goes on to rubbish whatever is being proposed. That is a rather soft position. No clear statement has been given on road user charging, so we have seen the spectacle of a series of multi-modal studies, each proposing something different because each made different assumptions about what the Government might do.

There is great uncertainty about the Government's ability to raise the necessary private finance for rail. My hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) will talk about that shortly. Questions remain about the Government's commitment to cutting congestion, introducing congestion and road user charging, and tackling social exclusion through their transport policy. Severe doubts remain about the Government's ability to monitor their progress and to adjust their policies if they appear to be missing the targets. After five years, transport remains the Government's Achilles' heel and I fear that the Minister's response this afternoon will do nothing to dispel that view.

3.2 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I come to the debate in a detached way. I say that because the exchanges between the Select Committee and the Government seem to pass by my area and its transport needs—needs that arise from the fact that Lowestoft and the rest of my constituency feel detached from the national transport network.

My constituency is the easternmost part of the United Kingdom. Its road and rail links to the rest of the country are very poor and anything but modern at this time of talking about modernisation. When we talk about an integrated transport policy, we just want to be integrated with the rest of the country. Lowestoft is a small to medium-sized port whose purpose is to integrate the movement of goods on land and sea. It is difficult for a port to be successful if, unlike the rest of our industries, it does not have good transport links with the rest of the country. We want modern connections to the rest of the country and we do not want to be left out or left behind.

Nevertheless, from my reading of the Select Committee report and the Government's response, the latter is more in touch with the ordinary people of my constituency and their expectations of transport than the former. The biggest failing of many of the debates on transport in this House and elsewhere is that we are presented with what I call a one-stroke policy—it is as though there is one policy for the whole country. Clearly, different parts of the country have different needs. I spend four days a week in London. Obviously, the policies needed here are completely different from those needed where I live for the remainder of the week.

Of course, transport policy must recognise environmental objectives, but we must understand that transport is the engine of the economy and that it must sustain local economies throughout the country, including in the "far east". At the moment, however, it is not doing so. An examination of the map reveals that the national road and rail network simply peters out in East Anglia, and the further east one proceeds, the worse the problem becomes. Poor transport links accentuate my constituency's geographical remoteness at the end of the East Anglian peninsula. Indeed, if we were to draw a map based on journey time, East Anglia would stretch half or two thirds of the way across the North sea, and my constituency would be at the end.

Unemployment is the key issue that we face locally. I am delighted to say that, since the Government have been in power, unemployment in my area has fallen from more than 11.5 per cent. to just 4.1 per cent. The figure fell again last month, but my area still suffers structural unemployment. The rate in most of the rest of East Anglia is 2 per cent. or below, and at 4 per cent., unemployment in my area is still above the national average. The Government recognise all that and give us all the designations that they can, including assisted area status, objective 2 funding and funding from the single regeneration budget. However, we still have structural unemployment, which is linked to low pay and deprivation. That all adds up to a weak economy.

Again and again, people in my area ask themselves, "Why us? Why are we in this position?" Labour and land are cheap, but we have lost our traditional industries. We have lost our shipbuilding, almost all of our fishing, much of our canning industry and many of the industries that sustained the town for so long. We cannot attract new industries, and existing industries find it difficult to expand and employ more people.

I cannot believe that our economic situation and our lack of jobs are not connected to our poor transport links and what I call our "disconnection". Many others feel the same way, and employers in my constituency are unanimous in claiming that the situation makes it harder for them to compete—it is the old level-playing field argument. I presume that entrepreneurs who want to start businesses have formed the same view, because we have a very low start-up rate in our area. I spend a lot of time in Westminster talking to national business leaders, telling them how wonderful the east coast is and how many opportunities there are. However, they all say, "Nice one, Mr. Blizzard, but you're a bit off the beaten track. Your area's almost a backwater, and we don't tend to look there." As we know, people cite location, location, location as an important factor in business.

Those involved in the last public examination of the regional planning guidance reached the same view. They said that transport links in East Anglia—particularly road links—were poor, and the decision makers

accepted that view. Ministers say the same thing. Nearly all the Ministers who come to my area arrive late because they underestimate the time it takes to get there. When I meet them here afterwards, they say, "My God, the roads are pretty awful up your way!" or "The railways aren't very good." Everyone recognises the problem. I had lunch with one of the country's most eminent environmentalists last year, and even he said, "We need to do an awful lot on modal shift in this country, but I have to say that East Anglia needs some better transport infrastructure."

The 10-year plan contains some good statements on that issue:

"Good transport is essential to an enhanced quality of life, to a strong economy and to a better environment."

I cannot disagree with that. The "Vision" chapter states that the aim of the plan is to

"boost the economic development of all regions . . . promote the renaissance of towns . . . enhance access and opportunity in rural areas . . . reduce social exclusion".

We tend to think of East Anglia as a generally rural place, although it has sizeable towns and cities. Overall, its economy is very strong; indeed, in places such as Cambridge, it has overheated. The city is turning business away because it cannot cope. For a long time, the regional strategy has been dispersal of that economic activity to other parts of the region. However, I cannot see how that prosperity can be dispersed unless there are better transport links.

What do I ask for, as the Under-Secretary of State for Transport listens to me this afternoon? Quite a lot of effort has been put into trying to develop a good rail link to Lowestoft. The project to develop rail in Lowestoft was even mentioned in the integrated transport White Paper, because the lines are right alongside the docks. The problem, however, is that a critical mass of freight volume is needed to make the project worthwhile. There is only one company that has that volume. It did a study, and, although there was quite a lot of hope, the plan did not work economically. I wish that such rail grants as exist were a bit wider in their terms of reference, in order perhaps to make up that difference and to get the freight going. At the moment, however, the situation looks bleak.

Let me turn to roads. I recently conducted a survey of 300 businesses in my constituency, to try to establish the most important route. It turns out that the A12 is a clear priority. Those businesses employ the people who need the jobs. The results of my survey underline the folly of trying to pretend that the other trunk road in the area—the A47, which runs from Norwich to Great Yarmouth—can operate as Lowestoft's main link. Few people in my town think that it makes sense to start by going north if one wants to go to London or even along the A14. I have measured the distance, and if one wants to go to London that way, it is 16 per cent. further, which means 16 per cent. more miles, fuel and emissions. The Minister will remember me talking in a previous debate about the magnificent lift-up bridge in the middle of Lowestoft. The idea that if one lives in the south of town one will go north over that bridge in order to go south is, frankly, bizarre.

The focus is on the A12, which was de-trunked following the roads review. I personally objected to the de-trunking. However, the local highways authority, Suffolk county council, supported the de-trunking, because it felt that it could do more with the road by managing it itself. That view prevailed. Now we see what the council had in mind. It recently carried out a route study, which seems to have been conducted by asking everyone on the route what they want. If one lives on the road, it is obvious what one wants: understandably, one wants the traffic to go slower, for there to be more crossing places, and so forth. That is what the county council is coming up with. However, given that the route is necessary for the regeneration of our fragile economy, that will make things worse. Journey times will be increased, the perception of what getting to Lowestoft entails will be made even worse, and it will be harder to attract the businesses that we need. There will be fewer opportunities to overtake the ubiquitous East Anglian tractor when trying to get from A to B on time. We are now trying to get the highway authority to think again, and to make the economic needs of Lowestoft a priority, fitting in with the economic policy of the county.

If we want to satisfy the needs of people living on the roads in those villages, and to meet the needs of the economy of Lowestoft, we shall obviously have to consider some bypasses. There is a clear policy on bypasses in the 10-year plan: the Government will support them; there is funding for a number of bypasses. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to confirm this afternoon that that remains the policy, that the Government support bypasses and will consider the case for them if a highway authority puts forward a proposal in a local transport plan.

Although I mention local transport plans, I do not think that we should underestimate how much is being achieved under the 10-year plan through local transport plans. A third of the money allocated under the 10-year plan is for those local transport plans, so long as they are the right plans and command the support of local people. I assume that just because a route has been de-trunked does not mean that it cannot be upgraded. I ask my hon. Friend to confirm that.

Many studies have been made of the relationship between making road enhancements and the effect on local economies. People who do not like roads under any circumstances quote the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment report and say that it came out against making that link. I have read the report very carefully, and it does not say that at all. In fact, the writers of the report say that the result of improvements may be some modest growth in local economies, but they are not sure to what extent. The report certainly does not say that there will be none—it says that it will be modest and that further local studies need to be carried out.

Some of the research that I have conducted suggests that there are other places in this country—in south Wales, north Wales and around Hull—where road improvements have had a major impact on local economies. Other countries around the world do not seem to have such doubts on the matter; whenever they want to open up a more remote part of the country, they invest in infrastructure. My hon. Friend the Minister has been visiting some of the countries that are about to accede to the European Union, which are all investing in their transport infrastructure to improve their economic performance.

[Mr. Bob Blizzard]

Last summer, Lowestoft lost most of its fishing industry, which gave us the opportunity to look to the future. There are three possible futures for our town: we could be a retirement town, of which there are plenty around our coasts, a dormitory or a thriving working town. The only option that offers opportunities for our young people is the latter, but to reach that point we firmly believe that we need road improvements.

The issue is one of fairness. Other parts of the country have had investment in transport, and few people in those areas regret that investment. Those parts of the country that have been left out now need attention. We do not want to be abandoned or to be dealt with by a one-stroke transport policy that says "Anything but roads."

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to keep an eye on our campaigning with the highway authority. If and when proposals are made to upgrade the A12, I ask him to look on them favourably and take note of what I have said this afternoon. We have heard about multi-modal studies, in which much transport policy is rooted. I respect such studies and understand that we must consider these matters in a scientific way, but I urge him not to take the politics out of politics. The studies are a useful tool for prioritising schemes, but sometimes a bunch of experts go to a place and say to the local people, "You are all wrong, you don't know what you're talking about. You thought you needed that but we think this." That is dangerous, because it simply gives people another reason not to vote. If people say they want something and their Member of Parliament says, "Yes, I support that, vote for me," but they realise that even if they vote for him they will not get it because the matter has been decided by an expert, it puts another nail in the coffin of democracy.

3.18 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The 10-year plan published by the Government got a widespread welcome, not only in this place but in the wider world, which is encouraging. It generated a lot of optimism and hope that, for the first time in a generation, we had a Government who were prepared to publish a document that moved away from the short-termism that has blighted transport policy for decades. Therefore, the general welcome for the document is well deserved.

I have the honour of being a member of the Transport Select Committee and the particular honour of serving under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who is responsible, in no small way, for this comprehensive report. It is critical but positive and raises many important issues. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will regard the criticism in the report not as negative but as a positive attempt to move forward the agenda. I seem to recall that, in the dim and distant days of the 1997 election, and perhaps even during the 2001 election, transport policy was one of the issues on which the Government said that they wanted to be judged, so Labour Members have a vested interest in the matter.

The Government are seeking to engender a shift from use of the car to public transport. They seem to believe that giving people genuine choice about whether to use their cars or public transport will bring about the modal shift that we all want by some mechanism that I have not yet been able to identify. The vital issue is whether promoting choice will be sufficient to tackle what we all know is the core problem—the increasing dependence of the travelling public on the motor car. Personally, I do not think that it will be. Our report shows in detail why that will not be sufficient. The Government need to step back, take a deep breath, count to 10 and closely examine the report, because based on the evidence, promoting choice simply will not work and more will be required.

One of our witnesses, Professor Begg from the Commission for Integrated Transport, said that a sticks and carrots approach was required—promotion and improvement of public transport and restraint on motor car use, especially in urban areas. The Government show no signs so far of being successful in the former or having any enthusiasm for the latter. That extremely important point comes out in our report.

The 10-year plan concentrates on improvements and new facilities for transport. That is all well and good because, without those improvements, the plan will not succeed, but there is something missing. If we focus entirely on what transport provision we should approve or what new infrastructure we should provide, we will avoid forming any vision of life or of travel beyond 2010. The report clearly shows that we should not start work on a major transport infrastructure and hope for it to be completed within 10 years. As we know, most of the important rail transport infrastructure projects will be backloaded. We must consider what vision we have for our society in 2010 and beyond, but there is little evidence of that in the 10-year plan or the Government response to our report. Indeed, there is little evidence that the Government have such a vision.

Will the projects that go ahead in the 10 years of the plan be consistent with any vision for after 2010? If the Government have no vision for living and travel in our society after that time, how can they reach a judgment as to whether the schemes that are started, particularly any that are backloaded three years before the end of the plan, will have an effect beyond that time?

The report is critical of Lord Birt's refusal to attend our Committee. As hon. Members may know, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister appointed Lord Birt to head the forward strategy unit. He is particularly involved in forward strategy thinking on transport, so we asked him to attend. We said, "Come along, Lord Birt. Don't be shy. We have watched your television programmes many times," but he refused to come. The position was, in other words, "If there is forward strategic thinking, it has nothing to do with the Select Committee on Transport. Mind your own business." That cannot be acceptable, and I hope that the Under-Secretary will comment on it.

Our report points out that the Government refuse to set targets to reduce the growth in traffic. That is disappointing, and a serious omission. I hope that, in the review of the 10-year plan, my hon. Friend the Minister will reconsider that, because we must address whether we have the capacity to cater for growth. If we do not know what the growth will be, and we are not taking measures to restrain it or setting targets to adjust it, we have no chance of developing the necessary

infrastructure. The result will be that no account is taken of the impact of traffic growth on quality of life and the reliability and safety of transport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred to costs, and I want to emphasise the increasing and alarming gap between the cost of motoring and of public transport. How on earth can we increase public transport use by 50 per cent., or whatever percentage the Government have laid down in the 10-year plan, when it is cheaper to use a motor car and more expensive to use public transport? The financial mechanism is completely the wrong way round for that to be achieved, but as yet the Government seem unwilling to consider the problem. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in evidence to the Committee that he did not intend to place unreasonable additional cost burdens on motorists.

Let me repeat the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich. We are not talking about imposing extra costs on motorists; we simply want the Government to keep the cost of motoring constant in real terms. If that happens, we have a chance, but if it does not, we have no chance. It is vital that the Government deal with the situation. If it is allowed to continue, it will benefit the better-off motorist and continue to penalise the less well-off in our society. I do not know how that squares with the Government's social inclusion agenda. I simply cannot equate the two, and I am someone who supports the Government—most of the time. The Minister needs to tell us how that apparent contradiction squares with the Government's agenda.

The 10-year plan does not keep the difference between the cost of driving and of using public transport anything like constant; it exaggerates it. We described that in the report as incomprehensible. The balance desperately needs to be restored. The basic question is this: if motoring costs will not remain constant during the 10 years of the plan—the Secretary of State has said that he is not prepared to impose an extra burden—why is it acceptable for extra cost burdens to be inflicted on public transport users? That is not an unfair question, and our report poses it.

Charging schemes are central to the plan. Some £2.7 billion from such schemes has been incorporated into the budget available for transport during the period of the plan, so it is not insignificant. At the moment, few schemes are on the drawing board or being planned. We know about the one in London and will see what happens there. However, the Government need to deal with some barriers. Local authorities and the population at large may accept charging schemes of one description or another, provided that public transport alternatives are available. At the moment, that is not the case. The Government have to ensure that public transport improvements can be provided in local areas, at least at the same time as charging schemes may be applied. My real problem with the Government is that they are too cautious. The Department for Transport is far too cautious, and ought to be more proactive in terms of charging schemes and resources for public transport.

I consider the most difficult and problematic aspect of the 10-year transport plan and its objectives to be rail. Some hon. Members have referred to freight, but I want to concentrate on passenger rail. The objective is to increase passenger kilometres on rail by 50 per cent. during the period of the plan. Some £33.5 billion of public money and £34 billion of private money will be involved in that increase in ridership. Those are enormous sums. Of course, we still hear from the SRA that they are not enough.

All the evidence that we have taken, not only during the inquiry but since the report was published, suggests that the SRA is having great difficulty levering anything like the necessary money from the private sector so that infrastructure developments can go ahead. Several billion pounds of private money have been put into rolling stock, which we welcome, but as yet I have been unable to detect a single infrastructure project that has levered in any private money. Such difficulties will increase.

The Government's transport plan and all the other plans suggest that infrastructure costs through the SRA will be based on Railtrack's cost assessments. If I dare to mention the west coast main line, that will give some idea of how silly and groundless it would be to base costs on Railtrack's assessments.

The report is deeply sceptical as to whether the Strategic Rail Authority will lever in the private money that accounts for more than half of the Government's intended expenditure on rail of £60 billion over 10 years. One of the Government's great challenges, and a problem that is a legacy of the previous Administration and the privatisation of rail, is the fact that the railway industry has been splintered and almost dismembered. That has led directly to the problems that the Government face today. In spite of the progress that has been made—and a lot has—in addressing that splintering and in putting back together and co-ordinating the railway industry, much remains to be done.

We are nearly three years into the transport plan, and as yet no private money has been levered in for infrastructure projects. If the Government and the Strategic Rail Authority continue to insist that so-called special purpose vehicles are to be the channel through which private investment will be forthcoming for infrastructure projects—although there have not been any such projects yet—they could create great problems. First, will the money be forthcoming? Secondly, will that not splinter the railway again, as we shall have up to 15 special purpose vehicles?

If the special purpose vehicles involve the train operating companies, as is intended, they will presumably be concentrated on sections of track that are of concern to a company. Would that not create a risk of repeating the splintering of the railway industry that created the problems in the first place?

There is a lot to commend the Government on, including their courage in tackling the issue. We must realise that everyone is a transport expert. Put a compulsory purchase order on someone's home and there will be a row, but paint double yellow lines and put a bus stop outside their door and you will have a revolution on your hands, Mr. Butterfill. Go into any local pub, and everyone has an answer to such problems.

The good intentions and courageous objectives laid down in the plan by the Government are in danger of not being achieved because some very important spokes in the wheel are beginning to look wobbly—in fact,

[Mr. George Stevenson]

some of them are beginning to come off. Unless they act decisively, not to reinvent the wheel but to put the spokes back in place, and have the courage of their convictions to tackle the issues that they know exist, the Government will not fulfil the good intentions and objectives that we all support, certainly not in the planned period, and it is difficult to think that they will do so afterwards.

Our report goes far in pointing the Government in the direction of tackling the difficulties and challenges in a positive way, and I hope that the debate will help the Minister to take the agenda forward.

3.38 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on the way in which she conducted the wide-ranging investigation that has resulted in a report that identifies what is good in transport and the importance of the 10-year plan. The report identifies the aspects on which there is lack of ambition and uncertainty of delivery. I thank the Minister and his colleagues for their response. Much has changed since the publication of the report. We now have Network Rail and a rejuvenated Strategic Rail Authority. The Government have recognised the importance of transport and the priority that they must attach to it in dealing with our communities and promoting economic regeneration. They have made major attempts to improve the situation that existed only a few months ago, but there are still areas of concern. I shall identify some of them and suggest a way forward.

The report says that important aspects of transport are omitted from the plan. One aspect is social inclusion. We need a transport policy that takes into account not only mobility and regeneration, which are important, but the needs of excluded individuals and communities so that they can participate fully as citizens in our society. It is important to remember that 60 per cent. of the poorest households have no access to a car. National figures show that 31 per cent. of the population do not have access to a car, but the situation is different in the areas of greatest need. In Liverpool, 55 per cent. of all households do not have access to a car.

We must recognise that individuals need transport to have access to employment—to get to job interviews, to get to jobs and to keep jobs. They also need it to have access to amenities such as shopping, health and leisure facilities. Transport enables people to participate fully in society, whether as workers or as citizens.

If we add that understanding to the fact that many people do not have private transport, we see the importance of concentrating on accessible and affordable public transport. We must improve bus services. In the poorest groups, nine out of 10 journeys are made by bus, something that is often overlooked.

I noted with pleasure that the Government's response to our report stated that they were in discussion with the social exclusion unit over the study of the relationship between transport and social exclusion. I welcome that, and should be interested to hear from the Minister what progress the Government have made in addressing this important aspect of social exclusion. I shall suggest to the Minister a way in which he and his colleagues can address social exclusion and regeneration and start to fulfil some of the specific promises in their 10-year plan. It is something that could be done in Liverpool at the moment on the commitment in the 10-year plan to an expansion in light rail. The plan refers to the Government's intention to double the number of journeys made by light rail and increase the number of light rail lines by about 25.

The Minister could fulfil part of that promise this afternoon by giving us the long-awaited answer to Mersey Rail's application to go ahead with the Mersey tram scheme. The scheme is extremely important. If successful, it would bring trams back to Liverpool for the first time in 50 years. Ministers are considering line 1 of a scheme that is valued at £400 million. Line 1 is valued at the bargain price of just over £200 million. The scheme would provide a link between Kirkby and Liverpool city centre, including the city centre loop. It would allow the Government in one jump to fulfil their promise to increase passenger journeys on light rail. Of the three lines, line 1 alone would lead to 9 million extra passengers per annum using light rail.

Sixty-four per cent. of households on the lines to be covered by the proposed Mersey tram have no access to cars, so it would deal immediately with social exclusion issues. Line 1 would go through six pathways areas, which have the highest concentration of social and economic need in Merseyside. There is 10 per cent. unemployment, 15 per cent. of people claim income support compared to the national average of 9 per cent., and the average household income is about £11,500 whereas the United Kingdom average is £16,000. The line would cross areas of great need in Kirkby, the 580 partnership, Queens, Stanley, Parks and Liverpool 1. It would link up with existing bus and rail services. It would provide jobs in construction and maintenance of the line and would create a link with employment areas such as the waterfront development in Liverpool and the new retail centre being built by Grosvenor/ Henderson.

The scheme would link people with amenities. Along the proposed lines there are 38 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, Knowsley community college, 20 adult centres and seven libraries with special drop-in centres to encourage adults to develop their training and education. The trams would also create a link to medical facilities such as the Royal Liverpool university hospital. Supporting and approving the line would at one stroke provide excluded communities with access to jobs and amenities and help the regeneration of Liverpool and Merseyside.

The Mersey tram application has been with Ministers for some time. Time matters, because regeneration in Liverpool is well under way and we need the project to allow it to develop further in a way that benefits all people in the Liverpool and Merseyside area. It matters, too, because a significant part of the funding for the project—in addition to what we hope will come from the Government—is objective 1 money from the European Union, and there is a time limit on those funds. I appeal to my hon. Friend the Minister to give us an answer today and to ensure that it is a po tive one to allow the Mersey Rail light rail system to g orward as quickly as possible.

Another area of concern in the Committee's report is economic regeneration in general. In her introductory remarks, my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred to the lack of clarity between national decision making, regional plans, regional economic strategies, comments made by regional assemblies, plans proposed by passenger transport authorities and passenger transport executives, where they exist, and the multi-modal studies currently being put together. There is a lack of clarity not just about specific transport issues but about decisions that relate to the interaction between transport, land planning and economic regeneration. It is far from clear how those decisions are made and how they are co-ordinated.

Paragraph (r) of the Government's response to our report relates to assessment of rail transport schemes. Paragraph (r) states:

"All scheme proposals, including those emerging from regional transport strategies and multi-modal studies, are evaluated using generally accepted methodology ... This takes full account of costs and benefits under each of the five main criteria—environment, economy, safety, accessibility and integration."

I welcome that very much. However, at an evidence session held by the Select Committee on Transport only yesterday, I was most disturbed that the chief executive of the Strategic Rail Authority, Mr. Bowker—who provides a welcome lead on transport issues—appeared to be unclear about whether economic regeneration was a factor in his assessment of transport initiatives. I would like some clarification on the matter. The Government's reply to our report also causes me concern. I am unclear about where economic regeneration fits into the Government's and the SRA's evaluation of proposed transport schemes.

Mrs. Dunwoody: My hon. Friend has been rather kind to Mr. Bowker. I do not think that he said, in quite the gentle terms that she used, that there was no very clear understanding in the SRA; I think that he positively said that the SRA would not take account of the factors that she has just enunciated and that are so vital to the development that she has been talking about.

Mrs. Ellman: My hon. Friend may well be correct. I certainly felt that it was very far from clear what was happening. My hon. Friend notes that Mr. Bowker suggested that economic regeneration was not a factor in analysing the costs and benefits of particular schemes. I recall that that was what was said.

Mr. Stevenson: Does my hon. Friend find it rather puzzling that when the development of airports is proposed, economic regeneration is one of the first issues that the Government say is important, yet when it comes to railways the Government and the SRA do not seem to recognise the issue?

Mrs. Ellman: Yes. My hon. Friend's point adds even more weight to the importance of considering economic regeneration in relation to all transport measures.

If there is going to be successful economic regeneration, we need to address the importance of freight. Freight is important to the country as a whole and to individual regions. Certainly in the north-west, the need to meet freight requirements to support the expansion of the economy is being addressed. However, we are still without answers to very important questions. A freight quality partnership is operating in the north-west, yet the north-west regional freight strategy has not yet been completed.

Again, if I can refer to the comments made yesterday by Mr. Bowker, I am extremely concerned that a centralist approach is being taken. I fear that the importance of regional needs, as expressed through those quality freight partnerships and the regional development agencies, will not be seen as part of the national strategy. They will simply be seen as something additional to it, which may or may not be relevant to the decision that will be taken centrally. It is not clear what decisions are being taken about the west coast main line and the differing needs of passengers and freight. We still await an answer from my hon. Friend the Minister and, perhaps more specifically, the Strategic Rail Authority on the proposed dedicated freight route from Liverpool to northern France mainly using existing rail lines and going through the channel tunnel.

We must also look at the importance of ports and links with ports in developing freight. In particular, we must see how the port of Liverpool can be linked with improvements to trans-Pennine routes. That is especially important as we look at the potential for expanding trade with Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Has any thought been given to that in the studies in NETA—the north European trade axis? I am far from clear how local developments are being linked with national strategies and national decisions.

It is also important to look at the contribution that airports such as Manchester airport and the expanding and increasingly successful Liverpool John Lennon airport can make. We need to look at the contribution that can be made by road, rail, airports and ports and the links and integration between those different modes. I feel unclear about how that is to be addressed. I would feel much more confident if we had a directly elected regional assembly with the powers to work with the Government in co-ordinating national needs and regional interests.

I recognise the renewed importance that the Government have attached to transport issues. I recognise the care that they are taking to implement the recommendations in the 10-year transport plan. It is important that the Government continue to be conscious of the importance of transport to economic regeneration and for those who are socially excluded. They must look at the national interest while recognising that regions and localities are intrinsic to it.

3.58 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman). I hope at the end of my speech to echo some of the points that she made about the lack of integration of planning and decision making. She made a thoughtful speech and I listened to it with great interest.

I also congratulate the Chairman and members of the Select Committee on an excellent report. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) said that everyone considers themselves to be a traffic expert. I strongly recommend that he does not come to my meeting with the Bath chamber of commerce

[Mr. Don Foster]

tomorrow, when I suspect I will be confronted by 200 people who are all traffic experts. The advantage that the Committee has is that it can call expert witnesses, and the Committee's analysis of some of their comments is helpful to all hon. Members, not just those who are here today.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) made a rather muted speech. She has been much more coruscating in the past about Government policies. She was right to set out at the beginning her praise for the Government in that they at least had a plan that looked to the future and had a set of aims and objectives. After all, if there had not been such a plan we would not be having this debate today. As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South pointed out, there is much to criticise in the plan. However, he implied that he supported some aspects of it, which the Committee has said it also supports. We also support several elements of it. Inevitably, in a debate such as this, we tend to concentrate on areas of disagreement, but I would not want it thought that there were none.

As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside appropriately said, it is right to have a plan with aims and objectives. I also fully support her comment that this needs to be the basis for a rolling plan, and we need to look forward to the future. I hope that the Minister, in his winding-up speech, will comment on the Government's intention to reconsider the changes to the 10-year transport plan.

As I said, there were, rightly, several criticisms about various aspects of the plan. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South described it as a wobbly wheel whose spokes were coming off. Having listened to the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), I suspect that he would be grateful for any wheel whatever in his constituency, however wobbly it might be. Members of the Select Committee expressed concern about the unbalanced nature of the plan and its failure to address the management of traffic growth as motoring costs fall and public transport costs rise.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside and others were right to be critical of the Government's failure to give a clear signal about where they stand on congestion charging and road pricing. Given the latest announcements about the continued growth in congestion on our roads, it seems odd that the only real response from the Government was to announce that we will have a congestion tsar. So much for a Government seemingly obsessed with targets—we now seem to have one that is increasingly obsessed with tsars of one sort or another. I note with interest that since September this year alone, a London schools tsar, an anti-spam tsar and an emergency medicine tsar have already been announced. We are now to have a congestion tsar.

As other hon. Members said, we need seriously to consider how we will address the problem of congestion on our roads, using the carrot and the stick. We are all aware of the figures, although some of them may not have the firmest of economic foundations. We all know that some people would argue strenuously that congestion on our roads is costing British businesses from between £15 billion and £20 billion a year, a figure that is rising. We also know that it is causing the nation significant health problems: large numbers of people are suffering as a result of air pollution from congestion on our roads. In many of our cities, traffic speeds are slower than they were in the time of carts and horses in the Victorian era. Clearly, we need to address those problems and must be prepared to offer bolder and more radical solutions.

Sticks must be used in the form of congestion charging and road pricing. However, I hope that those who have already talked about this will agree that we should introduce those sticks only where alternative "choices", as the 10-year plan calls them, are available to the people who will be affected. In an area where congestion charging is to be introduced, it is vital to have high-quality, safe, reliable and affordable public transport alternatives. Such a choice must be available first. It is therefore important that the Government and all political parties have now seen that some of the cruder measures designed to manage traffic growth are not right.

In the past, we might simply have suggested massively slapping up the cost of fuel. In reality, that would hit everyone in all sorts of circumstances, especially those people in remote rural areas without the alternative of high-quality public transport, who would lose out. That is why increasingly it is right to focus on measures that address the specific problems of congestion and the pollution that it causes.

It is important that the Government give clearer signals as to where they stand on the sticks now available under the Transport Act 2000, which are frequently referred to in the 10-year transport plan. If we are to improve the availability of safe, reliable and affordable public transport, we need a clear indication of the level of financial support other than that likely to be achieved through the fare box.

The Select Committee is concerned about the clarity of the Government's intentions on funding. Much is made of the £180 billion in the 10-year transport plan, but we all know that in the first two years under the Labour Government, the amount invested in public transport was less than under the previous Conservative Government. Further analysis of the alleged £180 billion makes apparent the smoke and mirrors behind the calculation of the figures. Under the current price base, the £180 billion becomes £157.6 billion. Taking out the amount spent on public resource expenditure leaves only £103 billion for new investment, of which £48 billion depends on the private sector, thus leaving only £55 billion of committed public investment. Comparison in real terms with the amount provided by the previous Conservative Government reveals that, although the funding is welcome, we are gaining only £1 billion a year more. We have to ask questions about the hype surrounding the amounts that the Government have announced.

The Minister has an opportunity today to clarify some of the confusions that remain. He will be well aware of doubts about the moneys available to different bodies and the letters of comfort provided to various companies developing bids to become infracos on the London underground.

Particular concerns have also been voiced about the status of Network Rail. The Liberal Democrats are delighted that the Government moved from Railtrack—a monopoly body torn by conflict between passenger

safety and shareholder profit—to a public interest company through which profits will be fed back into the system. We genuinely welcome that and we proposed it some time ago. However, the new body's funding seems increasingly unclear. Is Network Rail's £21 billion budget on or off the Government's balance sheet? A row is now developing between the auditors and statisticians about where Network Rail fits. I understand that it is to borrow money in the public market on the basis of Government guarantees. One would have thought that that meant accounting on the Government's account books, but some people are arguing against that. We need clarity, so I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

Some additional moneys will become available, so the crucial point is where and how they will be spent. Many people, including myself, can stand up and make a case for various projects in their local areas. The hon. Members for Waveney and for Liverpool, Riverside have rightly done so. I do not ask a great deal for my area—perhaps a decent public transport system with some Government support, the opening of Corsham station just outside my constituency, and sorting out the problems of Freshford station within it. The list is endless, but one thing is clear: there is a lack of clarity about who is taking the decisions and who can influence them. What will be the role of the regional assemblies and elected regional government in the future?

As other hon. Members have said, we are confused about why the Strategic Rail Authority's thinking is not linked to the multi-modal study's work. I go a stage further and suggest it is bizarre that today there was a statement on airport expansion, but in the consultation documents there was little or no reference to the role of the Strategic Rail Authority and the work that will be necessary to improve surface transport access to existing and planned new airports. There is a lack of integration in many of the projects and some rather strange thinking by those who take the decisions.

I welcomed the Government's recent announcement of improvements on our roads to deal with what they call "pinch points". I am not a great believer in huge new roads being built all over the country but it is common sense to build improved roundabouts and so on to provide better access to roads. Why is there such thinking in relation to roads but not to the railways? A great deal of money is being locked into the west coast main line and the Government have not yet placed a cap on public expenditure on that project. We should be thinking much more smartly about the sort of small improvements that improve the capacity of the existing network—measures such as putting in an odd little siding in a loop system so that a slow train can get out of the way of a fast train and then return to the main track.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich touched on rail safety and how it can be improved along with improvement to network capacity. There is a problem because Lord Cullen said that advanced train protection must be in place on all trains by 2008 and be operational by 2010. However, if the current basic ATP was introduced, it would not do a great deal to improve safety and it would do nothing to help with track management and greater track utilisation. It might be better to wait for the European rail traffic management system—ERTMS—level 2 which will come a few years later, but that would mean admitting that Lord Cullen's requirements will not be met and having a genuine, open public debate about it. It worries me enormously that the Health and Safety Executive website states that it is having a quiet little consultation on the subject, but the public has not been notified. There has not been an opportunity for wide-scale involvement in a very important consultation.

It concerns me deeply that 63 recommendations made by Lord Cullen either have not been met, or, if they have, no one has told anyone that they have been met. Some of them are probably not very sensible recommendations and there may be good arguments for changing or dropping them, but we need to be told what they are and when the remaining recommendations will be implemented. I hope that the Minister will say something on the important issue of safety.

I am worried that lots of deadlines are being missed, whether they are on safety targets to which my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) referred, targets in the 10-year transport plan or targets for the public service agreements agreed by the Department with the Treasury. Of seven key targets, it is worth reporting that the Government have failed to meet four.

The Committee should dwell long and hard on the crucial matter raised by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, namely how the decision-making processes on these matters need to be much more closely and effectively linked. The hon. Lady referred to the difficulty not only in linking together the various transport bodies but in linking transport with planning issues. There is huge fragmentation when it comes to taking decisions. I entirely support the Government's aspiration to develop integrated transport, but if they are ever to do it, there must be integrated thinking about the development of integrated transport.

I ask the Minister to reflect on how many different bodies have been set up by the Government and the industry with the sole job of looking at creating integrated transport. The list is lengthy and it includes the Commission for Integrated Transport. I worry about the failure to integrate thinking on these issues.

I end on a positive note: not all is doom and gloom and some real improvements are being made but there are some areas of difficulty. For example, more secure stations are needed, although none could be more secure than Bath Spa station at 4 am on Monday. A group of my constituents had set off from Paddington at 9 o'clock the previous evening. The first two trains were cancelled and the next one was massively delayed. It then stopped in Reading, where the group had to change. Having set off at 9 pm on Sunday to make the 90-minute journey to Bath Spa, they eventually arrived at 4 o'clock the following morning. When they reached their destination, they discovered that the station was truly secure, because all the doors were locked and there was no way out. Those constituents were very angry. Stations are, therefore, secure.

I hope, Mr. Butterfill, that you will have the opportunity to see the work being carried out by Journey Solutions, which has put together one of the more exciting integrated transport schemes. Under that scheme one can, at long last, go into certain railway stations to buy a railway ticket and buy a bus ticket at the same time. It has taken us a long time to reach that point.

4.15 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I welcome this debate and am delighted to participate in it. I do not wish to disappoint my former colleagues on the Transport Committee and so will declare an interest at the outset. My husband is an airline executive, and I have interests in BA, BAA, Railtrack, First Group, Eurotunnel and the RAC.

I congratulate the Select Committee, and its Chairman, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on this excellent report. I hope that she will forgive me for a little bias, as I was a member of the Committee. I believe that it was one of the hardest-working Committees during the last Session, and that we achieved a huge amount. I was delighted to participate in its work.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am delighted to tell the hon. Lady that we miss her on the Committee. She worked hard and was a useful member. We also miss her because of her marvellous declaration of interests, with which we started every meeting, and of which we are now sadly deprived.

Miss McIntosh: Perhaps I can send a framed copy of the relevant page of this debate to the hon. Lady.

I congratulate the Committee and its members on this timely report, which is a comprehensive and constructive appraisal of the 10-year transport plan.

I hope that the Minister will forgive me if I say that this is now a downgraded plan from a downgraded Department. We noticed, with some interest, that we have had three Secretaries of State for the almost three years of the plan. Many now see the 10-year plan as a 10-year sham.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, mentioned smoke and mirrors. I prefer to speak of announcements and re-announcements. I will not list all the dates of the relevant press releases, but the investment in infrastructure and capacity has been announced five times since December 1999. Opposition Members are therefore a little cynical about re-announcements.

On page 20 of their response to paragraph (hh) of the Select Committee report the Government state:

"We will publish a first report on progress on delivery of the 10 Year Plan in the autumn."

Will the Minister tell us where that report is? He said that it would be published this autumn, but there is less than a month to Christmas. It is less than a month to the winter solstice and we still see no sign of that first progress report.

The targets lie in tatters and the funding is clearly insufficient.

Mr. Stevenson: I recognise the expertise of the hon. Lady, and her input into the work of the Select Committee and this report. I am intrigued that she mentions funding. Is she about to tell us whether, if her party came into government, it would commit itself to the funding that the Government have committed to, or whether it would cut it?

Miss McIntosh: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for another opportunity. It will not be too long before we set out our stall, but he will forgive me if I do not take the opportunity to do so. Perhaps by the spring solstice we will have more information, so he should watch this space.

Has the Minister seen the details of trade routes circulated to all right hon. and hon. Members who have an interest in transport? They could be an alternative 10-year strategic plan, setting out investment priorities for the road and rail networks. Can he respond to them?

The Government's proposed funding is £180 million, made up of both public and private cash. The hon. Member for Bath made a point about the off-balance sheet liability of Network Rail, which will apparently be £21 billion. I wait to hear from the Minister the implications of that for transport spending. Hon. Members will have had the opportunity to study the Red Book this week. Of the total budget for the current financial year of £420 billion, only £12 billion is to be spent on transport. By my calculations, that is approximately 3 per cent.

The Government's original funding programme would have provided £60 billion for railways, of which £7 billion probably had to be accounted for twice as it would have gone to the railways anyway to make up private sector commitments. There was £60 billion for roads and £60 billion for local transport. A target was set to increase significantly rail's share of the freight market by 2010, which meant an increase of 80 per cent. in rail freight.

As hon. Members who serve on the Select Committee will recall, we learned in the context of other reports that those targets were way off beam. For six months, transport through the channel tunnel was disrupted between 9 pm and 3 am. Indeed, a paragraph of the report is devoted to that. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich will recall that that disruption was ongoing when our report was published. I record again my sincere disappointment at the failure of the Department for Transport and other Departments to raise that subject with the French authorities. Our constituents, such as Potters of Melmerby in the Vale of York, EWS, the Freight Transport Association and others lost vast sums of money in that regard.

The Minister must accept that putting Railtrack into administration destroyed, in one swift move, the confidence of private investors much wealthier than myself who might have wanted to invest in rail projects in future. The greater the risk, the higher the cost. We have discussed the £21 billion off-balance sheet liability for Network Rail.

Mr. Stevenson: Is the hon. Lady seriously trying to convince hon. Members that if Railtrack had been left alone and no action had been taken, its obvious success since its establishment by the previous Government would have seen us through?

Miss McIntosh: This is not the occasion to go over the history; we could spend the entire afternoon on it. In a spirit of constructive criticism, we should try to move forward.

Of the Government's projected investment in the railways, 50 per cent. should come from private finance. In the first two years of the 10-year transport plan, we

have seen nothing like that level of funding. The Minister might contradict me this afternoon, but I have not seen a level of investment to convince me that, having been so low over the first two years, it will recover over the remaining period.

Tom Brake: Does the hon. Lady agree that one of the best ways in which to unlock the private investment for a project such as Crossrail is for the Government to indicate their support?

Miss McIntosh: I am coming to the lack of Government transparency over which projects they support.

My comments on a previous Select Committee report, which recommended the establishment of an independent rail accident investigation board, apply here too. That would go a long way towards satisfying both investors and rail passengers. It is some time since Lord Cullen made that recommendation. Perhaps the Minister has an announcement on the point this afternoon.

The target was to increase rail passenger use to 50 per cent. above 2000 levels by 2010. However, the SRA has announced a disappointing reduction in the duration of rail franchises from the revised—increased—20 years to six or eight years. Mindful of the fact that the original franchise holders said that seven years was not long enough for them to see a return on their investment, I record my disappointment in that reduction.

The words of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) on bus use struck a chord with me, as I represent a rural constituency. There are pockets of rural poverty in the Vale of York that have insufficient public transport, particularly buses. I am disappointed that we have lost one route from Rawcliffe and Skelton into York, because buses are a potential answer to a problem with which we have become familiar during the first term of this Government—social exclusion. The Government hope to see bus use increase by 10 per cent. over the 2002 levels by 2010. How can they claim that that is achievable when, under Labour, bus use across England has declined outside London, Birmingham and eastern England? Perhaps the Minister can square the equation this afternoon.

Mr. Stevenson: The hon. Lady raises some important points. She mentions the success of bus passenger ridership increases in London, which is still regulated. Is she arguing for a re-regulation of bus services in the rest of the country?

Miss McIntosh: No. I pray in aid the rather inadequate evidence that the Committee heard in a separate inquiry from the Office of Fair Trading. I believe that the jury is still out. That is a separate debate, and I hope that we can return to it.

On road congestion, Trafficmaster this week judged that road journey times had increased by an average of 16 per cent. since 1998, but that the increase was more than 30 per cent. on the busiest stretches of motorway. As the *Daily Telegraph* reported on 26 November:

"The analysis, by the driver information group Trafficmaster, showed that delays had risen much faster than the increase in traffic, suggesting that the knock-on effects of network bottlenecks were worsening."

Perhaps the Minister would care to answer that one.

The congestion in London is familiar to all hon. Members and members of the public. It has worsened in anticipation of congestion charging. What is the response of the Secretary of State? It is to announce a traffic tsar. That was the subject of the lead article on the front page of the *Evening Standard*, also on 26 November. If the Government are minded to introduce the concept of a traffic tsar, why was it not deemed suitable at the time of the creation of the office of London Mayor, or when setting up Transport for London? All future applications for permits to dig up the road or to do any repairs will have to be made through the tsar. That adds an extra tier of bureaucracy. Who will it be? When will he or she be appointed? The measure was not in the Queen's Speech, and perhaps the Minister can tell us when parliamentary time will be made available for the necessary primary legislation. How many tsars will there be? Will there be one for London, one for Birmingham and one for Manchester? Perhaps the Minister can satisfy our curiosity.

The original 10-year plan also set targets for walking and cycling, and hon. Members will recall that I am keen on both. I simply make a personal plea to the Minister, whose attention I crave at this point. Will he dispense with staggered crossings, such as that outside 4 Millbank? I notice that some Ministers, although not this one, do not deem it appropriate to use that crossing.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich spoke of the important relationship between local transport plans and multi-modal studies, regional planning priorities, as expressed in regional transport strategies, and projects under the 10-year plan. That struck a chord with hon. Members and with the Select Committee, and I want to add another issue. We should consider the implications of the road de-trunking programme, which is due to be completed by the end of March 2003. Will the Minister tell us when financing for de-trunked roads will be fully integrated into local authorities' budgets? I gather that that will not coincide with local authorities taking up their new responsibilities for those roads. It will be interesting to hear about that.

In paragraph (cc) of the report, the Committee states:

"We reiterate our concern that it is impossible to tell whether the Plan is on target, if it merely consists of a series of aspirations for 2010 and little detail on how we shall achieve them from the current position."

The Minister must be able to see for himself and to understand the increasing anxiety on the part of industry, those involved in transport operations and even the businesses whose goods are transported. They are anxious about the Government's commitment and ability as regards delivering the 10-year plan. Will the Minister respond to their anxiety by giving us a date for the announcement of investment decisions and a timetable for implementation? Most schemes have a seven-year lead time for completion, so that information is vital to the transport industry.

Out of interest, can the Minister name any project that was started and completed in 2001? Most of the projects carried out in the first two years of the Labour Government were in fact holdovers from the outgoing Conservative Government, who agreed them, and no road projects were undertaken for the next two years.

As the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich and the Select Committee report have made clear, the question is not just how much money is available, but which

[Miss McIntosh]

budget it comes from. At a recent conference, Dennis Roberts, the head of the Road Transport Directorate, quoted some expenditure figures. He said that there was £36 billion for road maintenance, £21 billion for road schemes, £11 billion for light rapid transport and other local transport, £13 billion for buses, coaches and rail rolling stock, £52 billion for rail infrastructure and £25 billion for London. That raises several questions. How and over what time scale will money for road maintenance be allocated and spent? How will the £21 billion for the road schemes, the £11 billion for light rapid transport and the money for buses and rail be allocated? What budget will the money come from?

In paragraph (dd), the Select Committee concluded:

"two years into the Plan, there are still very few details about the results of the multi-modal studies ... The Committee recommends that the Government establishes a multi-modal study delivery fund to ensure a co-ordinated approach to delivering the solutions proposed".

Are the Government minded to agree to that request?

In paragraph (ff), the Select Committee points out:

"The Government is over-optimistic about how much private funding will be delivered in the Plan."

I tell the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) that I am not alone in thinking that. The Select Committee was in agreement.

In paragraph (gg), the Select Committee points out very poignantly that

"the current skills shortage is likely to impede delivery of the 10 Year Plan".

The strategic road network excepted, most of the new projects put forward in July 2000 are already behind schedule. The budget for completing the work proposed by the multi-modal studies must be set aside to ensure that the recommended balance of schemes is constructed. That was a request from the Select Committee. Is the Minister minded to agree it?

In the spirit of co-operation and constructive criticism, echoing the conclusions of the excellent Select Committee report, I request that the Government satisfy the need of the travelling public and industry for more details about the plan. That should include timetables for the construction of new projects, greater clarity and transparency and, above all, delivery of their projects. I commend the Select Committee report to the House, and hope to have provoked a more adequate response from the Minister.

4.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on the work of the Select Committee and on securing the debate. She not only secures debates directly through her work on the Select Committee on Transport, she even gets the Liaison Committee to secure debates.

As usual, my hon. Friend presented her arguments extremely robustly and powerfully. I believe that that is how things should be in Select Committees. Having served on one, I think that it is quite proper that Select Committees have robust views. Sometimes they challenge the Government's views, because that is their role. I do not know why the media were so surprised in the summer when the Select Committee came out with a number of criticisms in its report. Is it not the Select Committee's role to do just that?

The importance of the 10-year plan was widely acclaimed on its publication. The Select Committee report described the 10-year plan as a "crucial step" towards implementing the Government's integrated transport policies. Introducing a long-term investment plan that works across all transport modes was a major step forward. I think that that was recognised both by the Committee and in a number of speeches today. What was needed was a plan that continued beyond a single Government term and a long-term programme that could give the industry the necessary certainty to plan ahead and invest. That is what the 10-year plan gave.

I wish to respond to some of the points made about training and skilled people. The ability to plan in the long term gives companies the opportunity to train people to do the job. We have moved on from the stop-go of the past, when there was no certainty. The plan sets out a programme of more than £180 billion of public and private investment over 10 years. That is an unprecedented commitment in this country. I have heard nobody—certainly in this debate—express the view that long-term planning is bad for transport. The transport industry and those on whom we depend to implement the improvements certainly welcomed the plan. In their delivery plans, they have been able to set out how the investment mentioned in the 10-year plan will be used to deliver the plan's objectives.

Naturally, people will criticise some of the choices. Different people have different priorities, some of which have been reflected in the debate. There will always be difficult choices and differing opinions. However, that is not to say that we tear up the plans and go back to the drawing board every time we hear a criticism.

The plan needs to evolve. We need to take account of events and new pressures, and to review the plan in the light of progress. That is what the Select Committee asked us to do. Its report will be useful, and we are taking careful note of what it says in conducting the current review. I am sure that we all want to achieve the same things. When I read the Select Committee report, as opposed to reading its coverage in the newspapers, I was pleasantly surprised by just how much the Government and the Select Committee seem to agree on. I shall try to pick up the important points raised by those members of the Committee who have contributed to the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich raised the issue of congestion charging, which, as she said, was provided for in the Transport Act 2000. Of course, we are carefully monitoring how congestion charging unfolds in London. It is up to the Mayor to make the scheme the success that we hope it will be. The detail of what the scheme does is important, but it is also important that local authorities, in conjunction with their communities, work out what sort of scheme they want on the basis of the particular needs in their areas, which they know best.

My hon. Friend asked about the possibility of a rolling programme and regular updates. We will certainly provide those, but we will not contemplate a fundamental rewrite, because that would create more unwelcome uncertainties.

Hon. Members have asked when the progress report will be published. We said that it would be published in the autumn. Climate change has given us a mild autumn this year, so autumn is not yet over, and the report will be published shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich also raised the important matter of the comparison between public and private transport costs, and the plan made certain assumptions about that. In the light of experience, however, those assumptions may be wrong, because several issues, such as the price of oil and the price of cars, are not under the Government's control. Some 20 per cent. of the funding outlined in the plan—vast sums—will go to subsidise public transport.

Mr. Stevenson: As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, over the past few years, the cost of public transport has increased by 40 per cent. while the costs of motoring have decreased by 20 per cent. Under the Government's plan, that gap is due to widen over the next 10 years.

Mr. Jamieson: That is exactly why we are providing extra funding to subsidise public transport. Many of the schemes that we have been encouraging as part of the urban and rural bus challenges will help local authorities to meet some of the demands in their areas and to provide services at a reasonable cost.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jamieson: Let me finish answering the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson).

Some of that subsidy has been in the form of payments to operators and concessionary fares, which have been welcomed, especially in areas where there were previously no concessions for elderly and disabled people.

Mrs. Dunwoody: What concerns the Select Committee is that that is fundamental to the whole plan, and that if we get it wrong, the rest will not matter. The Department appears to accept that the cost of public transport will increase and the cost of private transport will decrease. If that is so, how does it fit with the objectives of the 10-year plan?

Mr. Jamieson: The ambition of the 10-year plan is to ensure that public transport is more widely used. Bus and rail patronage is growing. In an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) said that the multi-modal studies are very much top down. I contest that, because the feedback from those involved in the studies suggests the opposite. They welcomed the chance to work together, with one highways authority working with another, and the Highways Agency and other parties working with the appropriate Government offices. That has been welcomed on the ground, and people have regarded the process as bottom up rather than top down.

Mr. Don Foster: I do not want to speak for the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who is not in his place, but the Minister should be aware that many local people feel that huge holes were left in the consideration of the south-west multi-modal study. The Minister should be aware that we had to set up a greater Bristol study to fill the huge hole in the previous study.

Mr. Jamieson: If local people did not feel involved, it was the responsibility of local authorities to involve them. The process was being undertaken for the first time and it may have some imperfections, from which we shall learn, but it is wrong to say that it was top down—it was very much bottom up. Those who were best placed to recognise local needs were those on the ground who were most involved in the process.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) said that I was biting my nails. I may have been nibbling my fingers as I tried to keep myself awake during his contribution. He referred to the skills shortage, which is very real, and we have been working closely on that with our colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills. It is a problem throughout the transport industry, but that is the result of having such a successful economy and low unemployment. It is difficult to recruit people of quality for the entire transport area and for other industries. That is a by-product of having such a successful economy.

I always listen carefully to the hon. Gentleman, but in his assessment of the plan today he at no point told us his party's views. I look forward to hearing about his party's alternatives, either from him or from the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster).

Tom Brake: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Member for Bath is wafting round a large document, which may be a collection of focuses or a plan in embryo.

Mr. Don Foster: The Minister will be well aware that the Liberal Democrats published detailed documents about our policies. We are simply delighted that the Government adopted one of our polices in moving from Railtrack to Network Rail. They adopted another with the proposal to reduce the number of rail franchises, and another with regard to the rail regulator and safety regulation. We look forward to many more of our policies being adopted. I am sure that the Minister regularly delves into our documents, because he is forever using our policies.

Mr. Jamieson: We must have powers of clairvoyance if we are adopting Liberal Democrat policies without even seeing them.

Tom Brake: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington also referred to aviation, and I noticed his antipathy towards increasing people's ability to fly. We

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take careful note of that, in fact, because several things that he has said in the course of several debates suggest that it is Liberal Democrat policy to reduce people's ability to fly on their holidays. If I have got that wrong, he may like to tell me so.

Tom Brake: I am happy to respond. We have made it clear that, for reasons of sustainability, demand management would be appropriate for aviation. As for Liberal Democrat policy, we are discussing the Select Committee report. If the Minister would like to know what recommendations he should be implementing in relation to the 10-year transport plan, he should look at the recommendations at the back of the report.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman also mentioned congestion charging. He might want to find out whether his Liberal Democrat colleagues on councils are interested in bringing forward proposals for their areas; I am not sure that we have received many from Liberal Democrat councils. If he is enthusiastic about congestion charging, perhaps he will tease some of his colleagues along. He is now going to tell us about the Liberal Democrat councils undertaking such schemes.

Tom Brake: The Select Committee made it very clear that it requires leadership from the Government on the question of congestion charging. The Minister has said that he is monitoring what is happening in relation to London. Is that the leadership that he is providing?

Mr. Jamieson: The Liberal Democrat party talks about devolution. Now the hon. Gentleman tells us that the Government should instruct local authorities to go ahead with congestion charging. If he wants such charging, perhaps he should go back to some of his colleagues on local councils, who, I must say, show rather less enthusiasm for it—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman will stop barracking for a moment and listen, I shall tell him that Liberal Democrats on councils show less enthusiasm for congestion charging than Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament do. But there we are; we live and learn. Perhaps once the hon. Gentleman has had a little tour around the country and talked to some of his colleagues on councils, he will come back and inform us afresh. He asked about progress on increasing rail freight. In 2001–02—just one year in the 10-year plan—freight increased by 9 per cent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) made a studied and helpful contribution. He is a breath of fresh air in any debate in which he participates, and he has spoken particularly powerfully on behalf of his constituents. However, in doing so, he also spoke for many others, and he has made a useful speech. He talked about the need for links to ports, which are very important; falling unemployment in his area; and the contribution that good transport systems can play in reducing unemployment and creating investment. He also made a good point about the importance of various Government schemes in his area that have improved employment prospects.

A number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), made a good point about transport and its contribution to regeneration in urban areas. In the foreword of the 10-year transport plan, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

> "The Plan will ensure that transport plays its full part in delivering our wider objectives, contributing in particular to the renaissance of our cities".

A paragraph in chapter 3 referred directly to social exclusion and contained some of the figures that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside used. I shall not labour the point, as the subject has come up a number of times. Paragraph 8.3 says:

> "Improvements to the transport network will bring other economic benefits. They will open up new and expanded markets for business generally, stimulating competition and potentially contributing to faster economic growth. Better transport infrastructure can also play a major role in supporting regeneration programmes and access to new jobs, at both regional and local levels."

I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South now that I have finished quoting.

Mr. Stevenson: The look on the Minister's face betrays his knowledge of the provocation. If what he says is so, why does the Strategic Rail Authority show through its approach that it does not have the first idea about economic regeneration?

Mr. Jamieson: What I am saying, through the quotation, is that the Government think that improvements in our transport system are vital to regeneration. That is our confirmed view. I was not at yesterday's hearing, but I shall look very carefully at the contributions that were made. If there is any more joining up of various sections of government to be done, debates such as this are always helpful.

Mrs. Ellman: I note with pleasure the commitment to include social inclusion in transport and regeneration plans, but can the Minister tell me when the Government will approve Mersey tram's line 1?

Mr. Jamieson: If my hon. Friend could be a little patient, I shall come to that. Who knows? There might be good news for her. I want to finish replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney and I shall then answer her question.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney referred to his surveys of businesses' views on the A12, soon to be de-trunked. I am pleased to see the work that he has done and the interest that he is taking on a matter of such great importance to his constituency, and I assure him that de-trunking in no way inhibits a local authority from including in its local transport plans further improvements to such a road.

My hon. Friend also mentioned bypasses. Where bypasses are appropriate and meet all our targets, and will improve local traffic and conditions for people living in congested areas, such as narrow villages, the bypass programme will go forward. His point on bypasses was well made. He asked us to keep an eye on his local schemes; in fact, he will not allow us to take our eye off them, because he is a regular correspondent with the Department and often catches my ear around this House. He also mentioned multi-modal studies and the importance of regional balance. We share his concerns on those matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South is a very distinguished and valued member of the Select Committee, and has made a considerable contribution to the House over a very long period. Few of us could aspire to make a contribution of the quality that he has made over the years. He said that he hoped that we would view the report's criticisms positively. That is how I see them, as my opening remarks made clear. He rightly quoted David Begg's comments on the stick and the carrot. We want to improve public transport, but my hon. Friend also mentioned restraints on the private motor car and the cost of the car as against public transport—the point that I have just made.

My hon. Friend's most powerful points were those about social inclusion—points that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside also made powerfully. Yes, of course our plans must focus nationally and, particularly, at local level on including some of the people who have no access to the private motor car. Some 40 per cent. of my constituents have no access to private motor cars. Outside London and the south-east, it is often the bus, rather than the railway, that is important to such people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South will know that we have made many more resources available, for example through the urban bus challenge. We allocated £46 million to the scheme between 2001–02 and 2003–04. Looking at the schemes that have been approved under the urban bus challenge, it is interesting to see how many are using funding to assist people with poor access to transport in general. The schemes are helping people in outlying areas where jobs have disappeared and where transport is needed to access jobs that have appeared elsewhere. Schemes have also been set up to get people to health centres and hospitals and to help people with disabilities. The demand bus is perhaps more appropriate in the more outlying and scattered places around the suburbs and in rural areas. I noticed that Stoke-on-Trent was one of the winners in the 2001 competition and received nearly £750,000 for its dial-a-ride service, which was welcome to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Stevenson: Does the Minister share my view that subsidies, no matter where they come from—whether from local transport plans, the urban bus challenge or elsewhere—cannot in themselves solve the problem? Does he agree that the bus companies involved should take a more proactive view of marketing, risk taking and developing networks, and should regard subsidies as a starting point rather than an open-ended commitment whereby money is poured in and nothing really develops?

Mr. Jamieson: Indeed. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State is considering with others how we can make better use of subsidies for routes that, although insignificant in terms of profit making, are vital to certain communities. We are very much aware of the issue, and my right hon. Friend will make known the group's thoughts in the near future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside made a thoughtful contribution in which, like my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney, she spoke powerfully on behalf of her constituents. I felt that she spoke also for mine and for those of many other hon. Members. She recognises many of the improvements that have been made, and I am grateful to her for that. She spoke powerfully about social exclusion issues, which are desperately important to her in relation to her constituency. Great strides are being made in her area. When I visited it some years ago as a member of a Select Committee—the then Select Committee on Education—I saw many of the great challenges that it faced, and I was impressed by some of the work that was being done in the public services. I was struck by the importance of good-quality transport links in creating regeneration, getting people back to work and bringing new hope to communities that had completely abandoned hope. In the years when the Conservative party was in power, people entirely abandoned any ambition to work again or to have aspirations for themselves and their families. Transport plays a vital part in such regeneration. In my hon. Friend's area, as in other large cities and conurbations, people find bus services terribly important—probably more so than rail services. As she knows, local transport plans in her area have almost doubled in recent years, which gives the transport authority the extra funding that it needs to meet its ambitions.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: In a moment. I want to deal with my hon. Friend's question about the Mersey tram. I can tell my hon. Friend that since 2001 we have approved light rail lines in Nottingham, Manchester, south Hampshire and Leeds, and that we are carefully considering the scheme in which she has a great interest. An announcement may not be too far away.

Mrs. Ellman: Can the Minister give me an assurance on when the announcement will be made and what it will be? We should not like to be kept waiting for an announcement only to find that it was not what we wanted to hear.

Mr. Jamieson: In the privacy of this Chamber—I am sure that no-one from outside is listening—I can tell my hon. Friend that she will not have to wait much longer for the decision, and that it will have been informed by the powerful representations that she and other hon. Friends from Liverpool have made.

Mr. John Butterfill (in the Chair): Order. I should advise the Minister that our proceedings are being broadcast.

Mr. Jamieson: Thank you, Mr. Butterfill. I thought that we were having a private session. I am grateful to you, because I have not yet announced the decision; perhaps I was wise to be cautious in my choice of words.

Miss McIntosh: Given that there appears to be cross-party support on the importance of bus services in urban and rural areas—particularly in relation to that dreaded expression "social exclusion"—will the Minister respond to the Confederation of Passenger Transport, which noted that the target of a 10 per cent. increase in bus use was not sufficiently ambitious?

Mr. Jamieson: All I can say is that it is probably more ambitious than any of the Conservative party's plans for

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the bus service. If it is not ambitious enough, it can be revised upwards. At the moment, it appears that we will more than meet the target and if we surpass it, we will be extremely pleased.

The hon. Member for Bath asked a number of questions. I have to say again that he did not say much about his own policies or ideas. The Liberal Democrats talk of their great ambitions, but, on the Floor of the House, they have opposed just about every means of raising the funds to achieve those ambitions.

Mr. Don Foster: Name one example.

Mr. Jamieson: Well, they have reacted in that way to just about every ambition and Bill relating to budgets. I think that the hon. Gentleman and his party have opposed most of them.

Mr. Foster: May I formally ask the Minister to name one vote when the Liberal Democrats opposed money going into public transport? Then his reply will be on the record.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington was asked in this Chamber how much extra money the Liberal Democrats would invest in transport. He said that they would not invest any because it would be going into education. He said that that was where the 1p would be going.

Mr. Foster: Name one.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman says name one. It is all very well having ambitions, but the Liberal Democrats have no means of achieving those ambitions because they do not have the funding. It is all promised.

Mr. Foster *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: I shall not give way again because I want to answer some of the hon. Gentleman's other questions. He said that the numbers that we quoted on funding were smoke and mirrors. I do not want to enter into that discussion with him again. The plan sets out clearly how the £180 billion is made up. He knows that it includes £130 billion of public expenditure; it also includes £121 billion of capital investment. That is a real-terms increase of 75 per cent. over the previous 10 years.

The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh)—I was wondering where all her friends were, but I am sure that they are engaged with other things—has a great interest in transport. That is apparent from the number of interests that she declared.

Miss McIntosh: At least I declared them.

Mr. Jamieson: Yes, the hon. Lady quite properly declared them. She asked again about the progress report. As I said, the ambition is to have it before Christmas. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South asked whether the Conservatives would meet our spending plans—that was the first of the three tests that we had for the hon. Lady—but he never got an answer. The Liberal Democrats never answer that question either. Had the hon. Lady given an answer, I am sure that she would not have cleared it with the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). There may be inadequacies in the report and things that we want changed, but we have to remind ourselves that it would not be happening at all if we were not putting funding in. None of these things would have been happening under the Conservatives.

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to put in a bid for three hours to discuss other parties' policies. I thought that we were here to discuss the conclusions of the report. Will he respond to my request to name one infrastructure project for 2001?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Lady will know that some infrastructure projects take more than a year. We have announced many of them. I have been to a number of very large new developments on roads in some of her hon. Friends' constituencies. Those developments have been welcomed by her hon. Friends, one of whom was extremely pleased to see me announcing in Norfolk a large new programme for a bypass and improvements in her constituency. We also announced the Selby bypass, which is not all that far away from the hon. Lady's constituency, and a scheme around the City of York on the fringes of her constituency that will greatly improve safety and the flow of traffic from her constituency into the City of York.

The hon. Lady asked about the rail accident investigation board. I do not know whether she fell asleep during the Queen's Speech, but it was announced then. If she wanders through the Speech again, she will find reference to the RAIB.

The problems with transport in recent years were the result of the recent economic success—1.5 million more people are now in work who want to travel to work and for leisure—and decades of under-investment. We cannot turn around those decades of under-investment in only a few years. We know that prosperity increases people's need and desire to travel—the history of the 20th century is an excellent example of that. Economic success is no bad thing; no one would argue against it, but it imposes even greater pressures on our transport system.

The Government's role is to help people to travel, not to inhibit them. We inherited a transport system that had suffered from decades of under-investment and stop-go funding. The 10-year plan contains the long-term certainty, which has been recognised across the board by organisations that provide transport in this country, that the necessary funding is in place.

The plan provides an overarching framework that sets out our objectives for reliable, safe and accessible transport, concerns about which were raised poignantly in the debate today, and for transport that has less impact on the environment but supports a strong economy. We have targets to reduce congestion, improve the reliability and punctuality of the rail network, increase rail and bus use, and reduce the numbers of those who are killed and seriously injured on our roads.

It is important to remember that our 10-year plan is, in essence, a framework investment programme—something that has been overlooked in the discussion of the plan. The plan did not purport to set out detailed projects and schemes, which are often matters for individual delivery agents and agencies such as the Strategic Rail Authority, the Highways Agency and, in many cases, highways authorities through their local transport plans. Nor did it purport to set out or reproduce the whole of the Government's transport policies, which are set out in a wide range of policy papers that began with the original integrated Transport White Paper in 1998. The road safety strategy is an example. We published it just a couple of months before the publication of the 10-year plan.

Work is being done in a wide range of areas not covered by the plan. For example, we are working on environmental policy at European level. There are European Union directives and agreements on improving fuel efficiency and vehicle emission standards. Other parts of our transport strategy contribute to and complement the 10-year plan. We are now focusing on delivering the improvements set out in the plan, and will shortly publish a report on the progress that we have made in that regard.

Miss McIntosh: I thank the Minister for generously giving way. When will he publish the investment announcement on one project in the 10-year plan? We all agree that the objectives have been set out, but when will he give the details that the industry seeks?

Mr. Jamieson: I am not sure to what the hon. Lady is referring. There is no end to the projects that have been announced through the local transport plans. Some of them will be developed through the multi-modal studies. We have examined the first tranche and are now considering the second, which will unfold over time.

The hon. Lady is stuck in the past—the days of the Conservative Government when quick fixes were fashionable—but we are talking about long-term planning, even beyond the 10-year period. Eventually, the aviation White Paper will be published, looking 30 years forward.

The 10-year plan remains a major achievement and has been widely welcomed. The Chairman of the Select Committee acknowledged it as a crucial step in delivering our transport policies. The investment is in place; our task is now to deliver real improvements to our transport system. That is precisely what we are doing.

5.16 pm

Mrs. Dunwoody: With the leave of the Chamber, Mr. Butterfill.

The Minister is such an engaging fellow, full of charm and intelligent and caring thought, which makes it difficult to disagree with him. I used the technique myself as a junior Minister: when in doubt, always be nice to everyone—*[Interruption.]* Well, pretend to be. However, I must tell the Minister that this report will come back and hit the Department hard again and again. "Monitoring" is the new phrase, so our Select Committee will be monitoring the development of the Department's transport policy.

We have not yet heard how the Government will react to one fundamental problem. If they set aside all the other problems because they will be dealt with by the multi-modal studies or other plans, they will still have to address the fundamental question: if it is and remains cheaper to travel by motor car, how will the Government secure the movement towards public transport that they need to deal with environmental and transport problems? That is so central to all our arguments that we should have been more honest about it today. Unless the Government face that problem honestly, it will be a trap into which they continually fall.

The Government have not succeeded in giving many independent agencies a clear commitment to deal with the people who are lowly and dispossessed in transport terms. We can talk about social exclusion, but for the people concerned it means no access to doctors' surgeries, no way of fetching urgent shopping, no going out to the cinema or seeing friends in the evening, and no way to deal with the constant problem of coping with the practical difficulties of living on one's own. Under a Labour Government, we should not merely talk about social exclusion or view combating it as an ideal; we should insist that ending social exclusion is the top priority for those who plan railway and other transport services. We should not allow it to sink gently below the horizon. The problem will continue unless the Government are more brutal in insisting on the priorities that the various agencies must have.

I do not want to appear ungracious. I know that the Minister is genuinely committed to making the system work. He wants to ensure that buses, railways and even aviation operate in a way that will benefit us economically and improve the quality of life of the people we represent.

In closing, I shall say what I think the Minister should do and what I expect him to do. If he does not do it I may want to remind him about it in the near future. The review of the 10-year plan is supposed to be published in December. We can call it autumn—it would be a rather elongated autumn—or winter, but nevertheless I understand that the Department's review will be published next month. This is what it should contain. On interim targets, the review should not just be a list of schemes that are wanted. It should not be a wish list; it must contain targets so that we, the ordinary people concerned with transport, can judge whether the policies are working.

On rail, the Secretary of State and the Strategic Rail Authority have both made it clear that we cannot afford the schemes that are anticipated in the 10-year plan. The money is not there and some of the decisions taken so far will rebound badly on the plans for the future.

A consultation is being undertaken on raising fares. How does that fit in with the argument about the difference between the costs of private and public transport? The impact of all those problems must be made clear in the review if we are to know what the Government's plans are for the future.

On smaller measures, we should accept that many of the major schemes will not be built, at least not until the end of the 10-year plan. We were given evidence to that effect: so much is backloaded that we will not see the results for a long time. The Department should

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concentrate on local measures, especially for buses, and be much more ambitious. The Government acknowledge that the target of 10 per cent. growth for buses will lead to a decline outside London by 2010. That is not in the interests of the ordinary traveller or those whom we have been talking about so much this afternoon, who need our support to change their lives.

I believe that the Government are serious. They are the first for a long time to come up with an attempt at an integrated policy. That is why I ask them to make it clear that they are not just committed, that they do not just have a series of wish lists, that they are not prepared just to say, "Because we are good fellows, trust us and we will do something in the future." I ask the Government to do something far more focused, far more positive and, in the final analysis, much more satisfying: in December to print a simple list, not of what they would like to do but what they are going to do; not of the things that they cannot do, but of what they think is important. Above all, I ask them to explain to those who work in rail, aviation and road planning that every one of them has a role that is much wider than simply balancing their books and making sure that they can defend a list of advances over the next 10-year period. If we fail in this important respect, it will not just be the Government who are made to pay, but all those who have for years called for a workable transport system, because the parliamentary system will no longer be seen as capable of developing those things that are important and those services that matter. Above all, we will have failed those whom we most want to serve. That is too high a price to pay.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 3 December 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Carers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): It is a great privilege, on carers' rights day, to raise the issue of carers in the House. I am delighted that so many colleagues are present and able to take part in this important debate. I am grateful to whatever system it is that operates behind the scenes that ensured that this important subject was chosen.

The purpose of my remarks is first to pay tribute to those many people who demonstrate such sacrificial love and care on those who need their help—often, but not always, members of their own families—and who do it day in, day out. I pay tribute also to the many organisations that, under the banner of carers' rights day, are taking steps in every locality to ensure greater awareness of the needs of carers and of the people for whom they care. It is a great privilege to take part in this debate.

It will be salutary for us to think for a moment of the scale of the issue, and of what is involved for those who, every moment of every day, are ruled by the needs of others. Some of the families to whom I have been speaking since being told that this subject had been selected for debate have humbled me by demonstrating such commitment, such dedication, to the people for whom they care.

The scale of the problem is immense. Nearly 7 million people care full time or part time for loved ones who are frail, disabled or chronically ill and who could not manage without their help. One in eight of our population is a carer, and in Devon, 69,204 people are carers. Week in, week out, many of us talk and listen to carers in our constituency surgeries, and we hear of their struggles, problems and aspirations. Although the expression is overused, the words "unsung heroes" come to mind.

There is no question that society would collapse without those carers. However, at times in the history of mankind, disabled children would have been left out on the hillsides to die. Even in modern times in Europe, such as in Ceaucescu's Romania, children with mental or physical disabilities were abandoned in awful institutions and neglected. Thank heavens that does not happen in our society—thanks largely to the work of 7 million unsung heroes.

In our country, 1.8 million people care for others for more than 20 hours a week, and nearly 1 million spend 50 hours a week or more caring for their loved ones. We know from our surgeries that many spend not 50 hours a week but 24 hours a day looking after a disabled son or daughter or an elderly parent.

This year, 301,000 people will become carers for the first time. A particularly challenging statistic is that 51,000 young carers under 18 years of age not only cope with school and the turbulence of the teenage years—those of us who are parents know all about that—but have to go home at 3.30 or 4 pm to care for parents who are disabled or challenged in some way. They require our special support. One million parents care for their disabled children. If ever a statistic demonstrated the love of parents—in many instances it is mainly that of the mother—it is that 95 per cent. of disabled children are cared for in the home, not in institutions. We have all met people who commit their lives to caring for their disabled children. Carers collectively save the state £57.4 billion per annum. I am sure that the Minister would be horrified if all the carers in the country suddenly said, "We shall not do it any longer; the state must provide the services that we have willingly been giving free for all these years." The Chancellor of the Exchequer would have a difficult day trying to find the money to do that. It could not happen.

It is a salutary fact that most carers are caring for a husband, wife or partner, son, daughter, mother or father. Although we often think that the family is under threat—it is certainly changing shape in many quarters—we must remind ourselves, today of all days, that blood is thicker than water; family does work, it is the important building block of a strong society. The statistics demonstrate the meaning and the immense value of family.

Those of us who are married said in our wedding vows, "For richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health." We said it and we meant it. For many families, it is an everyday reality. We do not know in advance how our families will develop. We do not know when a child is born, or when our parents reach 50, 60 or 70, how their health will be. Some people say that that is unfair. Yes, it is unfair and there are no guarantees. However, the humbling lesson is that 7 million people have said, "Yes, it is unfair, but we will love through and provide the services anyway." It is important to recognise that.

The state could not take over these responsibilities even if it wanted to—it would not be right for it to try to supplant the natural family responsibility. However, we want the state and society to give the right kind of help. There are three distinctive layers: the family on the front line, the state, in the shape of both national and local authorities, and the wider community—charities, voluntary organisations, churches and all of us as neighbours. Each of us can play a part in helping the nation's carers.

We all have favourite examples of carers in our constituencies who have come to us for help, whether in writing or at our surgeries. I think of a man, now in his late 60s, who has been caring for his blind wife for more than 30 years. Many carers experience unrelenting pressure, day in, day out. I do not notice such things, but my wife tells me that the blind wife always looks terrific: she is well dressed—as she cannot dress herself, her husband dresses her—and they are active as a couple. They attend many events in the village, at the local church and in a larger association. They are always there, always active, always playing their part. That man is a hero. Uncomplainingly, he cares for his wife in a remarkable way.

In recent days, I have been talking to a family whose daughter is blind. She cannot walk, talk or eat and she is partially deaf. She always has tubes in her. The rest of

[Mr. Gary Streeter]

her family have devoted their lives to raising Vicky in her own home. It was a surprise to me to learn that the parents' main concern is not for themselves—"How could this happen to us?"—but that their other two children should live lives that are, in their words, more normal; not bogged down by tubes or blood testing all the time. They want their children to have proper holidays, away from such pressures. All these people deserve our support. I am sure that we have all met elderly people in our constituencies who care for their disabled adult children. Their abiding fears are what will happen to, and who will look after, their sons and daughters when they get too old to help them or die. That is such a difficult subject. Care will pass to another group, and it will not stay within the family in the same way.

Carers care sacrificially, but their care is not cost free. The Princess Royal Trust for Carers carried out a survey recently, and some of its members' responses are interesting. It states:

"Over eight out of 10 carers said that caring had a negative impact on their own health. Almost nine out of 10 reported that they feel stress, anxiety, depression or loss of sleep, due to being a carer. Carers also saw the sheer relentlessness of caring and its effects on their mental and physical well-being as being their biggest problems.

The majority of carers would like to take a break from caring. Those more likely to say they wanted a break were female, those caring for 15 hours a day or more, those caring for a son or daughter and carers aged 44 years or under. Carers need different types of help to take a break. Overall around two thirds of carers would need help with respite care, one third would need help from a sitting service and a third would need financial help, to take a break."

Caring does not come without a price. The mum in the family that I spoke to over the weekend talked about being permanently tired as a result of caring for her child.

That is the scale of the issue, but what can we do about it? I pay tribute to the Government for the additional resources that they have made available in the past few years, and for their focus on the issue. It is much to be welcomed and commended. The debate is not about wagging the finger at anyone to say that they are not doing enough.

The Carers UK website contains the understatement of the century when it states that

"the benefits system is complicated".

That has always been true. It is certainly true in relation to people who try to get help as carers. Some help goes directly to the disabled person, and some goes to the carer. Different rules apply for people under 18 or over retirement age. Some help comes from social services under a completely different system, and there is respite care, the new assessment system, some day-centre services and home visits from the local social services, for example. That last form of help is patchy and differs throughout the country. Sometimes it is excellent, but sometimes it is not so commendable. Much of the help is necessarily means tested. The forms seem to become longer and more complicated.

We are all concerned about the take-up of disability living allowance, invalid care allowance and related benefits, especially among those who have cared for many years. Those who have recently started to care and have had access to better information are more aware, but those who have been caring for a loved one in the home as a matter of course for 10, 15 or 20 years are less likely to be aware of the support available. What more can we do about that?

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that there are no real take-up figures for invalid care allowance? It might be useful if the Government undertook some high-quality research on the subject. I have noticed that the quarter following carers' rights day last year saw a 12.5 per cent. increase in claims for the allowance. That suggests a large unmet need.

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes a characteristically important point. I would not want the Government to load more accounting and reporting requirements on the system, but some forensic research would be excellent. One reason for us being here to support carers' rights day is to make more people aware of it. I have appeared in much of the local media this morning, and I hope that more people in Devon and Cornwall are now aware of their entitlements and will come forward for them.

The lack of awareness continues, despite the excellent work that some of the carers' associations are doing. In my constituency, the Ivybridge Carers Association and the Plymouth carers centre provide information, distribute leaflets and help people to access the systems. However, too many people still struggle to get the help that they desperately need. I ask the Minister what plans she might have to introduce greater simplicity and to streamline the system. I know how complicated the issue is, and I understand that there is no magic bullet or wand. What steps could be taken to increase take-up, by improving simplicity and streamlining the system?

The daughter of a family to whom I was speaking over the weekend had been having free respite care. Now that she is 18, however, the family has to start paying for that. The daughter and her needs have not changed, but suddenly the rules have changed. Maybe that is inevitable, but should it be? The family cannot find out what changed respite care will cost in their changed circumstances, and they have stopped having it. That is the last thing that we want to happen. The situation is like an elderly person not turning their fire on during the winter because they are frightened of the cost. Is there a way of ensuring that the system is simpler?

Recently, the Ivybridge Carers Association talked to me about concern over the fairer charging policies that some local authorities are introducing. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) intends to raise the issue, so I do not want to focus too much on it, except to say that people have genuine concerns that fairer charging policies are leading to increased charges for many people. We do not want to see that.

Is there a plan to simplify and streamline? Are there plans for a greater nationwide awareness programme? Is there anything more that the Government can do to make more carers aware of their entitlement? I think that even the term "carers" leads to some confusion, because some of the full-time professionals who work in domiciliary care and similar roles are also described as

carers. People may hear the word "carers" and think, "Well, that doesn't apply to me—that's fully paid people." The Government are skilled at the right use of language to get their point across. Is there scope for better language?

It is important that the Government do what they can, but also that there is a wider response to the problem. I feel strongly about a more holistic approach among employers. Best-practice employers are getting better at family friendly policies on such issues as their employees' having to collect children from school, and are showing a greater awareness of school holidays and of the needs that a family have when a child is born and children are at school. However, there is less awareness of the stresses and strains on families caring for a disabled person or an elderly relative in the same way. I was quite taken with the words of the chief executive of Carers UK, Diana Whitworth, on that organisation's website. It reads:

"Four million people in the UK juggle work and care and nearly three million of these carers look after an older relative. Our ageing population means more and more of us will end up caring for an older relative—and many of tomorrow's parents will also have 'elder care' responsibilities.

A sea change in employers' attitudes is needed. Tomorrow's workforce will include a higher proportion of carers and flexible working patterns will have to become the norm rather than the exception."

I am not sure whether this is an unusual thing for a Conservative to say, but I genuinely believe that employers—particularly larger employers—should follow best practice, in terms of flexible working arrangements. It is not all about the bottom line. We should be building a sustainable country, and family friendly policies are an important part of that. I hope that we can make some progress in that area.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): My hon. Friend is raising some important points. Perhaps I should speak as an employer. The advantage of a small family business is that one is aware of individual needs, although many employees are frightened to come forward to say what caring needs there are at home because they feel that that might be difficult. We should encourage employees to tell employers what the problems are, and ensure that employers do not discriminate against people who care for others.

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important point, and debates such as this can make us aware of such issues. Central and local government are massive employers and can lead by example. It is matter of attitude, not simply of new rules and regulations. As my hon. Friend says, it is about encouraging employees to step forward and employers understanding the issues.

My next point is my most important. I hope that help and support can be tailored to particular family situations wherever possible, although I know that that is difficult. I have spoken to several charities that are active on this issue, and I asked them which point it was most important to make in this debate. In different ways, they all said the same thing: we should not make assumptions about the sort of help that carers and families need. Wherever possible, our help should be flexible enough to meet particular needs.

A few days ago, I learned that this issue had been selected for debate and I felt strongly that respite care was the most important issue. Being the sort of person I am, I would want to get away as often as possible from the pressures that we are discussing. Interestingly, however, the Princess Royal Trust for Carers survey, from which I read earlier, found that

"four out of ten carers . . . would not like to take a break. Given the emphasis on carers' breaks as the major new service for carers this finding deserves some attention from policy makers and perhaps more research on the reasons for this. These carers might benefit from other types of support. Some local authorities have used the Carers Grant to fund different types of support for carers, including mobile phones, IT equipment and other equipment needed at home."

I am all for that. It is important that we listen to individual families and carers so that our support systems are sufficiently flexible to give them the support that they need. Earlier, I mentioned a couple who were caring for their daughter. Their main concern was not for themselves but for their other two children, whom they wanted to have a break from the tubes and blood tests, as they put it.

It is important that central and local government take that principle on board, which is why I was interested in the consultation that took place earlier this year on the respite voucher scheme. Although the scheme comes back to respite care, which is still important for many people, I liked the principle behind it. It would empower people to make their own choices by giving them a voucher that they could take wherever they wanted. I am in favour of applying that principle in other areas, such as education and health, because the money should follow the consumer or the patient. It was the Government who introduced this interesting scheme. I know that the consultation ended in June, but I want to know what has happened to it since. Has it become lost in the mists of Whitehall or is it about to emerge to delight us all over the next few weeks? It could make a real difference by ensuring that help is tailor-made to families' and carers' needs. I hope that it can be introduced.

Local authorities have ring-fenced money for respite care, a move that I welcome, but it is not necessary for them to provide the care themselves because there are some excellent charities that can make the provision. On the Winged Fellowship Trust website, I read about some of the excellent holidays that the trust provides for families with disabled children. They are the sort of holidays that I would like the family in Ivybridge to have access to, and the voucher scheme might facilitate that.

It is important that there is much more awareness of carers' needs, of the daily pressures on them and of the immense love and care that they give. There is a need for greater simplicity in the benefits system, and all Governments have tried to simplify it, but it is extremely difficult to do so. Does the Minister have anything new to tell us about that?

My main point, however, is that we should try to give these unsung heroes the help that they want and need, without assuming that we know what it is.

[Mr. Streeter]

The message should also ring out loud and clear from this debate, from all corners of the House and all parts of the United Kingdom: every carer—particularly on carers' rights day—we salute you.

9.54 am

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): It is a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) in this debate. I, too, am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate on carers' rights day.

We rightly salute the 1 million people who work for the national health service and for social services departments. However, as my hon. Friend said, 1 million people care for loved ones and family members for more than 50 hours a week—many of them for 24 hours a day. A further 1.8 million people care for loved ones for more than 20 hours a week. There are 7 million carers in this country.

We need to remember that carers are not a group parcelled away separately in society; they are not in a place that those of us without such responsibilities are lucky enough to have nothing to do with. We are all potential carers, and most of us will be carers at some time. Seven out of 10 women and six out of 10 men will be carers at some time. The subject affects us all, whether for short, intense periods or for long periods. We heard the moving story of the gentleman in my hon. Friend's constituency who has cared for his wife for 30 years or so.

I am deeply alarmed by a projection that I have seen that by 2037 we shall face a shortfall of 2.1 million carers. The people who need care will suffer if they cannot get it from close members of their family. I am also concerned about the extra demand that will be placed on social services departments.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon mentioned the tremendous importance of strong families. I have raised that theme before, and I shall continue to do so as long as I am a Member of Parliament. Sadly, we are the divorce capital of Europe. More marriages—40 per cent. of them—break down in this country than in any other country in Europe. Obviously, when relationships fall apart, the onus of caring for a partner, husband, wife or other family members can similarly be broken down.

That is one of many aspects of public policy of which the Government should be aware. They should examine the impact of family breakdown on people who need to be cared for. I hope that that argument will be fed back to the groups within the Government who study such issues cross-departmentally.

It is easy to talk about statistics such as the 7 million carers and the 1 million people caring for more than 50 hours a week. However, every carer is in unique circumstances, dealing with their own stresses, including isolation, exclusion from the community and, not least, severe financial demands. I welcome the fact that since October 2002 people of 65 or over who become carers for the first time have been able to claim benefits. I am proud that my party called for that from December 1999. However, to give credit where it is due, the Government introduced the measure.

Invalid care allowance, which, from next April, will be renamed carers allowance, can be claimed only if the cared-for person is in receipt of attendance allowance or disability living allowance. Yet more than half the people entitled to those benefits do not claim them. Take-up is an important issue. I know that take-up throughout the benefit system is a matter of concern to the Minister. As the Minister will know from previous debates on the minimum income guarantee and other benefits, the issue exercises social security Ministers in relation to a wide range of benefits. We certainly need to concentrate on increasing the take-up of attendance allowance and disability living allowance.

This morning I spoke to a representative from Carers UK who told me that many people find benefit application forms the equivalent of wading through a small novel. I make a plea to the Government to make applying for disability living allowance, in particular, simpler, and to advertise the availability of the benefit more widely so that more people know about it. That will enable carers to claim those benefits to which they are entitled, including the newly named carers allowance from next year and the premium on income support.

Since I became a Member of Parliament, several constituents have come to see me about claiming disabled facilities grants to extend or change their homes so that they can care for a sick or disabled family member. That is an excellent scheme, which enables families to provide care at home for members of their family who need it. An extension, a lift, a downstairs bathroom, or wider corridors can transform a family's ability to care for someone in their own home. I know that in my constituency, South Bedfordshire district council has a very limited pot of funds for that purpose so, sadly, it turns down many applications for grants, severely restricting the plans of those who apply for them. Of course, the system is properly controlled. The council acts on the advice of the professionals involved, such as occupational therapists, to ensure that appropriate extensions are put in place and that families do not try to take advantage of the scheme.

I am aware that certain local authorities in the eastern region seem to have money left in their budgets at the moment. The East of England Development Agency seems to have lots of money, which it is looking to spend on various things by the end of the year. I am also aware of the Government's plans for regional assemblies. I put in a plea that the Government should move some of that money to boost the amount that local authorities have available for much-needed disabled facilities grants. Those grants can be lifesavers and they encourage independence and care within families—exactly the things that we should support.

Last week, the Second Reading of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges) Bill took place. That Bill sets out procedures that will apply to people leaving hospital and will impose fines on local authorities that do not provide people discharged from hospital with somewhere to go within three days of their discharge. Carers UK is very concerned about that and believes that the Bill could be bad news for carers. Carers UK has conducted a substantial amount of research on the issue and discovered some alarming information. At present, 45 per cent.—nearly half—of carers are not consulted at all when the person for whom they care is discharged. That is very worrying. In addition, we know

that a fifth of carers do not receive a copy of the discharge plan from the hospital. There has also been a big increase in the number of people readmitted to hospital within two months of discharge. Between 1999 and 2001, it rose from 19 per cent. to 45 per cent. Those figures should ring alarm bells for the Government, who should consider carefully the effect of legislation on carers. We need to give statutory backing to the guidance on discharge so that carers have the full force of the law behind them to ensure that what is in the guidance notes comes to pass, and that people are not made to go home before carers are ready to care for them properly.

We have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon that some 4 million people in this country juggle work and care; some 3 million of those look after older relatives. They are a group of carers coping with particular demands and stresses as they move daily from the work to the caring environment. I pay tribute to employers such as HSBC, Lloyds TSB, British Telecom, Centrica and the national health service that have worked with Carers UK to develop carer-friendly employment practices. Credit where credit is due—they have made significant steps forward. We should encourage more employers to walk that route. It may be more difficult for very small employers to follow the same route as larger ones, but those who are able to should be encouraged to do so.

Perhaps a carer-friendly employer mark could be developed that larger employers could put on their writing paper to advertise the fact that they have made progress in developing carer-friendly practices. That would not be the heavy hand of legislation, but would encourage best practice.

People who have been caring full time and want to return to the employment market will have gaps in their employment record on their CV. I know people, including members of my family, who feel rather embarrassed about the time that they have been out of the labour market caring for others. That should not be the case. The fact that people have spent a period of time caring for someone who desperately needed it should be seen almost as a gold star on their CV.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon said that it was not all about the bottom line. However, people who have been through the hard times and shown that they have the duty and sense of obligation, day in day out, to look after someone in great need would make sterling employees and be particularly loyal to their employer; they should come highly commended to employers. Carers should not be embarrassed or try to tuck the fact away, but say with pride, "I cared day in day out for a sick relative, which is why I was out of the labour market. I hope you will respect the strengths that I have gained from that experience."

Many employers are taking steps to introduce good child care facilities. I salute and commend those excellent, much-needed steps, but as my hon. Friend said there is less progress in providing facilities for those who care for older relatives. We know that employees who care for older people are reticent about making their employers aware of their needs. We should encourage them to come forward, and encourage employers to take a responsive and sensitive approach.

I welcome the fact that those who have become carers in the past year seem to be more aware of the benefits, respite care and assessments to which they are entitled. Research conducted by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers and other organisations has shown that people who have been caring for many years are less aware of their rights and entitlements and the extra help that they can receive than those who have recently become carers.

In some parts of the country, GPs register their patients' carers. We need to extend that excellent scheme. I do not want to load GPs with extra administration—they should receive specific funds to help them cope, although the requirement would not be that onerous—but if we could extend the scheme nationally, for the first time we would have a register of the 7 million carers about whom we have been talking this morning.

As far as I am aware, there is no register of carers. If that information were available, it could be passed on to the Department for Work and Pensions, which would then know who was entitled to the new carers allowance and the income support premium. Local authorities would be able to make carers aware of respite care schemes and the assessments to which they were entitled. Such a scheme could make a big difference, and I commend it to the Minister. Perhaps she will be kind enough to give me her initial response in her winding-up speech.

Some information is available to carers. Carers UK does some excellent work, which includes running Carers Line on 0808 808 7777. It is available from 10 am to midday and 2 pm until 4 pm every Monday to Friday. It is worth putting that number on the record because if people read the record of the debate they may be encouraged to ring Carers Line to find out about their entitlement.

I should also like to commend my county council in Bedfordshire, which has been running a countywide short breaks bureau and helpline for two years through the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity. People can ring a freephone number to get vouchers to provide short-term respite care to enable them to go to the shops, visit a friend or take a break. The helpline has been running successfully for two years, and I know from constituents who have come to see me in my surgeries that it is greatly appreciated. Indeed, many people have asked me whether it would be possible to extend the scheme.

One of my constituents, Mrs. Maureen Fuller, has given me permission to mention her case. I spoke to her yesterday, and I have seen her on a number of occasions since my election to Parliament. Mrs. Fuller cares for her daughter Julie, who has learning difficulties and has been in a wheelchair for many years. Mrs. Fuller is Julie's sole carer, and she has raised a number of particular issues.

Mrs. Fuller lives in Leighton Buzzard, which was once described to me as being about eight miles from everywhere, and there are no facilities in the town where her daughter can be cared for on a daily basis. Eight miles may not sound very far from the nearest facilities, but Julie Fuller has great difficulty travelling in transport in her wheelchair to the nearest day centre because she gets pressure sores. There are plans, which will possibly be implemented in conjunction with

[Andrew Selous]

Mencap, to open a small unit to care for people with learning disabilities in Leighton Buzzard. I strongly support those plans.

Respite care has been mentioned this morning. It provides people with an important and welcome break. Sometimes it is not just a break but a necessity. In the next few weeks Mrs. Fuller will go into hospital, so she will need to find somewhere—she hopes that she has done so—for her daughter Julie to stay meanwhile. She told me that when Julie has gone into respite care in the past, those caring for her have not always properly read her notes. That small practical detail is tremendously important. When carers hand over to someone, they should have confidence that the notes will be properly read so that the person's day passes as well as it possibly can.

It is important that agencies who provide carers for people such as Julie have sufficient back-up to cover for their staff when they are sick or go on holiday. For a carer, it is the most alarming and worrying thing in the world if they are expecting someone to come in at 9 o'clock every morning to wash and dress the person for whom they care and nobody turns up. Unless one has been in that situation it is impossible fully to imagine the upset, worry and concern that it causes. I flag that up on behalf of Mrs. Fuller and the many other people who no doubt have to cope with the same situation.

10.16 am

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): I begin—how else could I?—by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) on securing the debate and my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on making a fine speech. It is a privilege to take part in this debate, although I feel a sense of inadequacy in doing so, for two reasons. First, the most useful contribution of all was made by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire when he gave the free Carers Line number and rightly said that people who leaf through *Hansard* to read the debate may care to take note of it. Secondly, I feel a deeper sense of inadequacy—my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon mentioned this—in the face of carers who come to my surgery week in, week out and have to deal with challenges and difficulties that I for one would feel unable to cope with or to bear. I am sure that the Minister and all hon. Members who speak in the debate will have had such experiences.

That leads me to praise the work of carers of all backgrounds in my constituency who care for sick, infirm or chronically ill relatives or friends. In my year or so as the Member of Parliament for Wycombe, I have often been struck by the fact that many of these carers would be unable to cope were it not for the network of charities, clubs, churches and faith communities that keep them going. Often, these organisations are staffed by volunteers who are recently, or not so recently, retired and are carers themselves. That should go on the record, too. I want particularly to praise the work of the South Bucks carers centre in High Wycombe, which provides information, advice and support for carers in the area.

As my hon. Friends said, carers who have been caring for the longest are often least aware of the good things that the Government are trying to do for them. I particularly draw attention to the needs of my ethnic minority constituents, whom the South Bucks carers centre makes great efforts to help. As carers in these communities may speak English as a second language, or not at all, they often have the most difficulty in getting access to the services and means of help that are provided by the state or by voluntary groups. There is a high concentration of poverty and challenges to carers among the elderly, and in particular among elderly women, who may not take up benefits to which they are entitled. Reference has been made to the carers allowance, which is due to be introduced soon.

Let us consider the take-up of some benefits: for example, of the minimum income guarantee, which carers often need and which helps them to look after the people for whom they are caring. The number of people who do not take up such benefits may be as high as 1 million. Will the Minister respond to the points raised by my hon. Friends about take-up? What do the Government intend to do for older, ethnic minority carers, who, because of the language barrier and the work that they often have to undertake in the home—looking after children—are not aware of the advice and support that they can receive?

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the full range of ethnic minorities have this difficulty? It does not affect only one ethnic minority. Carers UK in London is launching its campaign today in Soho among the Chinese community, where there are particular problems in conveying such information to carers.

Mr. Goodman: There is a small Chinese community in High Wycombe and I would agree with my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right to say that the problem is not restricted to certain ethnic minorities. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire and I have often made that point in our work for the Select Committee on Work and Pensions.

I could not possibly cover all the challenges faced by carers in this brief debate. However, carers in my constituency have consistently asked me to raise a point about the effect of the Government's so-called fairer charging policy, which I prefer to call the means-testing policy on carers. I was interested to learn that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon has had the same point raised by carers in his constituency. Until recently, charges for home care were essentially at the discretion of local authorities. In Buckinghamshire, clients were asked to contribute an average of between £25 and £35 a week. I do not believe that I have received one complaint from my constituents about the policy that previously applied.

As the Minister will know, Government policy now obliges councils to provide home care to the very poorest people, if they did not do so before. That is obviously admirable in principle but, financial pressures being what they are, it means higher charges for those who may not be the poorest carers, but who are often in challenged circumstances. Such carers feel that they are being penalised for saving, being thrifty and exercising prudence. The extra weight of the charges may make them feel that they cannot afford the consequences of the Government's fairer charging, or, as I prefer to call it, means-testing policy. For example, Mrs Hackshaw in High Wycombe asks me to urge

"the Government to review their thinking on the question of their 'Fair Charging for Home Care' policy."

She writes:

"My husband suffered a severe stroke in January 1998, since when he has had to have constant home care for which I already pay what I consider to be a fair charge.

My husband and I are both aged 74, and worked from the age of 16 to 65 without any unemployment or benefits of any kind. We were careful with our income, bought a house, raised two children, one of which we helped through university, and managed to save a small amount for our retirement. Now we are being penalised for being prudent which is grossly unfair."

I have a letter from Diann and Patrick Douneen of Marlow, who make a point about the complexity and difficulty of the forms. They say of their parents, who cannot understand the forms:

"They are a proud and independent generation, many of whom have fought for this country, but due to life's circumstances are not always able to pay for their needs as they become house bound and frail."

Mrs. Geers of Hughenden Valley, near High Wycombe, plays a part in caring for her 92-year-old mother-in-law. She writes:

"She is often confused, is very unsteady after suffering a stroke and needs help with washing and dressing, but the home care enables her to retain a measure of independence in her own home, which she values. She has always been very careful not to waste her money, but as a result of her thrift she is likely to have to pay around £200 a week from now onwards".

She continues:

"It seems to me scandalous that she will be required to pay possibly 10 times as much for these vital services—no other sector of the community would tolerate such a massive increase at one fell swoop in charges of any sort, but those requiring home care are probably the most vulnerable group in our society, and least able to express their plight."

It is hard for me to overestimate the anger and distress of many of my constituents at the imposition of this fairer charging or, as I prefer to call it, means-testing policy on carers in Buckinghamshire. As the local government settlement is due on Thursday, I would be grateful if the Minister were to indicate what the Government might be able to do to relieve these difficulties. I do not want to make points in a partisan spirit, but these are the concerns of my constituents, and it is fair to voice them.

I was interested when my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire drew attention to the additional burden that is likely to be placed on carers in future years, and their declining numbers. I am sure he would agree that one of the main drivers of that potential loss of carers is the breakdown of family structure in Britain. Rightly, he has consistently urged the Government to find ways of keeping people together. He has asked the Government—as have I—to take up the Prime Minister on something that he said in 1998—that marriage is the most reliable means of keeping two people together. If the Government did a little more, and I believe they could do more, to encourage people to stay together and to encourage marriage, many of the burdens placed on carers might be relieved a little. I know the challenges for the Government are great, but I hope that the Minister will respond to these points.

10.28 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) on his good fortune in securing a timely debate on an important subject. We have heard some detailed speeches about carers' concerns. I shall briefly pick up on a few issues and illustrate them through experiences in my constituency. We heard the hon. Gentleman set out the statistics that underpin the debate. It is worth stressing that the bulk of care is provided by informal carers and not the state. Often these carers are family members, but there are others, as we have heard.

The hon. Gentleman documented clearly the impact that that role can have on a person's health, wealth and well-being over time. It does take its toll. It is right to stress that in developing services for carers, as well as those for whom they are caring, we should ensure that they are not designed on a single template or based on a one-size-fits-all approach. We must ensure that they meet the needs of the individual.

Today, however, especially because the Minister is responsible for the benefits system, I shall raise some issues relating to the way in which that system sometimes gets in the way of, or certainly does not assist, carers and those for whom they are caring. The hon. Gentleman referred to the Carers UK website describing the system as complex. Sometimes it is not only complex but inaccessible, and access to benefits is an important issue for many carers. Research by Carers UK has revealed the financial hardship endured by carers. Eight out of 10 said that, on becoming a carer, they became financially worse off.

A case from my constituency highlights how the benefits system can let carers down. A daughter returned to her parents' home to care for them. The mother had suffered a stroke and required constant care day and night. The father was about to go into hospital for an operation. Both had clear and demonstrable care needs. The daughter took on the caring role. She applied for invalid care allowance, which is to become the carer's allowance, but she was turned down on the ground that she was fit for work. She had an interview at the local Benefits Agency office, where she explained her circumstances. However, instead of listening and offering help and suggestions, the official pressured her into applying for jobseekers allowance.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): On what date was that?

Mr. Burstow: It was in the past month, so I hope that the Minister can pick up on the case when she responds to the debate. As I said, the daughter was asked to apply for the JSA and eventually she gave in and did so. It would be helpful if the Minister would give us extra information. I shall explain why in a moment. The daughter made it clear on the application form that she was available for work between 11 pm and 5 am—while her mother was asleep. The Benefits Agency official saw that that was set out on the form in black and white, and my constituent has been monitored over the past few weeks on that basis.

The case came to my attention when I told the Sutton carers centre in my constituency that this debate was to take place and asked it for an example of how the

[Mr. Burstow]

benefits system sometimes lets carers down. Eddie Parsons, the carers' information and support worker, told me about the case and accompanied my constituent to her next interview at the Benefits Agency to support her and again explain her circumstances to the officials. During the interview, she was accused—the precise wording was not taken down—of evading work, of trying not to take on a work responsibility. Finally, the Benefits Agency worker explained that the daughter's ICA claim had been turned down because her mother did not receive attendance allowance. Why that had not been flagged up at the start of the process beggars belief.

According to a 1998 survey by the Department for Work and Pensions, anything between 40 and 60 per cent. of those entitled to attendance allowance do not claim it. In the case to which I have referred, the parents were unaware of their entitlement, a problem that other hon. Members have mentioned. As a consequence, the benefit was not claimed, the entitlement was not established and the ICA was not available. The parents are now applying for the benefit, but have been told that they may have to wait for two months and go through appeal procedures to get it.

The system let the mother down in the first instance by not ensuring that she was aware of her entitlement to attendance allowance. Secondly, the system let down the carer by not listening when she explained her circumstances and not signposting a way forward that would enable her to gain entitlement to the ICA and to discharge the caring responsibilities that she had chosen to undertake.

This afternoon, I shall attend a question time session with carers in my constituency as part of carers' rights day. I hope that the Minister will go beyond her intervention and explain what I can tell them about how such a circumstance can transpire and what can be done to ensure that it does not happen again. We have also heard that, at present, there are no reliable figures for the take-up of ICA. Research is therefore needed to underpin our understanding of how we can target take-up campaigns more effectively.

We know that one of the most important changes in a person's life that leads to the onset of a caring role is the discharge of a loved one from hospital. In that context, reference was made to research carried out by Carers UK, which found that 70 per cent. of carers who took on a caring role were not consulted about whether they wished to do so. I hope that when the Department of Health issues fresh guidance on discharge planning, we can ensure that information on benefits checks is built into it. Those who are about to be discharged should be given advice about their likely entitlements so that they can make further inquiries, and carers should also be given that advice through their assessments.

We have not yet mentioned blue badges, or disabled parking badges, in this useful debate. A short while ago I met a constituent—the carer of a young child who has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and whose condition is on the autistic spectrum—who was concerned about the eligibility criteria for disabled badges. I have had several letters in my mailbag recently on the same issue. The constituent applied for a disabled badge and was told that it could not be made available because the scheme was designed according to the recipient's ability to walk. However, the concern in this case was the ability of the recipient to walk safely, because of the child's autistic condition and their challenging behaviour, which made life very difficult for the carer and the parent to carry on with their caring duties. I would have welcomed the opportunity to expand on that issue.

Will the Minister ask the Department of Transport to examine the criteria, so that they can be made more flexible? In that way, the situation would be improved for thousands of carers in the United Kingdom, and probably hundreds in my constituency, who have responsibility for caring for disabled children and who would find a disabled badge a god send.

We have had a useful debate, which has illuminated some of the concerns of carers in the UK. It is not the first debate on the issue this year. That demonstrates that hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned about the value that we place on carers. They are the backbone of our caring system, and it is our duty to ensure that they receive the support that they deserve.

10.37 am

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I shall take up the point made by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) about the blue badge scheme. My experience of that issue is different from his but I, too, am concerned, and I hope that the Minister will comment on it.

The case concerned a child with mental health problems. A badge had been issued to the family, but they found that they received abuse, and had difficulty in using the badge, because members of the public did not understand that the child was entitled to it on the basis of the sort of safety concerns outlined earlier. The public did not appreciate that, because the nature of the badge implies that it is related to physical mobility and walking.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam made another good point about the complexity of the benefits system, which echoed that made by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter). In the example given by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, it was the fact that the mother had not received attendance allowance that had led to the surprising events in relation to invalid care allowance. Does the Minister have any plans to simplify the system, and, if so, will she outline them?

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon on securing the debate, and for doing so in such a timely way; we are discussing carers on carers' rights day. It is not often that the House of Commons is as efficient as that. I notice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you are looking doubtful at that statement, but I believe it to be unusual that we manage to be that effective.

I notice that early-day motion 254 on the Order Paper today also highlights the support of many Members for carers' rights day, and pays tribute to Carers UK and to Lloyds pharmacy for all their support for that day.

My hon. Friend started by talking about the scale of the issue; the 7 million people in the country who are looking after someone who is sick, frail or disabled. Many of those carers are unaware of the help that is available to them. Carers UK conducted a survey in

which it found that half the number of carers said that it took them two years to realise that they were, in fact, carers, and were therefore entitled to receive help. Last year's carers' rights day led to a 12.5 per cent. increase in claims for invalid care allowance in the following quarter, which is worrying.

As I said, there are no accurate take-up figures for ICA, and it would help to know the exact scale of the problem when targeting campaigns. The research undertaken by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers—which shows that the carers who have cared for the longest period of time are those with the least information—could be properly tested. We could examine ways to tackle the problem for the generation that is not receiving the advantages brought by the more recent changes.

It is right to welcome the Government's actions in extending ICA as an underlying benefit and in providing the extra payments after death. Those are caring measures that we should all welcome. It was right of my hon. Friend to mention "Without us . . . ?", the Carers UK report that demonstrated the economic value of carers, replacing whom would cost £57.4 billion. It is also worth remarking that the number of carers has risen by 70 per cent. in eight years. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) said, the projections are worrying. Given the estimates for the increase in caring need, as many as 9 million carers could be required by 2037. One of the documents that Carers UK produced highlights the case of a carer from Liverpool—Roger, aged 48—who made the point:

"We save the country a fortune by a life of long hours, hard work, physical and mental pressure."

It is right that we should recognise that and pay tribute to it today, but there is a moral and an economic imperative in giving support to carers. I visited several carers' groups in the past year, and spoke at a "Rethinking Severe Mental Illness" meeting in Oxford. What impressed me was that not everyone had wanted to be a carer—many had found it extremely hard—but by coming together in a carers group they could provide each other with a tremendous measure of support.

A young man and his carer were talking about the drugs that are now available to tackle schizophrenia. The group had a wealth of knowledge about the different medications that are available, which brings me to an important point that has already been mentioned; we do not always know exactly what information carers want. The information that we give should be informed by the views of carers themselves. We should make as much use as possible of carers' groups and the voluntary sector when we consider the issue. The Princess Royal Trust for Carers found that all too many carers want more information about medication and its side effects. Six out of 10 believe that they do not have enough information about medical procedures such as giving injections, using catheters and dialysis. A third of carers said that they found the sources of advice and help difficult to use. Paragraph 8.8 in the summary of conclusions states:

"A significant minority of these carers were shown as lacking access to support, information and contact with health and social care professionals. A picture emerged of 'information-poor' carers."

Do the Government have a strategy for tackling the problem? It would help if they did the requisite research and knew more about it. Producing a plan to deal with this information-poor group would be an extremely good contribution.

Some carers say that they would appreciate information about simple things such as lifting techniques. They can suffer illness because they do not have the requisite knowledge. How should we best tackle that problem?

We have heard a good deal from the Government about respite care. That is welcome, but I want to ask for two points of information. In mental health, 700 more staff are projected for 2004 to enable carers to take more breaks. That is the target. I have asked several parliamentary questions but found no evidence that, two years into the NHS plan, any of the extra staff have been employed anywhere. Can the Minister give an assurance on that? Secondly, what of the voucher scheme? It is a long time since consultation and most of us expected that something would have happened by now. Will the Minister also help us on that?

On the recommendations from the trust, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire mentioned the register proposed in paragraph 8.11. Do the Government welcome it and what is their response?

On premature discharges from hospital, the Minister will know that Carers UK stated:

"Our research shows that policies to reduce delayed discharge can result in patients being sent home too soon and without proper support. The proportion of patients readmitted to hospital within two months more than doubled—from 19 per cent. in 1999 to 45 per cent. in 2001."

The Minister will know that the more recent figures are even worse.

"The same research found carers struggling to cope when members of their family were sent home. Nearly half of those surveyed said that they had not had enough support."

Given that many of the carers are elderly and not in good health themselves, it is terrible if patients are sent home too early. The reason is probably connected with bed blocking. The Minister knows that 60,000 care home places have been lost in recent years as a result of Government policy. Bed blocking happens in virtually every hospital in the country. Are risks being taken by sending patients home rather than to an institutional placement? If so, what are the Government doing to halt this unfair burden on the carer?

Does the Minister agree that employers could do more through carer-friendly practice? Do the Government have any proposals to encourage that? My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) referred to charges. What is the Minister's take on that? The wider range of care is obviously welcome, but could the position be ameliorated?

Carers' rights day provides a great opportunity across the country, with 250 events taking place. It should help people to learn more about help available through the benefits system and community services. Everyone welcomes what is happening today. However, would it not be better if the information were made simpler through a streamlined system that people could more readily understand? It is surely a criticism of the Government's overall policy on benefits that it is impossible for many people to understand the system or

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involve themselves with it. The complexity of forms is a real problem. Are there any plans to simplify the system, the procedures and the forms? It would greatly assist many people who do not currently take up their benefits.

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): The debate has been good as well as timely. The hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) has been assiduous in securing it on the right day. He took his opportunity to set out both the current situation and the concerns of his constituents in detail. I congratulate him on that.

I shall set out briefly what the Government have done to improve the support and help given to carers and will use the rest of the little time available to answer the many questions that have been put. I shall do my best to canter through them, and I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if time constraints mean that I do not reach all of them.

This is one of the first Governments to have focused on the needs of carers in the way in which we have done—to be fair, the hon. Gentleman recognised that and said that he approves of what the Government have been doing—which has resulted in an extra £0.5 billion package to provide fuller support for carers than they have had previously. Until 1976, the benefits system did not recognise the work of carers at all, so this is a major change for a system that has been going since the 1940s. Invalid care allowance is the only real recognition of the work that carers do. As hon. Members have said, there are many interfaces with social services and elsewhere. Some of that is welcome but other aspects of it cause some of the complications that have been mentioned.

The aim of the extra package is to improve the support for carers, particularly older and poorer carers and the many who seek to combine work with their caring responsibilities. As a result, the ICA earnings limit was increased in April 2001. Many carers work, and ICA is a maintenance benefit; it exists to give a measure of financial support to those who have to give up work. To be eligible, one has to do 35 hours of caring per week. That does not leave much time for working, which is why I was surprised and appalled to hear the story told by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow). I hope that he will give me the full details in writing, because what his constituent was told was wrong. The mistake should have been spotted earlier. The story sounded so bad that I would like to look into it. His point about attendance allowance is correct. For the carer to be entitled to ICA, the disabled person who is being cared for has to receive a qualifying benefit. On the evidence of the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman outlined, his constituent's mother should have been eligible for attendance allowance. I hope that the problem can be sorted out.

There has been an increase in the earnings limit from some £50 to £75, plus additional expenses, to enable those who care to stay in touch with and remain in the labour market. There has also been an increase of £10 per week in the carer premium for carers at the lower end of the income scale. As many hon. Members have mentioned, carers often pay a financial penalty for the caring that they do. The premium focuses on their needs. An extra £10 per week in income-related benefits via the carer premium has been widely welcomed and benefits more than 233,000 carers.

The name of the benefit will—at last—change to carer's allowance in April 2003. It amazes me, but it is a feature of the social security system that changing the name of a benefit can take longer than making any of the other reforms that we have made. That is because ancient computer software means that we cannot generate letters with the right name on them until it has been updated next April. At that point, we will at last have completed the package of increased support.

There is an eight-week run-on of ICA when a disabled person dies. It is incredibly insensitive for virtually the first letter for someone to receive after they have been bereaved to be from us saying, "Give us your book back. We want the money back." The eight weeks will at least enable carers a little time to adjust to the new circumstances that they face. Often, bereavements following care for many years are even more difficult to adjust to than others.

From October, we have also extended ICA to the over-65s. There have already been 18,000 applicants for ICA who are over 65, 7,500 of whom have underlying entitlement to ICA in income-related benefits, and 4,000 of whom receive payment as well because they are poorer carers. We have focused on those poorer and older carers whom Opposition Members mentioned.

Many hon. Members raised the issue of take-up and whether there were take-up figures for ICA. Entitlement to ICA is increasing and the numbers are increasing annually. The forecast for this year is up to 421,000, whereas the 2000-01 figure was 390,000. As ever in the benefits system, we send out general information to try to encourage people to take up that to which they are entitled. Of course, the basic responsibility is to claim. We cannot seek out everyone for every benefit; we would spend our entire budget on that if we were to try it. We want people to claim their entitlements.

We have reduced the length of forms. The minimum income guarantee form has been cut from 40 pages to 10. We have recently completed an experiment to cut heavily the attendance allowance form for over-75s, and that has been successful. New computers in disability benefit centres mean that we can tailor our forms and identify people's requirements in a much more focused way, instead of having to ask people to fill in a general form about everything. We are also conducting experiments in Glasgow on the disability living allowance. There has been movement due to the introduction of new computer technology. The old technology has restricted us in the past.

Andrew Selous: Will the Minister give way?

Maria Eagle: I wish I could give way, but I have hardly any time and will not reach most of the points made.

Many hon. Members mentioned employment. With Carers UK, we are funding a project called "Action for Carers and Employment", which will assist carers to keep in touch with the labour market. The average time on ICA is two and a half years, so it is tremendously

important to give carers who care for such periods that sort of information. They will not then be disadvantaged if they want to return to work.

Flexibility in provision was referred to. The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 allows for direct payment, which is an excellent way to ensure flexibility. It means that resources go to specific carers to be used as they want, to meet their needs when they want them met. That means that the local authority does not tell them when they will be given provision. The authority in the area represented by the hon. Member for South-West Devon has made direct payments, which I welcome.

The short-break voucher scheme was led by the Department of Health. Guidelines are being drafted and we expect publication early in the new year. That is another way to increase flexibility where direct payments are not taken up or not quite as appropriate, so that some respite care is given.

Hon. Members also referred to the fairer charging policies. They arise out of "Charging with Care", the Audit Commission report that suggested that there was too great a disparity between charging policies. Department of Health guidance has been issued on the subject. Local authorities are not required either to charge or to charge more than they do. I am sorry to hear the point made by the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) about massive increases. The Government do not require them. Social services budgets have been increased by the Government by more than 6 per cent. this year, so there should be money available to enable local authorities to make good choices. I hope that the local authority in the hon. Gentleman's constituency will bear that in mind.

Coal Industry

11 am

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The energy sector in the United Kingdom faces a period of difficulty and profound uncertainty. As the Minister knows, some energy companies are in crisis. There are severe problems at British Energy, TXU, AES Drax Power and UK Coal, but they are merely symptoms of a deeper, underlying problem. The Government recognised that there was a problem and commissioned the performance and innovation unit energy review, which was published last February. Even in its opening lines, the review clearly acknowledged the underlying problems. In the foreword to the review, the Prime Minister wrote:

> "Energy underpins our daily lives . . . That's why securing cheap, reliable and sustainable sources of energy supply has long been a major concern for governments".

In a sense, three goals are thus set out: cheapness, reliability and sustainability. However, those three goals do not sit easily together—for example, there is real tension between cheapness and sustainability. There are those who argue—I have done so myself—that if we want sustainable sources of energy, we need to consider energy that is more expensive, rather than progressively cheaper. In fairness, the wholesale market price for energy has fallen by 40 per cent. since 1998. However, the knock-on effect for the consumer has been very limited—perhaps just over 1 per cent. off bills. That is a clear demonstration that the market system is not working properly. Furthermore, the problems that energy companies now face show that the progressive policy of squeezing assets has run out of juice.

The PIU report is good on questions but, unfortunately, short on answers. The question of nuclear energy is left for another day. I wonder what we should now make of the statement in the report, which was published some months ago, that:

> "Because nuclear is a mature technology within a well established global industry, there is no current case for further government support."

Well, a lot has changed since then. Just last week, for the third time in three months, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry had to roll on a £650 million loan to British Energy. Most significantly, it was backed by a grant from Government of between £150 million and £200 million over a 10-year period. That is a significant investment in maintaining an energy sector not through the consumer, but directly, through the taxpayer.

For my part I felt that in some ways, the PIU report showed complacency. Do we really want 80 per cent. of United Kingdom energy needs to be met by gas, 70 per cent. of which will be imported by 2020? What do we mean, post-11 September, by security of supply, if such a scenario is included in the PIU report? The real difficulty is that although the Government acknowledge the problem—I know very well that the Minister works extremely hard on such issues—the planning, policy and market cycles are out of sync. Immediate decisions need to be taken in the market, but the White Paper will not be published until early in the new year. Uncertainty in the market is leading to problems for companies such as British Energy and UK Coal.

The past few months have been extremely difficult for the deep-mined coal industry, witnessing the closure of the Prince of Wales colliery and the rundown—which I

[Paddy Tipping]

think will become quicker—of the Selby coalfield. If urgent action is not taken, worse is yet to come, because England's largest coal producer, UK Coal, is currently reviewing every colliery. Daw Mill, for example, is a pit with enormous potential, yet it has huge geological problems; the work force and the management are trying to work through those problems, but things are difficult and Daw Mill is proving to be an enormous drain on the finances of UK Coal.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Daw Mill employs approximately 450 people, a good number of whom come from my constituency. Does my hon. Friend hope that the Government will learn from the serious mistake made in respect of Asfordby in north-east Leicestershire, where more than 800 million tons of coal were left sterilised by a decision not to support the working through of geological problems? Will he therefore urge the Government to reflect on that case and to give Daw Mill and other collieries the support they need at relatively low cost?

Paddy Tipping: The Government need to reflect on the fact that Daw Mill, Harworth and Maltby have long-term strategic reserves of 20 years. We must not lose them, even though there are short-term problems at Daw Mill. A pit that might not have such long-term reserves is Clipstone, in my constituency—it has had a long, good history, but, in fairness, I have to say that it is coming to the end of the reserves. However, its life could be lengthened if closure aid were available for some of the limited reserves, or, in the longer term, if UK Coal were to dispose of it and pass it back to the Coal Authority, and a new owner and manager came in who was prepared to invest in access in the black shale—although that would be a multi-million pound project, I admit.

There are problems at Harworth and Maltby. The men who work in those pits are extremely concerned about the future, so they are in discussions with the management and UK Coal to keep those pits open, and they are prepared to consider new working practices and new methods of investment to do so. At best, the solution will be that UK Coal comes back and cuts costs—in effect, reduces the work force. At worst, it will announce the closure of both collieries, even though they have long-term strategic reserves that we would do well to safeguard. The crunch is that UK Coal is determined to make an announcement about Harworth and Maltby before Christmas.

UK Coal's problem is that it simply does not have the resources to invest in the future. Development of new kit, new faces and new seams is a £1-million project, and UK Coal's short-term funding problems inevitably mean that it is not investing in the future. That will mean progressively more closures in a domino effect. I think that UK Coal is currently funding its operations by closing down one colliery after another, and using the money from the pit that is designated for closure to support the rest of the company. Announcing the closure of a pit is not investing in the future—there is no longer any need to safeguard that pit, and the income from sales keeps the company and the rest of the group going. However, a domino effect has a consequence: at some point, UK Coal will run out of pits to close. I fear that that day may not be far off. Collieries can be used as cash cows, raped and pillaged in the short term, but that cannot go on forever.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does my hon. Friend agree that the old formula for privatisation of the industry from 1994 was flawed? When it was privatised, the whole industry was beyond the critical mass; that had implications for the financial market, which will not invest in an industry that it sees is beyond the critical mass. Therefore, it weighs heavily on Government to provide an aid scheme to allow the mining of a strategic resource to continue.

Paddy Tipping: That is a strong point. My hon. Friend and I go back 10 years on that argument. The mass of the pits has shrunk far too much. The key problem for UK Coal and other energy companies is that they need to borrow money but they are borrowing against short-term contracts, and the financial markets are not prepared to support that. In that context, decisions need to be taken immediately about whether coal has a place in a balanced, diverse energy policy. I have no doubt that it has, and I think that the Minister believes that coal has a future. Put bluntly, coal is the only source of energy that has the flexibility to meet the peaks and troughs of energy demand.

The question then arises do we want indigenous British coal or imported coal at a cheaper price? If we are interested in long-term solutions, we need to maintain our coal industry for reasons of security of supply. In fairness to UK Coal and to the men who work for that organisation, costs are coming down. Project 105 has been difficult but we are achieving closer parity between the costs of imported coal and home coal. Of course, the market is cyclical, and at the moment, we have a relatively strong pound. Things will change, but if we decide that we need a coal industry, we must support it.

The Minister has worked extremely hard in Europe to develop proposals for an investment aid scheme. That is an important step forward because it will allow investment in the future. There has been consultation on the scale and scope of that proposal. I hope the Minister will listen to the responses to the consultation and deepen and widen the scheme, because the total quantum currently envisaged is insufficient, as is the amount available for each pit.

David Taylor: Is not the gap between the cost of imported coal and UK coal wafer thin—a gap that can be bridged at relatively little cost to the Exchequer? Is it not the case that, during the past two and a half years, the average UK production cost per tonne has been about £33, whereas the average cost of imported coal has been about £30 per tonne? Would it not be astonishingly short-sighted to let an industry collapse for want of such a small sum?

Paddy Tipping: I am sure that the Government are aware of that argument. That is why they have stepped in to support British Energy at a cost of £650 million, with progressive annual payments of £150 million to £200 million. They believe in long-term security, which is what the investment package from Europe is all about.

The Minister needs to do two things. First, he needs to ensure that the package is ready to go at the beginning of 2003—not confirming the arrangements until later in the year simply will not do. He also needs to look further at the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) made about long-term borrowing against short-term contracts. Europe will provide 30 per cent. grant in some cases, but the company will have to raise 70 per cent. from the private sector. I have seen advice, as I guess the Minister has, that suggests that the Government could loan the other 70 per cent., provided that they did so at commercial rates. We might need to examine that proposition, because I do not believe that the market and the banking sector will provide the other 70 per cent.

The Government have, of course, given the coal industry aid over the past three years, including £150 million under the existing coal operating aid scheme. UK Coal's problem is that it has had its perceived "share" of the money. Its funding is capped at £75 million, but it has made bids to the Government for £137 million. I simply do not believe that the new investment package will make a difference on its own. I know that the Minister has listened to discussions about rolling the coal operating aid scheme out further. It will probably have to finish at the end of the month, and I suspect that it could operate until the end of the year. I hope that the Minister will look at that. If the Government seriously want to keep the coal industry going, they must lift the cap from £75 million to £137 million. That would cost £60 million, for which we would get a commitment from UK Coal—it has already made this commitment to several hon. Members present—to keep collieries open for four more years.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I am following my hon. Friend's speech carefully. The figures that he is using should be compared with the £650 million loan to British Energy. We should also consider the budget for renewables, which will cost £870 million by 2010. We must put those figures side by side. The coal industry is asking for less than £200 million, but the significant funding proposed for British Energy and renewables is far in excess of that.

Paddy Tipping: It is true that renewables have a market advantage—that is why the renewables obligation was set up as it was. The market is already rigged in favour of renewables.

As hon. Members have said, the £650 million for British Energy is simply astonishing. I accept that it is a loan, but we are talking about the possibility of a Government grant of £150 million to £200 million over 10 years. That takes some explaining in coalfield communities in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire. I ask the Minister for a commitment simply to look again at whether the current coal operating aid scheme can be rolled forward, and at whether the cap on UK Coal can be lifted to allow an extra £60 million into the coal industry. I believe that UK Coal will honour its commitment to keep all UK collieries open for a further four years. I say that in the secure knowledge that it has honoured such commitments in the past at Clipstone and Ellington.

I have not spoken about the environmental pressures on the coal industry, but in the long term, they will be the force that sounds its death knell. I ask the Minister to work closely with ministerial colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and with the Environment Agency in respect of European legislation such as the large plant directive, which is now on stream. I simply point out that advances in reducing emission levels have been made on the backs of the coal industry and the people who live and work in coalfield communities. If further limits on emissions are needed, other sectors should be considered—for example, the transport sector, which has contributed nothing—rather than the coal industry.

The men who work in British collieries are the most efficient miners in Europe. They can face tough decisions—after all, they lived with the consequences of tough decisions for many years. However, what they, the coal industry and the wider energy sector, find most difficult is uncertainty, which can be dysfunctional and can lead to the postponement of decisions. Financial decisions necessary for the longer term will simply not be made in the short term on the back of short-term contracts. The essential test of the forthcoming energy White Paper will be whether it injects a sense of direction into our energy policy.

Mr. Clapham: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the industry is to be tied to short-term contracts, it could result in a change in the method of working coal? That would add to the cost, as bringing the revenue stream on more quickly would entail moving from retreat mining to advance mining. That, in turn, would result in collieries being closed sooner.

Paddy Tipping: That is exactly right. One of the things that UK Coal is exploring is how to reduce costs. Retreat mining needs long-term investment for greater long-term profit. Advance mining means that short-term decisions are made because of the need for profit. My point is that because of uncertainty in the market, long-term decisions are being postponed. An energy policy is needed now. It should be published very soon to ensure that coal has a real stake, a real place, in an energy policy that is diverse, balanced and secure for all communities.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I remind hon. Members that this is a 90-minute debate. The convention is that the Chair is required to commence the winding-up speeches of the three Front Bench spokesmen 30 minutes before the conclusion of the debate. That leaves those seeking to make a contribution about 38 minutes. Protocol advises Members to forewarn the Deputy Speaker that they intend to try to catch his eye. I have received five requests this morning, so we do not have much time. I ask those who are called to be pertinent and brief and to try to resist taking interventions, which, so far, have been far too frequent. I call the hon. Member for Selby.

11.22 am

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): It gives me great pleasure to take part in this debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on

[Mr. John Grogan]

securing it. He referred to last week's historic announcement on British Energy. He knows that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry held a briefing for Back Benchers after that statement. I shall not breath a word of what was said at that briefing, but I shall paint a picture. It was held in Room almost as big as this Chamber, but there were only three parliamentary private secretaries, one distinguished Government Whip, my hon. Friend and myself present. There were no Members representing nuclear constituencies in sight. That is because all their problems have been solved—Christmas has come early for them, and there is nothing much to do for the next 10 years. That is not true about the coal industry. We are appealing for a degree of balance and even-handedness and a sense that justice has been done.

I want to reinforce the case for lifting the cap on UK Coal. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) said, we have 28 days to save the critical mass of the industry—that is 28 days before the scheme runs out of operating aid. We have 28 days to lift the cap on UK Coal, which would give it another £60 million to support the pits.

Ministers and officials have raised three objections, questioning whether that can be done. One objection centres on whether Europe would allow it. Hon. Members might remember that the same sorts of objections were raised when we instituted the scheme in the first place. Many civil servants argued that Europe would not allow the scheme, that we were starting too late and we should have started in 1993 if we wanted to start at all, but those objections were overcome. I rang the European Commission yesterday. I was told that, except for Christmas day and Boxing day, someone would be standing by the telephone, and the Commission would be prepared to entertain an application to lift the cap, although, obviously, it would not give a decision on that to me, and I was told that arguments would have to be made about changed circumstances.

I remind hon. Members that the cap of £75 million on UK Coal was instituted when the cap on the overall scheme was £120 million. Since then, the cap on the overall scheme has been lifted to £170 million, while no adjustment has been made to the cap of £75 million on UK Coal. The scheme has been extended for a further six months, so one could argue that the figure of £75 million was time specific to the cap of £120 million. There are therefore good arguments for raising it.

The second argument relates to what UK Coal will do in response to the lifting of the cap. The Government should ask UK Coal about that. As the hon. Member for Sherwood said, we have received assurances from the senior managers of UK Coal that in return for lifting the cap, the future of the three collieries under threat would be secure for four years, and Selby would be seen through until spring 2004. That is extremely important if we are to make effective the work of the Selby taskforce in retraining people and finding them new jobs.

The third question raised is about money. Sixty million pounds is a significant sum, but if the investment aid scheme is to mean anything, one must have something in which to invest—for example, places such as Daw Mill. It is essential that in the next few weeks we do everything possible to lift that cap. I do not think that Europe would be a barrier to that.

Moving on swiftly to the situation in Selby, even if the cap is lifted, £60 million will not save the Selby coalfield. However, it will ensure that its life is prolonged until spring 2004. We in Selby have had some good news in the past week. AES Drax, which owns Drax power station to which most of Selby's coal is delivered, has reached a six-month standstill agreement with its banks and will continue to take Selby coal at the price agreed for those six months. That is encouraging news for the Selby coalfield, and I pay tribute to the management of UK Coal and AES Drax for continuing to talk to each other during the past weeks. A worse situation could easily have developed, leading to Selby coalfield closing very precipitately.

Three things are on the minds of men in Selby coalfield, which they tell me about most forcibly. One is a real hunger for training and retraining. Some have already started: 50 men have started further education courses, and many others have had interviews and are making plans. It is essential that the Government respond to the request of the Selby taskforce for various pots of money as quickly as possible. That would, for example, allow for the day release of miners.

The second factor high on the agenda of Selby miners, particularly the younger ones—the average age of the men in the Selby coalfield is 45—is the chance of working elsewhere. The new National Union of Mineworkers leadership should be congratulated on beginning to talk about flexible working at Kellington and Rossington. I know that it is a controversial subject and that agreement has not been reached, but I am told that there is potential for extra weekly payments of £200 a man if agreement can be reached. Many Selby miners hope that there is a future for them at Kellington.

The third thing on the minds of Selby miners is that ordinary miners are not entitled to a full pension at 50 if they are made redundant, whereas pit deputies are. That is a source of continuing injustice, which I have discussed with the Minister before.

In summary, we must make every effort in the next few days throughout the coalfields of Great Britain to persuade the Government to apply to Europe to lift the cap. That would give a breathing space to the industry and enable us to maintain a viable industry so that there is something on which to build when investment aid begins next year. December will be the decision month for the future of the British coal industry.

11.29 am

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on making the case for coal. Perhaps there should have been a question mark at the end of the title of the debate—if only the Table Office would allow it. We have been here many times before. The Government have dramatically changed their position from that of a year ago, when they said that they were not minded to continue with any form of state aid. I am glad that we won that argument as a result of pressure from coalfield Members of Parliament, the industry and the Coalfield Communities Campaign. We should be talking about

details, but yet again, as the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) said, we are talking about the whole future of the industry.

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): May I correct the hon. Gentleman? He said that a year ago we had no intention of doing anything to support the industry. I assure him that since I came into this job I have never said that.

Adam Price: I am, as always, grateful for the Minister's support. We hope to hear more in that vein when he winds up the debate.

Yet again, we are not talking about 28 days to lift the cap, but 28 days to save the British coal industry. Why is that industry important? As we have heard, the European Commission's Green Paper on energy said that EU coal is vital to security of supply. As for economic arguments, the coal industry supports employment in some of the most disadvantaged communities across the length and breadth of the UK, including 2,000 people directly employed in Wales. As it stands, the package is inadequate—indeed, some industry insiders say that it is an insult to the industry. In the words of the Coalfield Communities Campaign,

"The UK coal industry faces the threat of wholesale closures. Without action from the Government, most of the remaining pits will close within the next 12 months or so—abandoning access to at least 20 years of reserves."

The declining amount of aid year on year is unacceptable. The upper limit of £20 million and lower limit of £1 million offers too little for large companies and, in effect, excludes small mines that are vitally important in terms of anthracite coalfields. The Government's aid proposals focus exclusively on investment aid, but EU rules allow investment aid, operating aid and closure aid. The Welsh Office's 1998 document, "The Future for Welsh Coal", argued that a key principle was to secure a level playing field for the British coal industry. If we are to achieve that, we need the flexibility to ensure that operating aid, closure aid and investment aid are available for our mines.

Apart from the wider debate, there is specific concern about Betws colliery in my constituency, which, like other anthracite producers—including Aberpergwm in the constituency of the new Secretary of State for Wales—will be excluded under the Government's proposals because it produces anthracite for the domestic fuel market. Why is it excluded? What is more sustainable than producing local clean coal for the local domestic fuel consumption market? That anomaly must be addressed. There is no sense in importing Chinese anthracite into west Wales when we have productive mines in which productivity has risen enormously over the past 10 years against the backdrop of difficult times for the British coal industry.

The Government must clarify their energy policy. The new Secretary of State for Wales, the former Minister for Energy and Competitiveness, recently said in Wales that the future of the Welsh coal industry was secure. I should like to know on what basis he made that statement. Apparently he has the ear of the Prime Minister, so perhaps he knows things that no one in this Chamber knows. He says that he is against nuclear energy and wants a future for coal and renewables, and I wholeheartedly support him in that, but we need clarity from the Government. We need them to give a commitment that coal has a role to play in future energy strategy. We need an improved aid package that focuses on opportunity, not restriction. Above all, we need a far more flexible approach if the Government are to do what they said all along that they wanted to do—to support the future of the British coal industry.

11.33 am

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on securing the debate. I thank the Minister for agreeing at short notice to meet a couple of weeks ago a delegation from every union with members at Harworth colliery. He will be pleased to know that since then, output at Harworth has hit record levels. Indeed, according to the latest figures I have, it was the best within UK Coal—Yet UK Coal says that Harworth is not productive. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood mentioned project 105 and the unit price at UK Coal. The figure last week for Harworth was 83. That figure is matched by some of the surrounding collieries—in fact, some of them scored less than that. There is no question but that there has been efficient and improved production across British coalfields in recent times.

The issue of nuclear industries and waste has been raised. I strongly disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan), who said that it was like Christmas for the nuclear industry constituencies. We have touched only the tip of the iceberg of the problems of nuclear waste and nuclear reprocessing. The long-term costs to the taxpayer, the Exchequer and the country are only just beginning to be revealed. I have not been anything other than supportive of the nuclear industry—as in solar energy and other sectors, I would like to see the industry developed—but I have always argued for a balance and a security of supply across all sectors.

The sort of subsidy that has been handed out to the nuclear industry will be greatly increased in forthcoming years—I am talking about the real costs and real subsidies, over not only the next two or three years, but the next 30, 40 or 50 years. We can compare the sums involved with the minute amount of money—most estimates put the figure at about £100 million or £150 million—required to maintain the UK coal industry at its current levels. That sum would be a drop in the ocean compared with the cost of the nuclear industry. Is this the end of subsidy of the nuclear industry, or is there more round the corner? How can we possibly not compare the modest amount that the coal industry requires with the enormous amount that the nuclear industry requires?

In my constituency this week, Cottam power station unveiled its new advanced technology, similar to that found at West Burton, which is also in my constituency. I visit both power stations regularly and I invite the Minister to join me. Those power stations are investing for the future. As energy suppliers, they see the future, but where will they get their energy supplies from?

Just after I met with the Minister, a delegation travelled to Brussels to meet Christian Cleutinx, the head of the coal unit within the European Union. We questioned him about operating aid, investment aid and the future of the industry. Some of his answers were

[John Mann]

convincing: there is no question but that there is sufficient flexibility within the existing rules to allow the UK coal industry as it exists at the moment to be maintained. He left us in no doubt whatever about that, but I challenge the European Union on another issue. As a key objective, the European Union wants to have a stake in the future of every other sector of industry—that is almost its ethos. In the coal sector, there is a degree of madness and convenient short-termism. We in this country have the opportunity to absolve ourselves from that.

Is it not the case that, as Mr. Cleutinx outlined, the European Union can provide the sort of subsidies that we require, should we apply for them? How much coal will be produced in the UK in 2020? The issue is far bigger than UK Coal plc. Frankly, I do not give a damn who runs the coal industry, so long as they run it well. I want this country to have the security of supply that it will need in 20, 30 or 40 years.

In 2020 or 2030, will we be reliant on Chinese coal and Russian gas for British energy needs? If so, what are the security implications for this country? That is the nub of the question. Of course, jobs are an issue—I have as many working miners in my constituency as any other hon. Member—but the overall issue is far bigger than that: it is about British national security. Are we going to leave ourselves open to the political intrigues of whatever regimes or Governments are running China, Kazakhstan and Russia in 20 years' time? Will they be determining what energy we have in this country? That is not in our economic interests, nor is it in the interests of national security.

Short-term, modest assistance to the coal industry would allow us to expand the seams at Harworth to make 30 years-worth of coal available—with a similar amount in other collieries. That would mean that we would still have British coal going into our power stations in 20 years' time.

11.40 am

Mr. Denis Murphy (Wansbeck): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on securing this timely debate.

Each colliery in UK Coal's portfolio has vast reserves of coal, which is the reason why the collieries have survived. They were the crème de la crème of the former British Coal, and billions of pounds of public money were invested in them prior to privatisation to make them world-class operations. However, UK Coal has stated openly and honestly that it cannot run the industry at its current size. It has announced the closure of Selby, and three other major collieries—Harworth, Maltby and Daw Mill—are under review. As I understand the position, such is the fragile state of the company that each individual unit is under review.

I am not attacking UK Coal. It is in a difficult situation. It is a plc and under pressure from shareholders to return profits; to that end it must make commercial decisions. However, its decisions are having a detrimental effect on the United Kingdom's energy reserves, and that cannot be right. Each and every remaining colliery is at risk. A major geological or technical problem can mean immediate closure, with the company unable in the short term to sustain such a financial loss.

The coal industry needs a period of stability. My hon. Friend the Minister has faced—and is, I hope, overcoming—a major crisis in the nuclear industry. Many argue that the crisis has been created by the wholesale price under NETA—the new electricity trading arrangement—falling by some 36 per cent., which makes it difficult for companies to compete in an open market. The Government have, rightly, intervened with a massive injection of public money, and British Energy has appointed a new chairman. The company remains a plc, but the Government's package will cut its costs, deal with its liabilities and raise cash. One industry analyst said:

"The key point is the Government now owns 65 per cent. of British Energy's cash flow. That is 65 per cent. of the economic value of the company and when you look at the appointment of Adrian Montague as chairman it is clear the Government is calling all the shots."

What works for British Energy should work for the British mining industry. Such a deal would keep Selby mining coal for many years to come, and it would permanently protect redundancy payments and pension rights. It cannot be right to force men into making decisions on their future or to sterilise millions of tonnes of coal by introducing an arbitrary cut-off date to qualify for payments.

The people who mine Britain's coal deserve the very best that the nation can afford. Investing in a new company would allow the Coal Authority some influence on the way in which coal is mined and on preventing the sterilisation of the nation's vast reserves. By extending operating aid and introducing a more generous investment regime, we could assist the mining industry, but that would be like applying sticking plasters when major surgery is required.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister genuinely wants to help the mining industry. He understands its strategic value, and the important role that the pit plays in mining communities. I therefore urge him to use the example of British Energy to restructure the British mining industry completely. For a fraction of the cost, we can retain the mining industry at its present size for many years to come.

11.44 am

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on securing the debate and running through a detailed analysis of where the industry stands today.

I also pay tribute to the Minister. He has done an awful lot of work and produced an awful lot of cash to help save what is left of the British deep-mined coal industry. That should not be overlooked. He has done a lot of hard work to ensure that we are where we are today, but there is still a long way to go.

Last week on the Floor of the House, we saw the Government rescue a botched privatisation by the Tories by stepping in to rescue British Energy, which supplies nuclear energy. We already knew that they had advanced a £650 million loan, but a further £150 million to £200 million a year for up to 10 years is a substantial amount of public funding. Media pundits added up the whole deal, which comes to about £3 billion over 10 years—I do not know how they reached that figure, but

you know what the media are like, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Even if the true figure is only half that amount, it is still a huge sum.

I do not have a big problem with the Government's rescue of the nuclear industry, because they have a duty to maintain the security and diversity of supply in this country. However, I object to the hoops that the coal industry has to jump through to qualify for relatively small amounts of money compared to the sums available for the nuclear industry. The Government must ensure the security of supply, and to do so they must keep their eye on diversity. British deep-mined coal has a big role to play in providing security of supply, and it should not be cast aside.

Some people think that the British deep-mined coal industry should be left to wither and that it is safe to import coal from wherever we can get it. They think that the world markets will stay low for ever and that there will never be political problems in the countries from which coal now comes—my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) alluded to that. They also believe that our gas supplies will be safe in the near future, given the countries from which we will be importing it in 15 to 20 years' time. I do not share that view and think it dangerous to go down that road.

The Government are right to underpin the nuclear industry. They also underpin, with an obligation, renewables, which is right because we need to be aware of the environmental consequences of burning coal in an unclean way. That is a problem that we need to face up to, and my view is that the Government should start pouring money into burning British deep-mined coal via an obligation to the renewables obligation.

David Taylor: It is certainly true that over the next 10 years £2 billion or more is to be put into trolleys and pushed towards the nuclear industry. Is my hon. Friend disappointed that the Department of Trade and Industry is suggesting a cap of £5,000 per job on aid to the coal industry, which at a typical pit would amount to perhaps £2.5 million? That is nowhere near enough.

Mr. Hughes: I agree. That is why I am arguing that it is high time the Government recognised the role of British deep-mine coal in security of supply and the provision of diversity. It is time that the Government underpinned the coal industry with resources on the same scale as those they will invest in renewables and British Energy over the next 10 years. The Government must ensure that when people flick the switch, the lights go on. They can do so only by underpinning a percentage of our energy supply. The way to achieve it is to underpin nuclear, underpin British deep-mine coal and underpin the renewables obligation.

Coal provides an energy source that we know is available and we know how to exploit. We also know that it is reliable and that it will last for many years to come. Yes, we need to start burning coal cleanly, but it is time that the Government gave proper consideration to underpinning the industry to provide the security and diversity that we need.

11.50 am

Mr. Bill O'Brien: I shall refer to the possible investment in a scheme for the coal industry mentioned in a recent consultative document issued by the Department of Trade and Industry. I submitted a response to the Minister and I invite him to reflect further on it.

We are all arguing in favour of supporting the mining industry. That requires a secure market for coal, and that is a possibility because some power stations are fitted with flue gas disposal systems. If power stations such as Drax and others fitted with that equipment burned to capacity, it would help the industry substantially. Power stations without the equipment could be encouraged to fit it, burn coal smokelessly and reduce the amount of sulphur emitted into the atmosphere. A scheme to do so is already there; it is simply a question of encouraging the power stations to introduce flue gas desulphurisation. Failure to encourage further such installations will make it difficult for the coal industry to obtain venture capital.

We are closing down mines that are capable of becoming viable in the not-too-distant future. People are not investing in new reserves because of the uncertainty in the market. We should recall the scheme offered to the nuclear industry in the first instance—when we had the non-fossil fuel obligation—which was not a charge on the Treasury because it was passed on to consumers. We could work out a similar scheme that would benefit the coal mining and electricity generation industries. The Royal Academy of Engineering and the Lattice Group plc are forecasting higher gas prices, so becoming more dependent on gas generation would have an impact on our local industries and domestic consumers.

The Minister should know that schemes could be introduced—I would be happy to discuss them in more detail—to provide a secure market for coal, to help the electricity generation industry to burn coal and to meet the standards imposed by European directives. That could be done with no real call on the Treasury to contribute. It is a matter of introducing a formula, working out a strategy with the coal and electricity producers, and ensuring that we obtain the proposals for which all hon. Members who have spoken in favour of the coal industry are pressing. That would enable the industry to prosper, and we would not depend on imports of gas, oil or coal.

I plead with my hon. Friend the Minister to give us, in the short time that is available, an opportunity to present those schemes on behalf of the mining and electricity generation industries, so that we can go forward with a substantial programme. We must accept that the energy industry is in a mess. We are therefore obliged to try to get the industry out of that mess, and coal could play a major part in solving the problem.

11.55 am

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I have listened to many hon. Members who obviously know much more than me about the coal industry. The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) spoke about the need for a strategy, which is a key point. We need a clear strategy for our energy policy, be it on coal or other forms of energy.

It is difficult to be as positive and optimistic about the coal industry as one would like. As with any other industry, we would like to be able to give help, as has been given in the past. However, it is rather unfortunate

[Brian Cotter]

that the Government have given so much help to nuclear power and British Energy. As has been said, considerable amounts are being given, but it is likely that those amounts will be increasingly a drain on our resources. As the hon. Member for Normanton said, we need a strategy to ensure that we are not just investing money in one direction and neglecting other forms of energy.

We must help the coal industry in any way that we can, as with any other industry. There is no question but that help should be provided for research and development with regard to cleaner forms of coal and productivity measures. That is discussed a lot in the paper, and the coal industry has taken tremendous steps forward in that direction. However, as those of us who have worked in the industry as opposed to the services know—I can say this modestly as I have worked in it all my life—the pressure to improve productivity is there all the time, year on year. The Government need to help in any way possible, whether by pulling together both sides of the industry, if that is appropriate, or through research and development and other ways of helping with the productivity of the industry.

I have to draw the unfortunate conclusion that such measures should be supported, but we cannot continue to support operating costs in any significant way. In the past, there have been many initiatives in that direction, but we must now develop a strategy that makes the industry sustainable and creates a future for energy provision in this country.

It is regrettable that there are to be, and have been, closures. We certainly support all that can be done to help communities affected by closures.

David Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether the Liberal Democrat policy is to accelerate the closure of the British coal industry?

Brian Cotter: No, certainly not. As I said, we need a proper strategy on energy policy. In their economic policy, the Government—not necessarily the Minister here—must address certain issues related to the exchange rate. Their policy has not helped in obtaining the exchange rate needed for businesses in the United Kingdom to export and to cope with imports. I could speak at length, although I will not, on the subject of the euro and exchange rates.

If we cast our minds back to November 1997, we felt strongly that a greater commitment to the idea of the euro would have helped to keep the exchange rate down. Hon. Members may disagree with that—we are all entitled to our views—but the exchange rate is an important issue.

We are not saying that closures should be accelerated or that the coal industry should be wound down. We are supportive of that industry, and of policies on productivity measures, cleaner coal and the exchange rate.

John Mann: Are you saying to workers at Harworth colliery—

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I am not saying anything at all.

John Mann: Sorry. Is the hon. Gentleman saying to workers at Harworth colliery, who have been threatened with the closure of the colliery by the employer, that they will have to wait for Britain to join the euro, or does he support operating aid going to that colliery in the next few months to keep it open?

Brian Cotter: No. The hon. Gentleman is looking for a solution to be produced today, and he is right to do that. I must also address why we are in our current position. I am not proposing an instant solution for tomorrow, but I seek a strategy from the Government—I have sought such a strategy for a long time—that would put us in a better position. That is all I am saying to the hon. Gentleman.

If the European Community can be prevailed on to provide assistance—that has been discussed and seems possible—that should be the route forward. We will back any significant help to the industry that we can get. However, we cannot go down the route taken by British Energy of pumping in more and more money. I look to the Government to produce a strategy that takes into account the whole of the industry, including investment in renewables and investment for environmental reasons. More should have been done in those areas in the past.

I bow to hon. Members here who know much more about coal mining than I do. I have been down a coal mine once, and that is all. I bow to them in that respect, but wonder whether more could not have been done in the past to help produce cleaner coal to ensure that we did not face our current problems.

I hope that the Minister will reply on the coal industry specifically and, more generally, on a clear strategy for energy in the UK. Such a strategy should give stability and a future for people in the industry, and should enable them to see the direction in which the Government are going. At present, that direction is not clear. The Government have distorted the market, particularly by helping British Energy.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose—*

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk) *rose—*

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I appreciate that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) represents a mining constituency, but he did not enter the Chamber until the debate had been running for an hour. I call Mr. Bellingham.

Mr. Bellingham *rose—*

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Gale. Is it a new rule of Parliament that if someone is not in the Chamber when a debate begins, they cannot be called? Every day in the House of Commons, people wander in and out of debates and take part in them. I have been busy in Parliament on other business and, to be frank, the rule

that has just been announced is wrong in principle. It is not in "Erskine May" and, if applied generally, many people—especially Privy Councillors—could not speak.

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's difficulty in trying to be in two places at once, but hon. Members are now making their winding-up speeches.

Mr. Skinner: What about the ruling?

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Gale. I asked you whether you would apply that ruling generally? I will ask the Speaker what he thinks.

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that other hon. Members are unlikely to be called when the debate has entered the winding-up period. If he catches the eye of the Minister or a Front-Bench spokesman, he will be able to intervene if he so wishes. However, as a matter of courtesy, custom and practice, Members who wish to take part in debates usually notify the Chairman first, and then do other Members the courtesy of listening to the debate before they seek to intervene.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Gale. You are taking a new tack. You are now saying that I was not here before. In fact, I stood up before the Liberal spokesman got to his feet, as the Clerk knows, but I was not called. I am not complaining, but it is not true to say that I was not here before then. The Liberal spokesman had not stood up at that point. As for the subsidies about which the Liberals are complaining, why do the Liberal Democrats take subsidies in the form of Short money? Why cannot the coal industry receive some?

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is merely detaining the Chamber and delaying the debate.

12.6 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I shall try to be brief, as the more time the Minister has, the more time there will be for interventions from various hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I also wish to pass on the apologies of the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), who is the Conservative spokesman on energy. He is currently visiting oil rigs off the coast of Aberdeen.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on securing the debate. I have great admiration for his efforts in fighting for his constituency and his community, as I do for the efforts made by the hon. Members for Selby (Mr. Grogan), for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price), for Bassetlaw (John Mann), for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) and for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) in fighting for theirs. They are right that our miners are not only the hardest working miners in Europe, but are, without doubt, the most productive. They want some clarity and certainty about the future, for which the forthcoming White Paper will be pivotal.

The year 2001 was cathartic for the United Kingdom coal industry; it was the first year in our industrial history in which we imported more than 50 per cent. of our total coal requirements. In 2001, imports exceeded domestic production. I hope that, in the White Paper, the Minister will discuss the 33 per cent. of electricity that is generated by coal and its future. I also hope that he discusses the 51 per cent. coal imports and what will happen to that. The White Paper needs to make very clear statements about the future as the Government see it, and what the Government want to happen.

Hon. Members have asked what formal risk assessment had been made of the potential for disruption to the coal supply to the UK. Before 11 September 2001, the accepted wisdom in the European Union was that the risks of disruption to the supply were minimal, such was the geopolitical diversity of coal supplies. Will the Minister still say whether this is the case, or will it be addressed in the forthcoming White Paper?

Several Members rightly touched on the coal aid operating scheme extension, which expires in 28 days, and almost every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate asked about the new investment aid scheme. In July this year, the Minister announced the start of a full consultation on the new scheme to help the UK coal industry to compete in the global energy market. The consultation will examine several key areas, not least whether the coal industry needs investment aid, whether the safeguarding or creation of jobs should form the basis of a scheme, which mining projects would qualify for aid and how to judge the quality of different mines. Will the Minister comment on how that consultation is going?

Mr. Bill O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman referred to the consultative document issued by the Department of Trade and Industry. Will he explain what the Conservative party has contributed to it?

Mr. Bellingham: I shall discuss that with my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate, and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman to let him know.

Mr. O'Brien: Do I take it that the Opposition spokesman has come to the debate without any information on the document on future investment in the coal industry? Has he come unprepared to make any contribution about it?

Mr. Bellingham: The hon. Gentleman is being a bit unfair, as I have the document with me. I am not dealing with it; my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate is, and I will let the hon. Gentleman know exactly what he has done.

Several hon. Members have made clear their views that the sums involved in extension of the scheme are minor compared with the money that has gone into British Energy. I hope that the Minister will think about that. It is vital that there be no hiatus after 1 January. We should now know how much money will be forthcoming.

The hon. Member for Selby spoke movingly about the impact of the local pit's closure on his constituency. He mentioned what is being done with the multi-agency

[Mr. Bellingham]

taskforce headed by Lord Haskins. We welcome the £1.5 million funding for it. Obviously the terms of reference are ambitious, but we especially welcome the requirement to galvanise existing resources and identify new opportunities for support from Government and European sources. The taskforce was to make its recommendations by 20 October 2002. What news is there of those recommendations?

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) made a vital point about the environment. The debate on cleaner fossil-fuel technology is crucial to the future of coal-fired power stations. Huge progress has been made on sulphur dioxide and NOx emissions. He mentioned that the flue gas desulphurisation scheme—FGD—is making progress. It removes a staggering 90 per cent. of SO2 emissions but only two power stations have FGD in place, including AES Drax Power.

The scheme costs about £30 million a year to operate, and it strikes me that most UK power stations are avoiding that cost. Following the standstill agreement that AES Drax Power secured with its banks and bond holders, it is generating at well below capacity. We are in a ridiculous situation whereby less coal is burned at Drax, which has that extremely environmentally-friendly system in place, but more imported coal is burned elsewhere, which harms the environment.

Will the Minister comment on the work on CO2 emissions? A great deal of research and development is being focused on cleaner coal technologies. Much of that work is on the reduction of CO2 for improved boiler efficiency. He recently announced that the case for supporting a cleaner coal technologies demonstration plant would be made. What progress has been made on the subject?

A great deal of uncertainty faces the industry, some of which is beyond the Minister's control. However, a lot of it is not. We need clarity and a new sense of purpose from the Department of Trade and Industry, because we are at a critical moment. We need to know exactly what will happen after 1 January, and we need a clear idea of what will go into the White Paper. I look forward to his response.

12.14 pm

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on securing the debate. I will try to answer as many points as possible and I will write to those hon. Members whose points I do not answer.

For reasons that have been touched on, the debate is very timely. On the other hand, it is slightly premature because many of the wider issues that we have discussed will form the substance of the White Paper. None the less, I recognise the urgency with which these matters are viewed in some quarters.

It is clear from a lot of what has been said that, even after five years of Labour government, much of our time is still taken up with dealing with the follies of the 1990s. That is particularly true of the ideological privatisations that took place, and I would categorise the privatisation of the nuclear and the coal industries as ideological.

I should say something about the analogies that have been made with the nuclear industry. I do not think that it is good for the debate to go down that road. I am sometimes characterised as being pro-nuclear or pro-renewables and I hope that I am sometimes characterised as being pro-coal. However, I would say that I am pro a balanced energy mix. It is a mistake to say that someone who is for one form of energy is against another; that is a divisive argument.

On British Energy, there are two reasons why we have taken the steps announced in recent months—security of supply and the need to guarantee the safe operation of nuclear power stations. I do not think that anyone in the Chamber would oppose either of those objectives, and I want to add three subsidiary motivations. One is the need to maintain an indigenous energy source, and, again, I do not think that anyone present would disagree with that. Secondly, whatever else nuclear energy might be, it is non-carbon, which is crucial to our environmental obligations. Thirdly, it would cost more to shut nuclear power stations than it does to keep them open. There is an interesting historic argument about whether we should have nuclear power, but we must address the objective circumstances. In that context, it is misleading, mischievous and, no doubt, tempting to draw a comparison between coal and nuclear power. From what I have said, however, people will understand that we have done the right thing and that not one penny would have been released for coal or anything else if we had done something different. Indeed, we would have to spend more on mopping up the nuclear industry than we would on sustaining it. It does not, therefore, make for a good analogy, however superficially attractive it might be.

The thrust of many of the speeches this morning, and perhaps the reason for the debate's timing, is that there are 28 days to go, UK Coal is in trouble and three pits are threatened. It seems that all we have to do is pick up the phone to Brussels, get the nod and write a cheque to UK Coal for another £60 million. I know that those of my hon. Friends who are making that case are being disingenuous and I know that they know they are being disingenuous.

David Taylor: Let me say to my hon. Friend in all comradeliness that the issue is much wider than the future of UK Coal—it is about the future of the British mining industry. The two are distinct.

Mr. Wilson: I have no intention of avoiding the wider question, but I have said—quite accurately, I think—that the nub of the debate is the short-term issues and the prospects for three pits, which my hon. Friends have said are under threat. The point that I made at the outset is valid, and some of the issues are very much tied up with the White Paper. No one has suggested that the next 28 days will determine the wider issues, but there are clearly more pressing short-term concerns, which I am as anxious as anyone to address. That is why I took slight exception when the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) said that someone had suggested a year ago, or at some point since I came to this job, that there would be no more support for the coal industry. I certainly never said that. In fact, virtually every working day during the past 15 months or so, I have been involved in one way or

another in trying to ensure that support for the coal industry continues wherever it is helpful, first under the operating scheme and, now, under an investment aid scheme. Since 1997, the Government have put a lot of money into the coal industry. They have put more than £160 million into the operating aid scheme and have moved on, against considerable odds, to gain approval in Europe for an investment aid scheme.

Adam Price: No one doubts the Minister's personal commitment to the coal industry, but I recall its being said that there were "no current plans" to continue the operating aid scheme, which is vital to my constituency.

Mr. Wilson: Perhaps it is a translation problem; things can be said much more subtly in Gaelic, as I am sure they can in Welsh. "No current plans" is parliamentary terminology for "It's on its way, but it's not there yet." Of course, at that time, we probably had not received approval from Brussels for an investment aid scheme, whereas we now have. There has been a continuum of our putting ourselves in a position to support the coal industry.

Insufficient attention is paid to the coal industry in the wider energy debate. Given that coal accounts for more than a third of our electricity generation—more than any other energy source—it is remarkable that its contribution to our energy mix is not discussed more often and in more positive terms. That is why I believe that we need a coal industry and why I believe that, within the bounds of what is possible, we should continue to ensure that we have a healthy deep-mined coal industry in the United Kingdom. It is disingenuous to suggest that there are any easy options, especially in the next few weeks, such as extending the operating aid scheme instead of adopting the investment aid scheme. Hitherto, everyone has agreed that we should pursue the latter route rather than sustaining non-viable operations any longer.

I am no uncritical admirer of the market that has been created in electricity, and I sometimes wonder what weighed on my predecessors' minds in introducing certain measures, but whenever I ask that question, I am told that their primary consideration was to create a level playing field for coal. How we got to a situation in which the level playing field for coal further exacerbated the problems of the UK coal industry is a mystery that I have not got to the bottom of yet. I recognise that the current problems in the market are creating further problems for all generators other than renewables and, therefore, for all suppliers to those generators.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister, like me, think that the subsidy is okay? The farmers get it, the Liberal party gets it, nuclear power gets it and God knows who else gets it. What worries me is that if the pits remain in private hands, the people who own them will eventually shut them on the basis of profit and loss. This Government must deal with the real question; whether, at this late stage, when there are only a handful of pits left, we save them permanently by taking them back into public ownership, so that we do not have to deal with the restraints of the common market, subsidies and the rest. We can do it because we believe in it as a matter of principle. At some point, the Government will have to wrestle with the problem of taking them back. Instead of handing out the money, we can buy them for a song.

Mr. Wilson: Even I do not agree with all of that. It is not productive to keep pits, or any business, going under public ownership irrespective of the cost. However, it is true that if a pit's current operator wishes to close it, the pit reverts to the Coal Authority, and it is possible in some circumstances for somebody else to take over its running. That is what happened to the Hatfield colliery in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes).

In answer to the Opposition spokesman, the future of the industry is tied up with clean coal technology. Coalfield MPs should not make too much of the damage that has been done by legacy issues arising from other energy sectors. Of course, nuclear power gives rise to huge legacy issues. However, I sometimes sit in halls full of miners who have paid the cost of the coal industry with their health. None of us should rest easy with that legacy. The Government are fulfilling their obligations—in so far as they are capable of being fulfilled—to people who have lost their health and the families of those who have lost their lives in the service of the coal industry.

If the industry has a future, it has to be built on clean coal technology. We are supporting a £17 million programme of research and development and technology transfer for cleaner coal technologies as well as developing a project to support retrofitting a supercritical boiler in an existing power station. I hope that we shall do more to exploit clean technologies and the considerable potential for carbon storage that exists in the North sea.

Reverting for a moment to Hatfield, I was also encouraged to hear that Coalpower Limited has secured 75 per cent. of the financial backing for the construction of a 400 MW integrated gasification combined cycle plan projected to be capable of taking 1 million tonnes of coal a year from Hatfield. It will be of interest to the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr that Progressive Energy Limited is about to seek consent for a 450 MW plant in south Wales, which would use local anthracite. The news is not all gloomy; good things happen where there is new technology and clean coal technology.

UK Coal has not announced an intention to shut any of the pits that have been named today. When I was in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), I met the unions from Harworth. I shall be pleased, after the debate, to meet those who are here from Maltby. We are not in a position to take a decision. UK Coal knows well the work that is going into creating an investment scheme and I should be very disappointed if, at this juncture, the closure of any pit were to be proposed. I said at Harworth that the option existed to get round a table and discuss proposals for a viable future. I know that that has been taken forward. I hope that there is the basis for that kind of discussion at Maltby. I stress again that there has been no announcement of a proposal to close Maltby colliery.

[Mr. Wilson]

I have valued this debate. I acknowledge and share the strength of feeling on the matter. I want to see a continuing role for the UK deep-mined coal industry. Many problems exist, but, because of the history, it is not within the gift of the Government to sort all of them out. I hope that if we work together and proceed with the investment aid scheme and other measures taken to assist the coal industry, when a White Paper is published, there will be a role for coal and for a UK domestic coal industry.

Social Services (Oxfordshire)

12.30 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I welcome the Minister, as I want him to hear me saying something nice before I start the tale of woe about the dreadful situation in Oxfordshire social services. Those of us who were elected in the last Parliament were pleased to see talent rewarded with his appointment to ministerial rank, and we continue to wish him luck. However, I think that the way in which the Government approach the difficult situation facing the most vulnerable people in some of our communities will be a test.

We face serious problems in Oxfordshire, and have done so for many years. When cuts are being made, I think that hon. Members of all political parties see it as a problem. Social care services in Oxfordshire are facing significant cuts this year, and will do so next year. That has been the case ever since I have been a Member of Parliament, as it was before 1997, when the Conservatives were in power, the Minister's party was in opposition and Labour politicians joined me and other Liberal Democrats in condemning the cuts.

The cuts are not the only problem. The other, related problem is the steep rise in council tax that has occurred in Oxfordshire. The county council, led by parties of all political persuasions, has increased council tax way beyond inflation. Council tax is a regressive tax—it hits people who are on fixed incomes, as the elderly often are. No one is happy about the need to raise council tax to reduce the level of cuts. It is one thing to raise council tax to develop new and improved services, but it is even harder to take when it is done merely to reduce cuts.

Given that there are cuts, and that council tax has risen to nearly double figures on average, there are clearly inadequate resources in Oxfordshire social services. My first question to the Minister is whether, in his opinion, that is indeed the case. I want to give him the opportunity to write that question down, because I do not want him to forget it.

I think that the Minister will find my next question easy to answer. Is he happy that Oxfordshire county council is cutting services to the most vulnerable in society? Does he see that as "one of those things" or as a matter of regret, about which something needs to be done? If he sees it as a matter of regret, what does he suggest that the county council do? Does he believe that the county council should, where possible, increase charges to users of social services, under the Government's policy of fair charging? Does he believe that council tax should be increased yet further, into double figures, to avoid some of the cuts? Does he perhaps think that the central Government grant should be increased to deal with core services?

If the Minister claims that the Government are increasing funding to Oxfordshire sufficiently, why does he think that cuts are being made? If he thinks that that is the case, does he know something that the Audit Commission does not know? That is, is he aware of profligacy and waste, or a pile of money lying unspent in Oxfordshire? Does he believe that Oxfordshire county council is now spending too much on social services, and that it would be appropriate for it to reduce the spend? I remind him that the spend in Oxfordshire is £22 million

over Standard Spending Assessment—that is the budgeted spend, before considering overspend. That is on a budget of £105 million. The SSA—the amount that the Government think Oxfordshire should spend—is £85 million, and it is spending 20 per cent. over that.

Is the Minister satisfied that the amount—the SSA—that the Government think Oxfordshire should be spending on vulnerable service users is adequate? If so, does not that mean that he thinks Oxfordshire is overspending, and therefore should cut services? Does he believe that the council tax is the fairest way of raising extra resources, or that, if there is a choice about how one raises resources from taxation, it would be better to use a more progressive tax, with a more easily identifiable link to the ability to pay?

I shall speak for about another 10 minutes, and I hope that the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) will have a minute or so afterwards to put his point of view. I made the point earlier that there is little division between local politicians of all parties about the regrettable nature of the cuts.

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman has mentioned that he wants to invite another hon. Member to participate. He should be aware that in a half-hour debate, that needs the consent of the Minister as well as the initiator of the debate.

Dr. Harris: I was aware of that, as was the hon. Member for Witney. I think that, certainly, if the Minister was not aware, he will perhaps now show his willingness to allow the contribution. I mentioned it to show that I did not object. As I have said, I think that there is cross-party agreement on this matter—and local members of the Labour party are included in that, as they recognise that the situation is intolerable.

The budget for 2002–03 reveals a 4 per cent. increase in SSA—the amount of money that the Government think should be spent. However, there is a 5.8 per cent. increase in the social services budget. That is significantly above SSA, so I do not think that the county council can be accused of not spending all the SSA increase on social services. Despite that, there were £9 million or more of cuts in the budget, to repay a £6.4 million overspend in the previous year, plus another £4 million of cuts. It looks as if £7.5 million of cuts have been made, at the price of extreme pain and hardship to social services users, but there is still a likely overspend of £3 million.

I want to make it clear that cuts mean a lack of service for people who need it—not savings, getting rid of waste, cost improvements or other euphemisms. In Oxfordshire we are now talking about taking services from people who need them. Everyone in receipt of domiciliary services—older people and physically disabled people—has had to be reassessed and many have had their provision cut. Those were not easy cuts to make. People's independence is threatened when they receive less care—when, for example, they are given no care or help in the matter of sorting out their house or their home help.

The cuts that we are dealing with included £2 million of budgeted cuts this year in home support for older people; £900,000 of cuts for people with physical disabilities; £1.3 million of cuts relating to learning disabilities; £100,000 of cuts in children's home support; £100,000 of cuts in physical disability equipment; and £800,000 of cuts for children's homes. Learning disability resource centres for children, which have received a great deal of publicity, were subject to £500,000 of cuts. I think that we know how painful those cuts have been, and will be, to implement. There were £600,000 of cuts in residential accommodation for old people and £100,000 of cuts in day centres.

Of course, it has not been possible to deliver all those savings, and legal action has been taken to challenge some of them, as the county council is bound by statutory duties. The Government need to explain which of those cuts they are happy with and where more cuts could be made.

The cost pressures in the coming year also look drastic. Before the Minister says that everything will be fine and that there will be a 6 per cent. increase in real terms in Government funding for SSA, I ask him to say whether he is aware of the unavoidable pressures, over and above inflation, that exist in social services. For example, to deal with the problem of delayed discharge for older people, a 5 per cent. increase in fees—more than was budgeted for and more than inflation—is the minimum needed to maintain capacity, let alone build on it, in the care home sector, which suffers cost pressures of £740,000. Physical disability service purchasing faces cost pressures of £140,000, as a result of a 5 per cent. increase in fees when in fact providers need between 10 per cent. and 15 per cent. to keep the services afloat. For learning disabilities, cost pressures of £300,000 are predicated on a 5 per cent. rise in fees.

As far as demography is concerned, one cannot blame Oxfordshire for increased longevity or for people surviving with disability beyond childhood; indeed, the Government might argue that they should take credit for it. However, a 1.69 per cent. increase in the number of older people is forecast for the coming year, which predicates an additional spending pressure of £240,000 just to keep the same services. For physical disabilities, there is an anticipated increase of 0.8 per cent., but on previous experience, that will amount to 15 extra clients costing another £200,000. In learning disability, another £50,000 will be needed.

There is more. Because the planned savings by learning disability resource centres are not achievable, there will be the pressure of another £400,000 over budget. In mental health and acquired brain injury placements, £225,000 more will be needed because of increased demand for an expensive service. That stems from mental health review tribunals and an increased incidence of injury—and it assumes a 50:50 share or thereabouts with the health service.

The Government's change to charging—called fair charging, which I do not necessarily disagree with—have cost implications for those counties that were charging above that rate. The loss of income, which will now have to be corrected to be within Government guidelines, is £1.1 million. That, effectively, is an extra duty imposed by the Government. Foster care allowances are up by £167,000 because Oxfordshire now pays less than the recommended rates.

There is more. Information technology needs £110,000 to administer Government grants to service providers because that responsibility was transferred

[Dr. Harris]

without funding. Home support for children with disabilities will be £195,000. The cost of administering the payroll will be another £65,000. It is estimated that the social care of asylum seekers will cost £200,000, following the Law Lords' ruling that if local authorities have responsibility for the community care health needs of asylum seekers, they must also provide accommodation and cover subsistence costs.

The list goes on. Significantly, independent foster agency placements will need £234,000; and intentionally homeless families will want £200,000 since courts are now directing councils to support some homeless families. It is an extensive list, but I have not yet dealt with the increase in employers' national insurance contributions that the county council will have to pay. Is the 6 per cent. real terms increase in SSA or in Government funding in addition to extra money needed to pay for those national insurance contribution increases, or is it part of the 6 per cent.?

Will the Minister answer the following important questions about grants? Oxfordshire currently receives a building care capacity grant of £1.5 million and a promoting independence partnership grant of £1.6 million. It is still not clear whether those grants will continue or whether they will have to be absorbed into the 6 per cent. increase. It is bad enough that people cannot plan because they are not sure whether the grants will continue, but it will be even worse if the grants do not continue and they are threatened with having to find that money from the 6 per cent. increase. The increase clearly will not be enough.

Do the Government accept that a tragedy is overtaking vulnerable people in Oxfordshire? The elderly, the mentally ill, the physically and learning disabled and young people at risk are bearing the brunt of underfunded extra duties placed on social services. The county council has been unable to raise council tax any further within reason, even if it had not been capped during previous years. Those cuts in services to the most vulnerable in society are the sort of cuts that the Labour party in opposition used to condemn.

The Labour party claimed it came to power to do something about such treatment of vulnerable people, and to reverse the cuts. Will the Government take responsibility today for the level of cuts affecting services to those vulnerable groups? If not, that will be seen as a disgraceful and immoral abrogation of their responsibility to the people of Oxfordshire, who know that the Government, not any local political party, are to blame, and they will not forgive them.

12.45 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on securing the debate, and thank him for allowing me to take part. He spoke extremely clearly. We have a most serious situation in Oxfordshire. We are spending £20 million more than the standard spending assessment, but it is still necessary to make severe cuts. The social services inspectorate gave Oxfordshire social services a fairly clean bill of health, so the problem is one of funding. I join him in begging the Government to help us.

I would like to make three quick pleas. First, there are three care homes in my constituency whose future is in question. Rural areas need more funding for sparsity so that great homes such as Langston house in Milton-under-Wychwood can survive. Secondly, during the summer Adjournment debate, I raised the question of adult placements. That would not require more money from the Government, but it would require them to think about regulation. I have had no reply to the points made during that debate, to my letter sent to the Department of Health, or to my written question. Adult placements are like fostering services: they do not need to be subject to the National Care Standards Commission. I would grateful if the Minister would consider that point.

My third plea to the Minister is that he should come and visit Oxfordshire. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon and I would gladly show him around. I would take him to Chipping Norton and show him those older people who have had their care assessments changed, and introduce him to the parents of children who have had their care packages changed.

We have to get it right. Carers in Oxfordshire are under huge pressure, and if they pack up, the cost to the state and the county council will be even greater. We have to grab the issue—it is the most important one in Oxfordshire at the moment. I look forward to the Minister's response.

12.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on securing this debate on social services in Oxfordshire. Clearly, social services staff play a vital role in the support of some of the most vulnerable people in society. I agree that the matters he raised are extremely important to his constituents and people throughout the country. I acknowledge that health and social services in Oxfordshire are operating under tremendous pressure. I was pleased that he paid tribute to staff in social services and the national health service, who manage to do a first-class job for may of their patients and clients, sometimes under very trying circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned resources. Between 1996–97 and 2002, resources have increased by more than 20 per cent. in real terms, an average of more than 3 per cent. a year. That compares with an average, annual, real terms growth of only 0.1 per cent. between 1992–93 and 1996–97. He must acknowledge that. He went on to make some very strong political points, suggesting that the Government do not care about social services in Oxfordshire, but that is not the case.

That is why we are putting in extra funding across the board. Such decisions are the responsibility of the local authority. I am advised—the hon. Gentleman may want to correct me—that the nine-strong executive of the local authority is drawn from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, and that its own corporate self-assessment of council tax was that in 2002 it spent £689 per head of the Oxfordshire population, compared with an average of £749 in other county councils; only three county councils spent less than Oxfordshire. That was the assessment of the Liberal Democrats and

Conservatives who run that part of the country. I therefore ask the hon. Gentleman to be less strong in making political points about this important subject.

Dr. Harris: I am grateful to have the opportunity to explain what those figures are about. They were intended to answer the charge that Oxfordshire is an overspending county council and that the cuts are a consequence of that. The figures show—the same point has been made by Labour-Lib Dem and by Labour-Conservative administrations—that Oxfordshire gets a bad deal, relatively speaking, and is not a wildly overspending council that needs to reduce its overspend.

Mr. Lammy: Let me go on to deal with resources more specifically. Decisions are about to be made across Government, and I do not intend to pre-empt the various formulae that are about to be produced. I should say, however, that the local authority run by the Lib Dems and the Conservatives went on to say that this year's consultation showed that many people would still be prepared to support a larger council tax increase, especially if it was clear which services would benefit. I am not responsible for executive statements made by the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives who run Oxfordshire; I am responsible for the Government. As I said, we are making a 20 per cent. increase across the board, while specifically ensuring that money goes to Oxfordshire.

Looking to the future, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Chancellor's Budget statement in April indicated that resources will increase again by an average of 6 per cent. a year in real terms over the next two to three years. That includes an extra £100 million over the next three years for each full year of operation of the new scheme to tackle delayed discharges that the Health Secretary announced a week or so ago. The local government finance settlement for next year will be announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 5 December, and I am unable to say anything today about the exact allocation of resources to individual local authorities, including Oxfordshire, for next year. Those details and the new general grant allocation formulas will be published on Thursday. Like all hon. Members, the hon. Gentleman awaits those decisions, which all our local authorities will examine carefully.

The means of distributing funds for future years has been the subject of an extensive review. There has been a full consultation exercise on the proposed changes for channelling money through to local authorities. Until now, the grant has mainly been distributed using standard spending assessments by the Minister for Local Government and the Regions. It is right that we look afresh at the formulae. One of the aims of the review of allocation formulae is to make the new system more transparent so that people affected have a chance of understanding it.

There is a trade-off, however, in that the price of oversimplification is a system that fails to take account of the appropriate indicators, and we need to avoid that. When coming up with a formula that applies nationally, it is extremely difficult to guarantee that every local authority will benefit. Local government has called for an increase in predictability and stability in any new system, which is obviously important for county councils such as Oxfordshire.

Turning to the specific resources available to Oxfordshire county council, we all await the announcement with interest. For this year, its personal social services SSA has increased by 5.6 per cent., compared with the national average increase of 4.9 per cent. Similarly, for the past year its SSA increased by 6.5 per cent., compared with the national average increase of 4.7 per cent. In addition to its SSA, Oxfordshire receives substantial specific grant allocations from the Department of Health. This year, for example, it has received a preserved rights grant of more than £6 million, a children's services grant in excess of £3 million and, in order to tackle delayed discharges, a building care capacity grant of £1.5 million.

The authority's grant allocations have also shown marked increases in recent years. This year, for example, the carers grant has increased by 22 per cent. and the children's services grant by 11 per cent.

As I said at the outset, I recognise that there are pressures on social care in Oxfordshire. In particular, the authority is concerned, as the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) said, about the shortage of affordable residential and nursing home places. The substantial increases in personal social services resources that the Government are making available over the next three years will help. We should continue to ensure that investment is maintained, but it is only one part of the equation and not the only criterion by which we should judge the success or otherwise of the reforms, because it is fundamental that other things happen as well.

I should like to commend Oxfordshire social services and its primary care trust health partners on the creation of a pooled budget under section 31 of the Health Act 1999 for the purchase of residential and nursing home care. That is one way in which to maximise the purchasing influence of health and social care.

During this year, Oxfordshire county council has also had the benefit of support from the Department of Health funded change agents team, which has worked with the health and social care economy to identify further improvements to both the system and the use of capacity in Oxfordshire. All the partners have signed up to an action plan, and it is of the greatest importance that they follow through and implement the agreed action to secure improvements for service users and patients.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon criticised the resources available to Oxfordshire, and asked for the Government's response. Most resources available to local government are not earmarked for any particular purpose. It is for individual local authorities to decide how much to spend on their social services in the light of local priorities, and how to make the necessary resources available, which includes deciding how much should be raised by council tax. We have heard the assessment, which was made locally by the Oxfordshire executive—by Liberal Democrats and Conservatives—on council tax, which is a matter for them and not for the Government. The SSA is not an indication of how much the Government consider Oxfordshire should spend on its social services, which is a matter for Oxfordshire to decide in light of its priorities.

Dr. Harris: This year's council tax rise is 9.9 per cent., which is three or four times the level of inflation, because

[Dr. Harris]

Oxfordshire people would rather have rises in an unfair tax than suffer even more cuts. Can the Minister explain whether he thinks that that is insufficient? If all the money is going into Oxfordshire, can he explain why Oxfordshire is still spending above its SSA, despite what he described as "a generous SSA settlement"? Is it his opinion that it is spending too much?

Mr. Lammy: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that I acknowledged that there are pressures in Oxfordshire. At the same time, the Government have to look across the board. I explained that we have increased the amount available to Oxfordshire by much more than the national average. If Oxfordshire is overspending its personal social services budget, it needs to improve its budget forecasting. Oxfordshire has been clear that there are issues relating to deficits and financial management that it wants to get to grips with in order to move forward. There will therefore be local determinants for which the Government, quite rightly, are not responsible, and—

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. Time is up.

Newspaper Industry (Scotland)

1 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am pleased to have the opportunity to highlight an issue that is important to the newspaper industry in Scotland and has wider implications for newspapers elsewhere in the UK.

My choice of debate has been prompted by the recent speculation about the likely future ownership of *The Herald*, the *Sunday Herald* and the *Evening Times*, following the announcement by the Scottish Media Group that it was disposing of those interests, and in particular about whether those papers will be purchased by the current owners of the *Scotsman* group. A great deal of debate has taken place in Scotland, the Scottish media and the Scottish Parliament about the possible sale of the *Herald* newspapers to *The Scotsman*. It is right that Westminster should also focus on the issue, given that policy on competition, including competition in the media industry, is the responsibility of the UK Parliament.

I am aware that press reports at the weekend suggested that the owners of the *Scotsman* group—more precisely, Ellerman Investments, which was the vehicle for the bid—had been excluded from the final shortlist of two possible purchasers for the *Herald* newspapers. However, that does not render today's debate unnecessary—in fact, it is even more appropriate.

First, from the way in which corporate mergers often unveil, a takeover involving *The Scotsman* and *The Herald* may come back on the scene again. Secondly, and more importantly, the possible sale prompts much wider questions about the way in which media ownership is regulated in Scotland. Given that later today the House is beginning its detailed consideration of the Communications Bill, it is appropriate to highlight my concerns, which are shared by other hon. Members.

I am not making any particular criticism of *The Scotsman*'s owners for seeking to buy the *Herald* newspapers; nor am I motivated by any particular dislike of *The Scotsman*'s editorial line, or any individuals associated with the papers. I do not always agree with the editorial line of *The Scotsman* or the other papers in its stable, but I am as likely to choke over my breakfast at something I read in the *Daily Record* or *The Herald* as at something in *The Scotsman*.

I recognise also that *The Scotsman* has recently adopted a role as something of an outsider from what it sees as a dominant Scottish political and media consensus. I am not sure that all my colleagues would agree, but I believe that by doing that *The Scotsman* plays a valuable role. In a small country such as Scotland, a danger is that differing views and challenges to a political consensus become excluded from public debate.

In so far as *The Scotsman* has chosen to challenge received wisdom, I welcome it. It highlights the very reason why I believe that the *Scotsman* group of newspapers should continue to be distinct and separate from the *Herald* group.

In Scotland, the *Scotsman* and *Herald* groups are two distinct and competing newspaper groups, both opening their pages to a wide range of views and contributors,

and both very much competitors in the market. That competition is even more apparent in their respective Sunday publications, which have both established themselves as papers with a Scotlandwide readership and appeal. My fear, and that of many others, is that if the ownership of the two groups were to become identical, such diversity and competitiveness would diminish and run the risk of disappearing.

Senior figures from the *Scotsman* group have said that if there was a takeover, *The Scotsman* and *The Herald*, and presumably the *Evening News* and the *Evening Times*, would remain separate titles. Despite the sincerity of those who made the pronouncements, there must be a risk of a diminution in diversity and competition because of the normal pressures from shareholders and the market. What has been said about *The Scotsman* and *The Herald*, has not been said, as far as I am aware from the reports, about the future independence of the *Sunday Herald* and *Scotland on Sunday*.

No matter what good intentions there may be, there is a risk of the papers' separate existence being eroded because the media world is competitive. New channels and methods of communication are being developed all the time. Shareholders need a return on their capital. If the two groups of papers were to merge, there would be an inevitable tendency for an owner of the combined group to consider ways of cost saving sooner or later. It would be amazing if they did not, and it would probably be an abdication of their responsibility to their shareholders.

One can easily foresee the pressures that there would be to merge various aspects of operations of the two newspaper groups. Why would there need to be a multiplicity of foreign teams? Why would there need to be two parliamentary teams, either at Westminster or at Holyrood? Why not just have one team in both Parliaments? Obviously, that one team would report events in the same way for both papers. Why have two sets of offices in cities and towns throughout the length and breadth of Scotland? What is true of news operations, which are perhaps more visible to politicians, would undoubtedly be true of the many less visible aspects of the businesses. The merger would affect everything from the advertising sales department to farming reports and distribution networks. That would be a clear threat to jobs in Edinburgh and Glasgow, in particular.

What is even more significant to the political process is that at a time when it is especially vital that there are a range of voices in the Scottish media to ensure that there is a vibrant political debate and a hard-hitting scrutiny of the Scottish political scene, there is a risk of two very different and powerful voices being replaced by one voice alone. That would be bad for Scottish democracy—a democracy that is still finding its feet in a new world following the establishment of a devolved Parliament and Administration.

Those in the metropolitan media world may not fully appreciate the significance of such a merger in relation to public debate, news coverage and media policy in Scotland. They should ask themselves what the reaction would be if there was a prospect of *The Guardian* and *The Times* merging, without any other broadsheet papers in the market as major contenders. If that were to happen in London, there would be an immediate outcry and a chorus of voices from all parts of the media and political spectrum demanding that the regulators intervene. That is what a merger of the *Scotsman* and *Herald* groups would mean for Scotland, and that is why the issue is so important.

I call on the Government to refer any such merger to the Competition Commission. Even though the takeover of the *Herald* newspapers by the *Scotsman* newspapers may no longer be an immediately likely prospect, the issues it raises have a much wider significance. The issue emphasises that although a newspaper or media outlet may be relatively small in terms of the United Kingdom, its significance for a region or nation of the UK may be much greater. There is a need for such special interests to be taken into account when newspaper mergers and takeovers are on the agenda. The Communications Bill emphasises the need to ensure plurality of views in the newspaper industry. It is important that the role that a newspaper plays in a regional or national arena—particularly one with its own political arena, such as Scotland—is taken into account.

I well understand that the Minister has to be careful in what he says about the competition authorities. He may be especially reluctant to comment on a potential takeover rather than a specific proposal, especially when the takeover might not even proceed. I should not be surprised if he were uncharacteristically restrained in his statement today; but I would be delighted if he could expand on any of the issues.

My hon. Friend should, however, give assurances to the House that, whenever a takeover of the *Herald* titles takes place—as eventually it will—if it occurs under the present rules for regulating competition in the newspaper market, he will, in deciding whether to refer to the Competition Commission, take into account the role of both the *Herald* and the *Scotsman* group in the Scottish market. They should both be treated as national newspaper groups, not merely as regional groups within the UK. Will he, together with his ministerial colleagues, ensure that the new competition regime for newspapers that will be established under the Communications Bill takes account of the need for plurality and diversity in the newspaper market at the local and regional, as well as the UK level? The needs of Scotland, in particular, should be acknowledged.

1.11 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on introducing a debate on an important issue that is highly topical in Scotland and has major implications not just for the future of the Scottish media but for democracy itself. I warmly welcome his decision to apply for this debate and I am delighted that he was successful in securing it.

I look forward to the Minister's reply. If I smiled a few moments ago when my hon. Friend was speaking, it was because he referred to the Minister's reluctance to become involved in controversy. I had never viewed the Minister in those terms before, particularly in his journalistic role. If anyone understands the Scottish media, it is he, and we have many reasons in Scotland—not least his contribution to the *West Highland Free Press*—to be grateful to him.

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

I want to underline the crucial importance of having a variety of opinions on, and interpretations of, the work of this place as well as the Scottish Parliament. I would greatly regret the takeover of *The Herald* and other newspapers by another news group, which would then have a virtual monopoly on reporting and the expression of opinion. The chattering classes in Scotland—I have never seen the like elsewhere—are renowned for expressing strong and diverse opinions. Ownership is power—used and often abused—so we must take the correct decisions on these matters.

My hon. Friend spoke about the reporting of this place and the new Scottish Parliament. It is important to reflect on how opinions are presented to mould the perceptions of the readership of Scottish newspapers. The Scottish Parliament is at an early stage of its development. Frankly, it has not been helped by the way in which the chattering classes have reported it. We have also suffered here, because many of the important issues that are dealt with day after day at Westminster are simply disregarded by a media in Scotland that should show greater maturity and responsibility. The events that occurred over the weekend give us a little more encouragement, as my hon. Friend said, but I would very much regret it if the two major newspapers—*The Scotsman* and *The Herald*—and their sisters newspapers found that they had the same owners and therefore the same political influences.

I do not want to dwell on what I regard as my own unsatisfactory experience with the Scottish media for three or four years in the 1990s. I must say, I hope objectively, that they behaved disgracefully towards me, although that is a matter for memoirs or another debate. If our democracy is to flourish in this place and in Scotland, we must have the pluralism that we want and to which the people of Scotland are entitled. It would be very grave if the owners of *The Herald* and its sister newspapers also owned *The Scotsman* and its sister newspapers. Variety, democracy and pluralism are important, and my hon. Friend has done us a great service by introducing this debate. I am sure that the Minister will respond appropriately.

1.16 pm

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on securing this debate on the important questions of competition and plurality in the Scottish newspaper industry. I say that not only from the perspective of a Member representing a Scottish constituency, although in the light of the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and my own modest history of press proprietorship I should, perhaps, enter a disclaimer. I am not, however, thinking of entering a late bid.

It is widely recognised that a vibrant and diversified press is essential for healthy, democratic debate, especially in a nation such as Scotland that shares many interests with the rest of the United Kingdom but also has its own rich traditions, culture and concerns. Today's debate is so important that it is surprising that only one political party is represented in the Chamber.

The Government have noted the considerable interest in the proposed sale of the Scottish Media Group's publishing division. We saw that in the House, the Scottish Parliament, the press and among the public of Scotland. In particular, there has been lengthy and lively debate about the effect that the sale might have on the plurality of views available from the press. As has been recognised, that chimes with the measures that we proposed to protect the public interest in newspaper mergers in the Communications Bill, which receives its Second Reading in the House this afternoon. I hope that my hon. Friend, and others who recognise the importance of protecting the plurality of the press in the United Kingdom and its nations, regions and localities, will support our proposals in the Bill.

As my hon. Friend properly recognised and other hon. Members will understand, I cannot comment today on the details of an individual case that the Secretary of State may have to consider under the merger provisions of the Fair Trading Acts. However, it would be useful briefly to set out the processes by which a sale of SMG's publishing business may fall to be considered under merger control provisions.

If the acquirer of SMG's newspapers is an existing UK newspaper provider, and if a circulation threshold is met, the transfers would fall to be considered under a special newspaper merger regime. The threshold is that the total paid-for circulation of the newspapers involved averages 500,000 or more each day of publication. Qualifying newspaper transfers are unlawful and void without the Secretary of State's prior written consent, and except in certain circumstances, the Secretary of State cannot give such consent without a Competition Commission inquiry.

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend referred to the 500,000 threshold for sold copies of a publication. Given that a number of newspaper chains make great play of their total circulation, including copies that are given away, would it not be more appropriate if the figure included the circulation figures as they are claimed, rather than simply the paid-for circulation figures?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend has alighted on an interesting point, which I shall be pleased to clarify in writing. Whether the 500,000 a day is in sales or distribution should be clarified.

The Competition Commission would be directed to report on whether the transfer might be expected to operate against the public interest, taking into account all matters that appeared to be relevant, particularly the need for accurate presentation of news and free expression of opinion. The Secretary of State would have regard to the report in deciding whether to consent to the proposed transfers, and could make consent subject to conditions.

If the acquirer is not an existing United Kingdom newspaper proprietor, or the circulation threshold is not met, the merger could fall to be considered not under the special newspaper regime but under the general merger regime of the Fair Trading Acts. In the first instance, it would be for the director general of fair trading to assess the merger's likely impact before advising Ministers on whether he believed that it should be referred to the Competition Commission.

The Competition Commission would be directed to report on whether the merger would be expected to operate against the public interest. Again, the final decision would be for the Secretary of State, although under this regime, in deciding on a reference, she would generally expect to follow the director general's advice, and in the event of a reference, she could take no action if the commission found that the merger would not, or would not be likely to, operate against the public interest.

Under the Enterprise Act 2002, which reforms merger control and which we plan to commence next spring, the vast majority of mergers will be assessed only on the test of whether they would result in a substantial lessening of competition. However, we still believe that the plurality of views in the press is a vital public interest and we remain committed to its protection. To that end, the 2002 Act has preserved the special newspaper merger regime of the Fair Trading Acts until such time as the Communications Bill reforms those measures. The principle is important: the special newspaper regime should remain. Those reforms will continue to provide a system for protecting the particular public interest that newspaper transfers can involve. Decision making in cases that raise plurality concerns will rest with the Secretary of State, rather than the specialist competition authorities.

The newspaper public interest considerations in the Communications Bill are substantively directed at the same types of public interest issue that have arisen in the past in relation to newspaper transfers. We have drawn very much from the existing body of precedent. They will cover the concepts of free expression of opinion and accurate presentation of news that are already identified as matters to which the Competition Commission is to have particular regard in the public interest test under the special newspaper merger regime.

There will be a third limb of plurality of views. That is designed to pick up some of the issues that the Competition Commission has previously considered, or might want to consider, in relation to plurality, but that might not fall strictly within the concepts of accurate presentation of news and free expression of opinion. In particular, that is aimed at ensuring that, so far as is reasonable and practical, a range of different views is available in newspaper markets.

The Bill will remove the rather anomalous distinction in the Fair Trading Acts under which different regimes apply, depending on whether the acquirer is a newspaper proprietor and on whether the circulation threshold is met. In future, there will be a single newspaper plurality regime.

I assure my hon. Friend that we take this issue extremely seriously. Our concern is not limited to what might be called the national press in a UK sense, or the London press, as some might describe it. Newspapers in all parts of the UK play powerful roles as opinion formers for the communities that they serve. For those affected, local, regional and national issues in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and indeed England, as well as the wider UK issues of the day, can be of great significance.

The Communications Bill will rightly allow us to continue to consider issues of editorial freedom and the plurality of views in mergers affecting the local and regional, as much as the national press. In addition, when considering newspaper plurality, the Competition Commission will be specifically directed to test local opinion effectively, for example by means of citizens' juries.

The newspaper industry plays an essential role in political debate and the democratic process. My hon. Friend will appreciate that I cannot comment on individual merger cases, but I hope that he will rest assured that the Government are committed not only to their current approach but to continuing the protection and maintenance of freedom and variety of expression in the press, and the wide range of views that the UK press offers. We need greater rather than lesser diversity, which is why future legislation will maintain the existing principles.

I recognise that this subject is of widespread interest in Scotland, for all the reasons that have been discussed, and that whatever happens on this specific issue will continue to be of interest in Scotland and throughout the UK. My hon. Friend has done the issue a service by giving it an airing in the debate today, and if I have not dealt with any points that he raised, I will be pleased to respond to him in writing.

Scotland has a tradition of a geographically, culturally and politically diverse press, as has the UK as a whole. It is clear from the approach that we are taking through the Communications Bill, the Enterprise Act 2002, and the perpetuation of the special newspaper regime, that that is the sort of media that we wish to maintain in Scotland and in the UK.

Police Funding (Wiltshire)

1.27 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I am grateful to the newspaper industry in Scotland for allowing us an extra three minutes in which to discuss this important topic. I am also grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) in the debate this morning. My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) have also lent their support, but sadly are not able to be here today.

We sought today's debate because we believed that there might be a threat to the rural policing fund—the ring-fenced funding directly targeted at rural police forces. We were concerned that, if that money were subsumed into the general police funding, even if there was a proportionate increase in the general funding to take account of it, there would be no guarantee of its continuation in subsequent years. In other words, the extra cash that the Home Office, quite correctly, allocates against the additional costs of policing in rural areas would have had to fight for its survival among the more general funding.

In Wiltshire, the annual rural grant is spent on a range of activities and initiatives, many of which allow the high visibility that is so important in a rural area, as well as contributing to the more obvious extra costs of rural policing. For example, it pays for air support at night time. I pay particular tribute to the voluntarily funded Wiltshire air ambulance service, which shares helicopters with the police.

I am delighted to have the support of the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown), who has now joined the debate. We apologise to her for having started ahead of time, owing to the previous debate having finished early.

The annual rural grant allows more call handling staff, contributes to the prisoner handling team, pays for five support staff who keep the rural stations open, supplies and fits out vehicles that act as mobile police stations, and employs three staff to work on the employment and retention of specials. All those vital services would have been at risk had the rural policing fund been abolished, so we were greatly relieved by the Home Secretary's announcement at the Association of Police Authorities conference that the fund is to be preserved outside the formula. That will safeguard it for subsequent years.

I am delighted to have been joined by my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury, to whom I apologise for having started a moment or two early. I am grateful for his support.

A less modest Member of Parliament might attribute the preservation of the rural policing fund outside the general formula—that seems extremely important for future years—to the imminence of this debate, or at least to our lobbying of the Home Office in the past week or two. The Wiltshire police authority and other rural police authorities, especially those from the south-west of England, have also lobbied the Home Office heavily on the subject. We are glad that the Home Secretary listened carefully and agreed to preserve a ring-fenced fund outside general funding. We merely ask the Minister to assure us that that ring-fencing will continue in subsequent years, as that is terribly important.

That is where the good news, and perhaps the cross-party consensus, begins to peter out a shade. We and our colleagues in the Wiltshire police authority remain extremely concerned about the imminent announcement on Thursday of the local government settlement, and of the proposed changes to the police funding formula. We all hope that the good sense that the Home Secretary applied in saving the rural grant will be brought to bear on his colleagues in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister when they consider the settlement.

The press reports—they may be wrong, and one must not believe everything one reads in the papers, so we must wait until Thursday—suggest that funds will be shifted from rural shire areas towards metropolitan areas. That certainly would be the outcome of most of the changes proposed in any of the different versions of the formula that were put out for consultation. No matter which of the five or six options in the consultation process is adopted, some such leaching of funds seems likely.

It is true that Wiltshire has a low crime rate compared with some more urban areas, although the crime rate in Swindon and Salisbury bears comparison with that in most of the larger metropolitan areas elsewhere in England. Yesterday, the Wiltshire chairman of the National Farmers Union, Denise Plummer, reminded me forcefully that even in rural areas there is a worryingly high instance of burglary, especially against farms. In an area such as mine, there is also a worryingly high quantity of drug-related crime.

People often think of drugs as a problem for the inner cities, but rural areas have as big a drugs problem as elsewhere. I discovered only this week that drugs are even a significant problem in one of the smallest rural primary schools in a small local village. Two or three weeks ago, in a superb operation, Wiltshire police arrested 30 drug dealers. People sometimes think of places such as Wiltshire as leafy, suburban, rural and prosperous, but that is not the case. We have significant crime.

The fact that our overall crime levels are in the lowest three in the country is not necessarily because the area is intrinsically better, but perhaps because it is better policed. Crime detection levels in Wiltshire are in the top six in Britain. Our concern is that if funds were leached away from rural to metropolitan areas, that would undermine the fine policing that produces a comparatively low crime rate in places such as Wiltshire. The A303 in the south of Wiltshire, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury, and the M4, which goes through my constituency, mean that it is easy to transfer crime from, for example, Bristol, Swindon, London or Reading to areas such as mine. It is wrong to think of such areas as intrinsically less affected by crime.

If funding were cut, Wiltshire police authority, which has taken the lead on several policing initiatives, would no longer be at the cutting edge. We have taken the lead on e-policing, for example, although I was amused to hear that the Home Secretary specifically and personally insisted that the White Paper on policing be circulated

to all personnel in paper form, even though every civilian and uniformed member of Wiltshire police authority has an e-mail address.

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham) *rose—*

Mr. Gray: The Minister is about to repudiate that dreadful allegation. Let me say, however, that the chief constable specifically requested that the White Paper be circulated by e-mail. I would be happy to be corrected, but I am told that the Home Office refused to allow that. The Minister wants to put me right.

Mr. Denham: I congratulate Wiltshire police authority on enabling all its staff to be receive documents by e-mail. The reason the White Paper was made available in paper form was that, sadly, not all police forces allow their officers to access material distributed by e-mail. We are working on that, and I congratulate Wiltshire on being ahead of the game.

Mr. Gray: Apparently, not everyone is on the cutting edge like Wiltshire. There is another problem in that regard, which the chief constable raised with me. People do not read documents that are sent out in paper form, and great piles of paper sit unread in the corner of the police station for quite some time, whereas there is a slightly higher chance of persuading everyone to read their e-mail.

Wiltshire has been extremely imaginative in another sense. It is the first county in which the emergency services have set up a joint command and control centre. The police, the fire brigade and the ambulance service are all in one place, and the new building in Devizes will be opened shortly. Admittedly, there is a problem with the fire brigade, which has insisted that a partition be built in the joint control room, and the Fire Brigades Union is contesting the matter nationally, but we hope that the last remaining barrier will be broken down in the not-too-distant future so that all three services can operate from one control room. It is worth having such arrangements in Wiltshire, which leads the nation in that regard. If, in an unhappy change to the funding formula, our funding were cut on Thursday, such innovations would unquestionably be undermined.

The Minister must think very carefully about such issues, and I hope that he will make strong representations to his colleagues in ODPM. Perhaps he will tell us not to worry and that he will put a floor in place so that our grant will not fall below a certain level no matter what changes are made to the funding formula. I would counter, however, that a floor merely extends the length of time over which a cut becomes effective. We are told that funding will not be allowed to fall below a certain level, but that it will not go up either. A floor does not guarantee that funding will remain as it is but merely spreads the pain—possibly over many years. Any such shift in funding is unacceptable in principle, irrespective of how it is managed.

The only other way to counter any untoward change in the funding formula would be to increase the precept. Before the Minister contemplates going down that track, however, he should consider this. It is not unreasonable to assume that there will be a 2 per cent. increase in central Government funding on Thursday. Let us also assume that Wiltshire's precept will increase by 10 per cent., which is as much as can be contemplated without inflicting great hardship. In that regard, it was interesting that the Countryside Agency produced a report this morning about poverty and deprivation in the countryside. An increase of more than 10 per cent. in the precept would have very worrying effects on many constituents, while a 2 per cent. increase in general funding plus a 10 per cent. increase in the precept would result in a £1.2 million cut in police funding in Wiltshire. In crude terms, that is equivalent to 50 police officers.

The statistics demonstrate that, even without any further untoward changes in the funding formula, a 2 per cent. general increase in central funding on Thursday and a 10 per cent. increase in the local precept could still lead to the loss of about 50 police officers in Wiltshire. For the sake of the peace of mind of my constituents and those of my hon. Friends, it is only reasonable to say that it is unlikely that 50 redundancy notices will be going out on Friday morning. Of course that will not happen; that is not how it works, and it would be wrong to give that impression. Eventually, in a year or two, because of reduction or delay in recruitment, 50 fewer officers than at present would be available in Wiltshire.

In my area and, I am sure, other parts of Wiltshire, there are real visibility problems. Visibility is extremely important in rural areas. The problem is occurring in places such as Malmesbury, Wootton Bassett, Chippenham and Corsham, the four main towns in my area. My surgery is full of people complaining about it. How much worse things would be if the Government were to try to filch further funds from us in favour of Labour-controlled inner-city areas. That would be unsustainable and politically unforgivable.

I hope that the Minister will take advantage of this short debate and, just as the Home Secretary has done with respect to the rural policing fund, allay our concerns about what may await us in the settlement to be announced on Thursday, and the new formula. Rural police forces await the announcement with some nervousness. The Wiltshire police do an outstanding job and I hope that the Minister will lay out plans that will allow them to continue to be as good as they are.

1.40 pm

Mr. Denham: I congratulate the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on securing this debate. I am pleased to see in the Chamber my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) and the hon. Members for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) and for Salisbury (Mr. Key). I am grateful for their interest.

It is of course a bit unfortunate that the debate takes place before the announcement of the provisional police funding settlement for next year, which is due later this week—on Thursday, on the current timetable. However, today we have a useful opportunity to discuss some of the local concerns that were well set out by the hon. Gentleman, as well as what the Government and the police are doing, with local authorities, to reduce crime and make Wiltshire a safer place to live in.

The announcement is imminent and I cannot provide further specifics until it has been made. It is worth bearing in mind that Thursday's announcements will be

[Mr. Denham]

provisional. As with the rest of the local government settlement, there will be an opportunity to make representations during the consultation period, which will run, on current plans, until 14 January 2003.

I acknowledge the record of the police service in Wiltshire. It has a good record as an innovative force. The hon. Gentleman has talked about the joint working that has led to the combined control centre. Those concerned with the provisions in the Police Reform Act 2002 for extending the use of police staff in custody suites learned from innovative work done in Wiltshire. Also, some of the changes that we made in that Act to allow wider use of nurses and paramedics were made in response to direct representations from Elizabeth Neville, the chief constable. I am happy to acknowledge—with regard not just to e-policing and the current initiatives, but to several other matters—that Wiltshire police have worked hard to innovate and to lead the reforms that we want to happen more widely.

For the current year, Wiltshire police were allocated Government grant of £56.5 million, which was an increase of 2.3 per cent. over 2001–02. Last year floors and ceilings on the change in police grant were introduced for the first time. Floors protect police authorities that would otherwise receive a lower settlement, by ensuring that no authority receives an increase in grant of less than 2.3 per cent. The use of floors and ceilings ensured that every police authority received a grant at least in line with general inflation.

The way in which grant is distributed according to the system is intended broadly to reflect the relative needs of forces. The formula is weighted according to population so that forces covering larger populations receive more money. It also takes into account sociodemographic factors, and that, in part, is understood by all concerned as one of the surrogates for the pressure on policing—the likely demand and the likely levels of activity.

The hon. Gentleman said that it would be wrong to get the impression that Wiltshire was suburban, rural and prosperous. Large parts of it—I know the southern area best—are indeed rural and prosperous. Not all of it is, and my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon comes from a part that has its fair share of problems. However, it would be wrong to characterise Wiltshire in the way in which the hon. Gentleman attempted to do.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Can my right hon. Friend explain why, in the consultation, deprivation has been considered as a factor that might be introduced into the formula? Policing is not like education, where deprivation is used as a proxy for educational challenges or attainment. When crime statistics are used in a formula, as they have been here, surely it is not necessary to include deprivation as well. I hope that he will move on to the matter of cost. The high costs that our police force faces are an important issue for all of us in Wiltshire.

Mr. Denham: We held consultations on a number of possible amendments to the formula because it was, as always, difficult to achieve the correct balance of the factors involved. We are sometimes urged to put a lot of weight directly on recorded crime statistics. That brings with it the danger of rewarding the police services that are not performing well, as opposed to those that are fighting crime effectively. The search is always on to balance the factors in a way that fairly represents the different pressures on the police service.

We held consultations on a proposal to bring the rural policing fund into the main police grant formula. There were reasons for that. It would have been possible to have a rural formula that reflected sparsity, and for that to be reflected in the main formula. However, the balance of responses to the consultation was that, although that would have resulted in winners and losers, even in rural areas, there was a sense that the rural areas and those that benefited from the rural policing fund preferred to have a separate, ring-fenced fund, rather than for it to be part of the main formula. The case could be argued either way, but we listened to the consultation and we were pleased to hear the announcement that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a few weeks ago.

The rural policing fund is a good example of the way in which some police forces benefit from the allocation of significant sums outside the normal grant formula—in Wiltshire's case, £1.1 million. There are other funds through which forces gain significant sums outside the grant distribution. This year, Wiltshire received £1.7 million from the crime fighting fund, which is tied directly to the recruitment of additional police officers. Thanks to the Government's introduction of that fund, we now have record numbers of police officers in England and Wales.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire made many of my points about the use of the rural policing fund for me. Wiltshire was one of the forces that was able to demonstrate effective use of its expenditure. He referred to the air support providing night-time coverage and faster response times, the investment in call handling staff to improve the service across the county and the establishment of the prisoner handling team. I referred in my opening remarks to some of Wiltshire's innovations: support for rural station clerks, the development of mobile police stations and the investment—which I thoroughly commend—in support staff to work on the employment and retention of special constables.

There are many concerns about and recognised limitations to the police funding formula. As a whole, it has strengths, and it has the general confidence of the policing community. We have been keen to ensure that any new arrangements fully support the reform and modernisation process on which we have embarked for the police, while retaining public confidence. The 2003-04 consultation paper contained six options for change: using new activity analysis data; integrating the rural policing fund into the main formula, which we have discussed; reducing the establishment component to zero; increasing the personal crime component; increasing the public order component; and the possibility of a 2 per cent. deprivation component.

I believe that the majority of the policing community has been in favour of updating the activity analysis data and generally in favour of ending the establishment component. There has been a strong preference for retaining the rural policing fund. The balance of support for the other options is more mixed, as one would

expect, depending on its impact on different services. The decisions on those options will have to wait until Thursday.

I have already mentioned the effective role played by the crime fighting fund. The Government recognise that police numbers are an important part of a comprehensive package of measures to ensure a modern and efficient police service. The public feel reassured by the sight of police officers on our streets, and that certainly helps to reduce the fear of crime. It is, of course, for the chief constable and the police authority to determine the precise make-up of the force and the distribution of officers throughout the force area. On 31 March 2002, Wiltshire had 1,157 police officers, 37 more than in March 2001. I understand that the force plans to recruit a further 89 officers by March 2003, thereby meeting its recruitment target for the current year.

Since 1997, the number of civilian staff employed by Wiltshire police increased by 174 to 649 in March 2001. Many of the extra civilian support staff have been used to free police officers from paperwork and jobs that can be undertaken as effectively by civilians, allowing police officers to spend more time on operational work. I have already acknowledged the lead of the chief constable of Wiltshire in developing the full role of police staff.

Mr. Gray: The Minister said that there were 1,157 police officers in March 2002. He then went on to talk about the increase in civilian employees since 1997. Perhaps he could tell us how many police officers there were in Wiltshire in 1997 and how that compares with the current figure.

Mr. Denham: I do not have the exact figure, but I know that there were fewer then than there are in Wiltshire now. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman on that point.

In addition, we are committed to increasing the size of the special constabulary, whose numbers have gradually fallen. That is partly because of the numbers of special constables who have been allowed to join the police service, but none the less, we are currently working with Peter Fahy, the chief constable of Surrey, on a project to consider ways of improving the recruitment, deployment and effective use of specials, which we hope will produce valuable guidance for the service next year. I know that Wiltshire police want the number of special constables to be increased.

The hon. Gentleman referred, fairly, to recorded crime in Wiltshire. Recorded crime levels have decreased since 1996–97. The figures for all categories of offence are lower in Wiltshire than the average in the south-west region or in England and Wales as a whole. Detection rates in Wiltshire for each of the categories are better than in the south-west region or England and Wales as a whole. The annual detection rate of 30 per cent. is higher than that for the south-west region as a whole, which is 23 per cent.

Of course, the support that we provide for the police service is not the only way in which we seek to reduce and tackle crime in Wiltshire. Crime reduction partnerships have also been developed in the county. In 2002–03, the police service was able to work, through those partnerships, with local authorities and others, using just under £750,000 of funding from the partnership development fund, the safer communities initiative and the communities against drugs project. More directly, the force has recently applied for, and will receive, funding to employ 15 community support officers by the end of the financial year.

CSOs are an innovation introduced in the Police Reform Act 2002. The Metropolitan police service has pioneered the idea. All hon. Members will have seen the CSOs patrolling who have taken over some of the anti-terrorism reassurance duties in Westminster, allowing police officers to return to their normal duties. I am interested to hear that a predominantly rural police service such as Wiltshire's has also taken advantage of that funding. It will be interesting to see what use will be made of CSOs and how effectively they can be deployed in different circumstances from those of the Metropolitan police.

The hon. Gentleman quite reasonably asked me to speculate on what figures there might be on Thursday. I am afraid that I cannot do that, but I shall make an important point. We have made it clear that this year we shall continue the policy of having floors and ceilings in the grant settlement. He said that the only thing that floors do is spread out cuts. I do not accept that. It is worth bearing in mind that for a number of years the overall funding of the police service has been increasing in real terms, which will continue. The cake is getting bigger. While any changes to any funding formula mean that the relative sizes of the slices of the cake change, that does not mean that police services face cuts in real terms in their allocation.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Can the Minister assure us that he has given due consideration to the special responsibilities of the Wiltshire constabulary—including special protection—with regard to the Ministry of Defence police, the military police and the other service authorities, which impose a significant burden?

Mr. Denham: When the burdens of such costs are significant enough to be picked up either through direct funding arrangements or in the funding formula, that is done. It is not always possible to pick up every cost, because every police force is able to point to something that is peculiar to the challenges in its area. I could not tell the hon. Gentleman the precise balance of funding, if any, that is available to Wiltshire, though I would be happy to write to him about what provision is made.

The debate about the funding formula has been limited to the six potential changes that I outlined, rather than taking in issues that are specific to any particular force. Any other arrangements would be dealt with outside the formula.

I hope that I have been able to respond to at least some of the points raised. Had the timing of the debate been slightly different—had it taken place after Thursday—we could no doubt have discussed the real figures, but we will have to wait until another day for that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 4 December 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Nuclear Test Veterans (Compensation)

Motion made and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): The opportunity to hold such a debate is fairly rare. I shall not give an account of the illnesses suffered by people who attended, witnessed and took part in the preparations for nuclear tests on behalf of this country. Instead, I shall focus on some of the ways in which we can remedy grievances. Those who took part in the tests as well as their children and grandchildren feel that the men who had often risked their lives in war prior to the tests—in which they took part at the behest of the Government—have been poorly treated in the past 50 or so years.

I do not intend to criticise the present Government heavily. Successive Governments have taken the same stance towards claims for compensation or improved pensions on behalf of the service men who took part in the tests. It has been argued throughout that there is no overwhelming medical evidence—it is only marginal—of a link between participation in the tests and particular illnesses. Such matters were revealed in the analysis of the test outcomes by the National Radiological Protection Board and, in some cases of leukaemia, a war pension was granted when a link to the tests was demonstrated. That is based on a slightly increased likelihood demonstrated in the data that have been analysed to date. The Government have taken that position throughout.

We need to create an atmosphere of greater objectivity and consensus building. Research has demonstrated that many of those who took part in the tests have since suffered terrible illnesses; there have also been cases of illness among their offspring. We must consider how to attribute that information to the circumstances of their lives; what they did in their lives when they were service men and later. So far the Government have commissioned work through the NRPB, which is currently undertaking its third study of the data produced by the examination of the records of 20,000-plus service men who attended the tests at various times during the 1950s and early 1960s.

I am worried that there is no proper consensus on whether that is the correct basis for research into illnesses. I note in particular the approach to similar circumstances taken by other countries. We are not alone in having carried out nuclear tests involving our service men. At that time we had a Commonwealth on which we could call, and some Commonwealth countries provided men. I draw attention to the example of the New Zealand Government, who have grant-aided the New Zealand Nuclear Test Veterans Association to provide a basis for that organisation's own research. That is a positive idea for two reasons.

First, the test veterans argue that they are overwhelmed by the scale of a large and understandably secretive Department—the Ministry of Defence—and the weight of the scientific establishment, against which they must contend purely with voluntary funds. The New Zealand Government have set a good example in choosing to grant-aid their veterans so that they can buy their own research. That provides a proper balance with the science of the matter. Secondly, we should genuinely consider whether there are different ways of looking at how to research the issue.

Thus far, our approach has been to take account of the scale of the issue—more than 20,000 people were involved in tests—without, perhaps, always recognising the different circumstances of individual test veterans. Some people were clearly exposed to a greater risk than others. The *Sunday Mirror* has carried many stories about the issue. By simply taking the group as one swathe, without sufficient differentiation of either the test or the circumstances of the military operation in which a person was involved, the precise circumstances will be concealed by the sheer scale of the data which the NRPB will be examining.

At the end of my speech I will call for far finer slicing of the data, to attribute the data to individual operational circumstances and particular tests. If we did that, we would be able to identify whether pockets of occurrences might be concealed in the overwhelming evidence of a large number of people who may have had little exposure to danger during an operation.

The United States has had an extensive programme of tests and it operates a policy for veterans for whom there is a presumed cause for one of 15 illnesses from which they may suffer. If a person can demonstrate that they were involved in a particular test and developed one of those illnesses, there is a presumption, which does not require a test in court, that they should be compensated for that experience. I do not understand why we choose not to follow a similar path to the one taken by the United States; that great Government are prepared to take such a step.

The Australian Government have also, to a lesser extent, adopted a presumed cause approach. In my correspondence with the Minister—I always appreciate the courtesy and the length of the answers that he has given to me on the various questions that I have asked—he hints at one possible reason, which is that factors such as the small size of the nuclear test participant group appear to be relevant. That suggests that we can take a straightforward approach to the issue because some countries say that only a relatively small number of people were affected. It also suggests that the British Government are apprehensive about a large number of claimants and, therefore, the substantial cost associated with dealing with the problem. That does not reflect well on our integrity and honesty. Surely, damage is the same whether it is done to a citizen of New Zealand, Australia or America, or to one of our own citizens. We should be prepared to take the experience of other countries into account.

Some of the New Zealand Nuclear Test Veterans Association's research has been commissioned in this country. We welcome that because it provides us with greater opportunities to examine different dimensions of the problem. Research is being undertaken in Dundee and I am aware that the MOD has taken a particular

[Mr. Mark Todd]

view of the work of Sue Rabbit-Roff. It has also been commissioned in the university of St. Andrews. The other research that I am aware of is that at Massey university in New Zealand.

I should hope that we are fully engaged with the New Zealand Government on what they have set off through their approach, although I have not been reassured by the answers that the Minister has given me. I have asked whether we have made representations to the New Zealand Government and the answer was no. I have asked whether there has been any substantial engagement with the issue, and was told that there has not. I hope that we are aware of the research activity, and that we are engaged sympathetically in trying to understand what that research is seeking to achieve and in liaising with those who commissioned it.

I come to the rather legalistic way in which the issue has been addressed. I represent a former mining constituency, in which miners had to fight for many years to demonstrate the damage caused to their health by coal dust in their lungs and the use of vibrating tools. That culminated in a successful action in 1997, and gradually and painfully, in the drawing down of compensation for the people involved.

I am well aware of the lengthy civil process that can be involved in pursuing such claims, and I would not wish that on anyone, particularly not on a voluntary organisation. The one advantage that mine workers had was a well resourced trade union to fight the case on their behalf and to commission the best possible legal advice. I note that civil cases are being considered at the moment, and I would not wish that process on those pursuing them; it would be long, painful, and might, if the case is eventually proved, lead to a large class action.

There are far better ways of pursuing such issues, and one can see that even in the mining industry. In the early 1970s, the Government correctly understood that pneumoconiosis was a major disease in mining, and that there should be a straightforward compensation scheme available to people who could demonstrate that they had experienced it in their lives. I recommend a simple process, and the presumed cause approach that I have suggested would provide that simplicity.

If a case went to court, one would have to demonstrate negligence, and consider the advice that was available. We must recognise that our knowledge is much greater than it was then, and some of the precautions that, frankly, we ridicule now may well have seemed to be the best ways of protecting people. We would also have to show whether there was intent, and that causes concern. I have received correspondence from the Minister that says that there was no intent to test the effect that the weapons had on human beings. In a quotation from the *Sunday Mirror*, there is a reference to a declassified document, dated 20 May 1953. The article says:

"A report to the Chiefs of Staff, headed 'Atomic Weapons Trials' states: 'The Army must discover the detailed effects of various types of explosion on equipment, stores and men with and without various types of protection.'"

I do not know whether that approach was adopted.

I ask the Minister to consider whether we can release the full public record of those tests now for proper scrutiny. The bits that have crept out show that part of the purpose was indeed to understand what happened when nuclear weapons were exploded and a person was in reasonably close proximity to them. Certainly, the evidence shows that there was the intention to understand how equipment reacted to weapons, and human beings then had to clean down that equipment. They were exposed to the risk partly through that. If that was part of the purpose of the tests, there should now be candour about it.

I have talked to my father—who was a career naval officer—and my mother about that time, and it is clear that their generation's attitude towards risk was very different from ours. People had lived through a world war in which they had seen friends die in violent ways, and many of them were trained to say, "Well, it is our job to take risks." That might have been the case, but people who are placed in harm's way deserve to know something about what that harm might be and what the exercise that they are involved in might achieve.

I see no evidence of such candour towards service men at that time. It appears that advice and information were minimal and perfunctory. It is worth reflecting on the culture of the time, which is evidenced by the recent disclosures at Porton Down that service men could be used legitimately as guinea pigs; they were given minimal information, and sometimes—one hopes in extreme cases—they were deceived. That that was the concept of a service man's role at that time in our country's history should be addressed honestly.

It is easy to make judgments now about attitudes then, and I am not seeking to do that. I merely think that we should be honest about what might have happened, and about the contexts of these tests. Therefore, I hope that as part of this exercise, we can be open with people about the purpose and meaning of these tests, and about how we communicated what they were about to those who participated in them.

First, we should consider the basis of presumed cause in dealing with certain kinds of illnesses where they occur among nuclear test veterans. Secondly, we should re-examine the test data and seek to differentiate it with regard to the circumstances of the operation in which people were involved and the individual test in which they participated. Thirdly, we should look at empowering the test veterans associations by providing them with resources so that they can commission their own research and vigorously question the science of all of this. The Minister will almost certainly respond by discussing the science as it is perceived by the Ministry of Defence. I want there to be proper engagement with that subject; we should debate that science in a fully informed way and with a greater degree of consensus than has been achieved until now. Fourthly, I want a proper disclosure of the purpose of these tests and how we communicated what they were about to the service men of that time.

We should give respect to those who participated in these tests and followed the orders that they were given. They did their duty. We have a duty to act with integrity towards them and their families.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I plan to start the winding-up speeches at 10.25 am. Five hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. I wish them to think of their

colleagues; if each of them were to speak for roughly seven minutes, that would enable everyone to contribute to the debate.

9.48 am

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd), and I congratulate him on securing the debate. The matter is of great importance to a relatively small number of people; but the issues that the debate raises are of wide importance. He has done the House and the public a service by raising this subject.

I want to centre my remarks on the case of my constituent, Mr. Derek Fiddaman. He was serving on the guard ship HMS Cossack as part of Operation Grapple X when the fourth British nuclear test at Christmas Island was carried out on 8 November 1957. The ship sailed to the west of the island after the explosion, and it is argued that it became contaminated as the wind carried radiation from the site of the explosion to where it had sailed to. Eighteen years later, in 1975, the first symptoms appeared of the basal cell carcinomas from which Mr. Fiddaman still suffers today.

After the contamination of nuclear test veterans came publicly to light in 1980, Mr. Fiddaman contacted a radiologist in Guildford. He was diagnosed as suffering as a result of over-exposure to radiation. He had been undergoing a course in radiotherapy for the basal cell condition; but that course was ceased immediately. Since 1980, he has undergone more than 100 operations to remove malignant tumours. He will attend a further clinic tomorrow.

Mr. Fiddaman has stressed that his case is by no means the worst. He is not whingeing or complaining; he says that many others are much worse off than he is. However, he has suffered enormously from his condition for more than 27 years. In 1980, when the source of his illness was first properly diagnosed, he applied for a war pension. Two years later—the process was not rapid—an initial decision was reached and he was offered £2,000. On appeal, that was upgraded to a 20 per cent. pension entitlement. Eventually, after a series of grudging decisions to upgrade the entitlement, he was awarded a 60 per cent. war pension. Getting that level of pension sounds like a long and painful process, but Mr. Fiddaman, again, is comparatively one of the lucky ones. Out of 1,228 claims for war pensions from the test veterans up to March 2000, only 467 resulted in awards.

As we know, until 1987, service personnel were prevented from pursuing claims for compensation from the Ministry of Defence by the Crown Proceedings Act 1947—now, happily, repealed. Between then and May 2000, 144 claims for compensation were made; none has been settled. In other words, fewer than 500 of the perhaps 20,000 veterans who witnessed the tests have received any kind of recompense. In no case has it been recognised that people suffered as a result of inadequate precautions when the tests were carried out. The onus for proving entitlement to a war pension is placed entirely on the veterans. As Mr. Fiddaman's case illustrates, the process is long and tortuous. More than half of the cases have resulted in outright failure; in many other cases, only a partial award has been made.

In the meantime, the continuing struggle to establish a right to compensation has left the veterans in a state of great uncertainty. It is now 45 years or more since the tests took place and many people were—arguably; this is the issue that must be resolved—exposed to the radiation that has harmed them.

This is not a partisan issue. I am conscious that it is the kind of issue that parliamentarians tend to take up in opposition and then drop when in government. I hope that the tone of this debate will be non-partisan. I understand why Government Ministers and the MOD take a slightly different view today from that taken by the Labour party when it was in Opposition. The MOD has a history of being very reluctant to accept liability; I am not talking only about this issue but about other issues as well. As we saw with Gulf war syndrome, when any such suggestion is made, the MOD tends immediately to deny any possible connection between what was done and the illnesses that transpired. The issue is then obscured and even obstructed. That is very unfortunate and very bad for the reputation of the MOD. The House will appreciate that I am not one of those who routinely attacks the MOD. I am a huge admirer of our armed forces, which are the finest in the world. I have no animus at all against the Ministry of Defence. However, its Ministers and officials must understand that a lack of straightforwardness has caused distrust of the MOD. People do not feel that they have been treated fairly, openly and straightforwardly on this issue and, indeed, others. I urge a different approach most strongly.

I was a Treasury Minister many years ago. I am very conscious of concerns that are raised in the Treasury on any issue of this sort. The same old phrases always emerge: "Floodgates opening"; "The thin end of the wedge"; and "If we accept liability in one case, the whole thing will be opened up." I am one of nature's Treasury Ministers. I am not an enthusiast of the reckless spending of public money. However, an injustice has been done and people have been subjected to danger and suffering as a result of what the Government asked them to do.

That is especially true of our armed service men, who were national service men who had no option about what they did or where they went because they were under military orders. They were subjected to danger as a result of the Government's actions. If it is probable—it does not need to be established beyond peradventure—that what they went through caused the pain and illness that many have suffered, the Government should pay up because that is required for justice.

There has been a lack of openness and straightforwardness. In 2000, the Government said that test veterans would have the right to request access to their official service records, including their medical records. It was said that they would be entitled to have access to any information held relating to their exposure to radiation while participating in the nuclear test programme. The situation has not quite worked out like that. Despite repeated attempts, Mr. Fiddaman has still not been able to view his service records. During a meeting with an MOD official, it transpired that radiation readings carried out among servicemen at the time of the tests appeared not to have been properly logged in several cases. That puts people at a major

[Mr. Francis Maude]

disadvantage. Some information seems to have been withheld, some seems to have been destroyed and some was never recorded.

Indeed, it was left to Mr. Fiddaman to prove the positioning of the HMS Cossack on the day of the test. Using his training in navigation, he reconstructed the ship's course on charts held in the Public Record Office. It is fair to say that he was a bit offended by the justification that the MOD eventually used for awarding him his 60 per cent. war pension. The MOD said that it was offered to him on the basis of his "over-exposure to brilliant sunlight" while on active duty. We all know about the risks of skin cancer due to sunlight, but that way of denying liability for something that seems increasingly likely is mildly offensive. Mr. Fiddaman continues to campaign despite the fact that his position is better than that of many others.

I am following on from what the hon. Member for South Derbyshire said. I urge the Government to be very open, to lay the records bare and to allow completely open scrutiny of everything that happened. The Government and the Ministry of Defence should not fear such openness and scrutiny. If there is nothing to hide, there is, by definition, nothing to fear from the most open scrutiny that can be imagined. If there is something to hide, simple, straightforward equity and justice require the course that I urge the Government to take.

9.59 am

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on securing this debate on an issue that will, clearly, not go away. I am pleased to be here to support him and the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude). They clearly elaborated the issue from the veterans' point of view.

I wish to discuss an issue raised in a letter from my hon. Friend the Minister to a member of the veterans association in which he describes the Ministry of Defence view being established and supported by "sound scientific analysis". I am slightly sceptical whenever I see phrases such as that one or "evidence-based medicine". It is not that I do not want to achieve that, but there is always another view. A view is only as good as the evidence that is available today. Further research often shows that there is another explanation.

Indeed, science is based on quarrelsome individuals who hardly ever agree with each other. There are still people who do not believe that prions cause BSE and some who believe that AIDS is not caused by a virus. There are others who, with little scientific evidence, believe that telecommunication masts cause childhood leukaemia. Such issues are concerned with more than just straightforward, scientific and medical evidence. The public must also be convinced that the expertise and knowledge is convincing and can be supported.

We live in a world that is rapidly changing. On the issue of genetically modified crops, for example, people do not necessarily believe the evidence of experts. We should be sceptical about whether the sun will rise tomorrow morning in the east. I am 99 per cent. sure, but part of me says, "Well, it might not." Our views and legislation should operate on that basis.

Much evidence has been produced that will no doubt be disparaged, such as the work of Dr. Rabbit-Roff, or by John Urquhart, who addressed a meeting of MPs and veterans in Westminster Hall last week. The *Sunday Mirror* contacted the 350 families from the original study and 300 responded. Among those, the number of cases of Down's syndrome was significantly greater than the national average.

Mr. Urquhart is a brilliant statistician. I know that, in epidemiology, statistics are all—with chi-squares and T-tests and so forth. However, it is not necessarily an exact science. It is hard to get the evidence, but it is based on good statistics. Mr. Urquhart has researched child leukaemia and has found that, in the families studied—although it could be argued that the study is selective—there are above average rates of cancer and Down's syndrome.

Dr. Rabbit-Roff and others claim that the incidence of multiple myelomas—a type of blood cancer arising in the bone marrow—is way above national levels among veterans. When I looked it up in the medical books that I occasionally pull off the shelf, I found that one cause of multiple myeloma is exposure to nuclear explosions. That is what young medical students are now told. When one looks at death certificates, such sophisticated knowledge is not always there. Any analysis based on a death certificate that says "heart failure" must be absolutely right because everybody's heart fails when they die. Death certificates can be filled in quite easily. They are not a good parameter for examining the issue.

There are tests available that veterans could now use, such as cytogenetic tests that examine chromosomes, the deoxyribonucleic acid and so forth. They would clearly show that there had been minor damage to chromosomes in the genetic material that had been caused by radiation. Nobody would deny that radiation causes genetic damage. The subject is crying out for new research to examine the whole process of what has happened. There are individuals who are prepared to play a part in that, and I hope that the Government will, now take a good solid look at all the evidence available, pull it together and give us the final judgment.

10.4 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): As I am conscious of the time, I shall concentrate on the case of a constituent. I am not someone who is necessarily drawn to the work of the Ministry of Defence or to defence matters, but I was particularly shaken by a meeting with my constituent, Shirley Denson of Morden. It was towards the end of 1998 when I first heard from her and became aware of the tragic life of her late husband, Squadron Leader Eric Denson, who committed suicide in 1976 after a long struggle with health problems.

Some 40 years before my first meeting with his widow, the 26-year-old Flight Lieutenant Denson captained one of the three Canberra aircraft deployed to fly a nuclear cloud-sampling mission through the mushroom cloud created by the three-megaton Grapple Y air drop detonation on 28 April 1958.

The planes were collecting samples while in the cloud. In the process, Flight Lieutenant Denson and his crew would each have collected 13,000 rads, which is the equivalent of 6,500 full body X-rays. Flying into the

cloud 49 minutes after detonation, Flight Lieutenant Denson was ordered to keep the plane inside for six minutes; four minutes longer than the aircraft should have been inside because of a fault on one of the dosimeters. When the plane landed, the ground crew said that it was the hottest aircraft they had ever handled. As well as receiving massive radiation in the air, the crews would have been exposed to the radiation fallout on the ground, as they drank water, ate shellfish and caught fish in the sea around them. I understand that Eric Denson's eventual dosage could have been the equivalent of 40,000 X-rays.

Eric Denson was sent home after that flight and told that his dosage exceeded the legal limit, thus excluding him from participating in further tests. His vomiting started almost immediately, and became so severe that he was forced to delay in Fiji for a further three days. Great emphasis was placed on the imposition of strict orders of secrecy concerning any discussion of events going on in the south Pacific. Be that as it may, after Eric Denson's return in obvious ill health, no medical checks or follow-up—in fact, no duty of care of any reasonable kind—were provided that could have alerted him to the probable cause of his progressive medical problems. Significantly, no mention was made in his medical records of his activities in the south Pacific in 1958.

Squadron Leader Denson ended his life in 1976 at the age of 44, after 18 years of breathing difficulties, acute sinusitis, mood swings, anxieties and depressions. He was the father of four children. His widow had no idea at the time of his high dosage of ionising radiation, which he acquired through his participation in nuclear tests almost two decades earlier. Another 20 years passed, during which Shirley Denson brought up four daughters on her own, three of whom were born after 28 April 1958. All three have experienced lasting health problems.

In 1997, Shirley was alerted to the latest scientific evidence about the Christmas island tests, and started her own investigations into the events there, with a growing realisation of the true effect of radiation poisoning on her husband. Such is the case of my constituent, and I pay tribute to her energy and tenacity. It has been strongly suggested to her during meetings with officials that her late husband was sickly and unbalanced from boyhood, and that his suicide was somehow inevitable and nothing to do with Christmas island. That is not an image of Eric Denson that squares with the fit Yorkshireman who joined the RAF to serve his country, and who was pronounced among the fittest of his peers, an expert pilot and a credit to the squadron that he would eventually lead.

There are several questions concerning that case, and there are many scientists here today who know a great deal more than I do. In the couple of minutes that I have left, I should like to ask the Minister some questions. I should be grateful if he explained why UK pilots such as Eric Denson and his peers were ordered to fly into experimental thermonuclear detonations without radiation protection. Will the Minister also explain whether the Government have any intention of following the lead taken by the Labour Government of New Zealand and instituting a medal—posthumous in too many cases—to commemorate the sacrifice of British test veterans?

Successive Governments have kept up a studied policy of denial, which today is clearly at odds with those of most western and NATO countries. Will the Minister explain why Britain persists in pursuing such a strange strategy? In doing so, the Minister might also explain why that policy of denial relies on a 1993 National Radiological Protection Board study that clearly found that UK test veterans had an excess of four major types of leukaemia, as well as excesses of bladder and liver cancers compared to a similar control group of veterans who did not participate in the tests.

I have many more questions, but I do not want to take up any more time. I want to allow everybody to have their chance to speak. Many people have questions that they want answered, and they deserve answers. Those responsible should be more straightforward than they have been.

10.9 am

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): First, I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on securing the debate. I should also like to welcome my hon. Friend the Minister. He is a gentleman, and we can expect him to take copious notes and not just to read out the carefully crafted brief from his Department. If he is unable to answer some of our questions, no doubt he will write to us.

I am going to tell a story, which some people may not appreciate. The issue is shrouded in deceit, deception and duplicity—the stuff of politics. Many people do not know that Britain never developed an independent H-bomb. The Minister and his Department will know that the first time we tested a bomb it was unsuccessful. In the middle of the cold war, however, the Government's policy was to sit at the top table with the H-bomb countries. They wanted parity with America and an independent deterrent, and they wanted to defend certain colonies and ex-colonies.

The Government concocted the biggest hoax in this country's history. They exploded an atom bomb that contained so much uranium that it caused a 750,000 tonnes explosion, which made the Americans think that we had an H-bomb. The Americans admitted us to the top table and gave us access to their secrets. Later, Britain managed to clone an American bomb, but we had, of course, created some difficulties. An atom bomb is dirtier, more dangerous to personnel and more radioactive than a hydrogen bomb. We could not allow that fact to be revealed in the form of extra protection for our service men. We therefore sailed our service men close to the explosion, and did not give them the protection that they needed.

Worse than that, the British did not record the radiation readings in case they fell into the hands of a clever American observer who would have noticed that the radiation levels did not coincide with the explosion of an atomic bomb. All the readings were faked and fixed in the interests of national security. However, we need not have bothered because the Americans knew that the dosimeters did not work. Once we had started our great lie, however, we had to continue it.

One incidence of the great lie concerns a friend and constituent, Ron Coates. He was told that he could not have been issued with a dosimeter because his duties did not concern radiation. Unfortunately for the

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Department, Mr. Coates has a photograph of himself wearing a dosimeter. The Department claimed that the dosimeter must have been issued in a simulation or exercise, but Mr. Coates has a photograph of the exercise. It shows four young men standing on the deck of a ship and there is a giant mushroom cloud behind them; some simulation!

What were the duties for which Mr. Coates did not need to be issued with a dosimeter? He was a member of the Fleet Air Arm, and his job was to maintain aircraft and, in particular, helicopters. Britain might not have had an H-bomb, but we must have had a world lead in helicopters. Apparently, we had a helicopter that could land on an island one hour after an atomic blast without raising any dust or having any dust sticking to it. Apparently, it flew back to its ship and was perfectly clean. Supposedly, Mr. Coates was not exposed to radiation and his meter showed no radiation. The fact that after handling the helicopter, he had to go through the scrubbers and down the dirty trail has been totally forgotten.

I shall tell hon. Members the history of the four men in that photograph. Pete Cutforth has cancer; John Carr has diabetes, plus several other ailments; and Ron Coates has cancer. They have lost touch with the fourth man, a Mr. Rowlands, so they do not know what happened to him. That is some record. At least two of the four have certified cancer, despite the claim that they were not exposed to a sufficient level of radiation.

Mr. Coates, after many struggles—and having gone through all the hoops to gain the war pension for which he thought he was eligible—was told, believe it or not, that he had to prove that he would not have contracted cancer had he not been exposed to the radiation. How can anyone prove that? A person would have to go back to a point prior to the explosion, create two of themselves, and allow one to go through the explosion and one not to do so in order to see whether the one who had not gone through it developed cancer. What a stupid thing to say. It is as bad as asking a service man who has been shot on active service to prove that he would not have been shot while walking the dangerous streets of Britain. Anyone who did that would be laughed out of the tribunal, but that is what was said, in effect, to that group of servicemen.

All they are asking for is fair treatment. I know that it is difficult for the Department, but the cat is out of the bag. The Americans now know that it was a con and a hoax. We do not have to keep up the pretence any longer. All we need to do is to quantify the cost to us. The first part of the claim is to secure a recognition of what these people went through; what we put them through. After that, we should ensure, like the Americans, that there is an easier trail for such people to claim war pensions and thus compensation. They were there when their country needed them; please let their country be there when they need it.

10.16 am

Mrs. Janet Dean (Burton): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on securing this important debate. I want to raise the concerns of my constituent, Mr. Prescott, who served on Christmas island in 1962. Mr. Prescott has suffered from ill health for many years and, five years ago, at the age of 57, he was diagnosed with diffuse ideopathic skeletal hyperostosis; a disease that is usually found in very old people. He told me that changes were first noticed on X-rays that he had in the early 1970s. He also has other conditions, including diabetes. My constituent served on Christmas island at the time of operation Brigadoon. One of his concerns is that although the 1993 report by the National Radiological Protection Board stated that there were 350 participants in operation Brigadoon who were mentioned in the health physics records with non-zero doses of radiation, operation Brigadoon is not included in the analysis of the results of that report. It appears that the NRPB did not include the veterans of Brigadoon in its study because the Ministry of Defence did not believe that those involved had been liable to exposure to radiation.

Whatever the results of the NRPB studies in 1988 and 1993, since 1998 an increasing number of pensions have been awarded to UK veterans for conditions recognised by the United States as radiogenic. Sadly, those pensions are not being granted by the Veterans Agency, but are being won on appeal to pensions appeals tribunals. The British Nuclear Test Veterans Association estimates that the Veterans Agency regularly spends £50,000 on trying to reject such awards—10 times the amount that non-officer ranks could expect per year for a 100 per cent. war pension. It will always be difficult—in fact, probably impossible—for test veterans to prove conclusively that their medical conditions are caused by their service.

Many veterans have had many years of ill health. Indeed, as we have heard, some have already died. They feel a strong sense of injustice that they were used as guinea pigs. They have lived in fear for the past 40 to 50 years. Is it not time for the United Kingdom to adopt a formula based on a presumptive principle similar to that of the United States? If what we asked our servicemen to do was so harmless, my constituent, Mr. Prescott, asks,

"Would Ministers be happy to see thousands of service men witnessing nuclear explosions today in the way they did in the 50's and 60's? Would they watch the footage of young men with their bones lit up in front of each other through the x ray effect caused by such a detonation on the burning of the skin, loss of eyebrows, the panic and fear spread amongst the men as the heat from the blast passes through their bodies?"

I hope that we will reconsider the way in which we treat our veterans and recognise that we owe them a debt of gratitude for the service they have given to this country.

10.20 am

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on securing the debate, not least because of my constituent, Mr. Tom Clarke, who lives in Blunts. I shall not repeat what Mr. Clarke has been telling me, because we have heard so many good accounts of veterans' stories. I shall instead concentrate on a few extra questions. The Minister has already heard many questions, so if he does not get around to answering all of them, I hope that he will respond in writing, as it is important that our constituents hear as many answers as possible.

On medical issues, I understand that the National Radiological Protection Board has launched a further study. We hope that its results will be available next

year. What contributions are the Government making to the study, and does the Minister have any idea when it will be available?

How, if there were insufficient records on veterans—we have heard much about the way in which data were or were not taken—could the 1998 and 1993 studies claim any accuracy? Why do the Government continue to ignore the medical conclusions reached in other countries, such as America and Australia, and maintain such a distinct position?

I shall consider some legal aspects. The Minister will be aware that the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights criticised the Government's reluctance to provide comprehensive information about tests and medical details, and concluded that it constituted a breach of human rights. What is the Government's response to that? Have they given an official response, or will they respond today?

I have written to the Minister on other issues, such as asbestos, relating to the effect of the repeal of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947, which bars retrospective claims by law. Does he intend to continue to invoke that, so that legally, even if the Government are persuaded that there are compensation requirements, they will be barred from seeing them through?

In today's state of heightened tension over Iraq and so on, the public are looking to the armed forces as they do not usually do. Surely it is of paramount importance that we are seen to treat them in the very best way. We have seen not only how successive Governments have treated the veterans under discussion but how they have decided to treat Gulf war syndrome, unlike America, which has accepted that the syndrome may exist. It is important for the Government to recognise that if we want men and women to join the armed forces and put their lives on the line, we should show them some respect if things go wrong and unintended consequences come back to haunt us.

There seems to be a prevailing ethos in the Government of closing down any thought of proper investigation and introducing new regulations to ensure that they do not have to meet legal responsibilities. If we are asking people once again to go and fight for their country, the background of how the armed forces are being treated will have an effect. In today's climate, we need to give tangible assurances of the real commitment to treat service personnel as they ought to be treated.

Valid and transparent research, which is required for monitoring veterans' conditions, is crucial to past and present members of the armed forces and to the public, who are beginning to be uneasy. They think that the Government are continuing to absolve themselves from any responsibility towards them—in relation not only to the armed forces but to other areas, such as mining—and that they are trying to avoid paying compensation. That is in stark contrast to the way in which other countries have been prepared to accept certain responsibilities. Is it not now time for the Government to consider presumptive principles? It would be a matter not of blame but of recognising that many people who have served their country now need the Government's support.

10.26 am

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I join everyone else in congratulating the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on having secured this important debate, in which many interesting contributions have been made.

I echo the words of the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed). This country owes a great debt of gratitude to its service men. The issue is particularly apposite at present because so few citizens of this country are members of the armed forces. It is not like during the second world war and its aftermath, when the entire nation was involved. From time to time, we call on a tiny proportion of society to lay down their lives for their country. I have just returned from the Falkland islands, where acts of great heroism were carried out. Sometimes the warfare in which the armed forces are engaged is similar to the warfare that was seen during the first world war, yet the rest of the nation is watching television, going to the pub and playing football. We owe a great debt of gratitude to those who serve and have served in Her Majesty's armed forces and we should take their concerns and concerns about them seriously.

The independent nuclear deterrent provided security for the peoples of these islands for a generation. If it had not been for that deterrent, who knows what might have happened? These people were involved in testing the weapon that went on to keep the peace in Europe. My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who said that he was ever a Treasury man, commented that even if the tests were the probable cause, Her Majesty's Government should pay up. I have to tell him that even as an Opposition spokesman I am not in a position to write a blank cheque, and if he were in the position of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), as he previously was, he would certainly slap me down if I were to do so. I recognise the difficulties.

We need to take a new look at how we treat veterans in the United Kingdom. When I went to the United States with the Select Committee on Defence in February, I noted how different the approach was there.

I know that the Government have set up a Veterans Agency, but it is a fairly limited operation. The time has come to examine where the burden of proof should lie. However, if there is to be an increase in public expenditure arising from such a change, it is perhaps not fair that that burden should fall on the Ministry of Defence. The crux of the issue is whether there is a causal link between participation in the nuclear test programme and any subsequent illness. As hon. Members said, successive Governments have commissioned scientific investigations to establish whether such a link exists.

The 1983 National Radiological Protection Board report was mentioned. That study compared the rate of mortality and the incidence of cancer in more than 22,000 men who took part in the tests with those in a similar group of men and civilians who were not involved. The results were published in the *British Medical Journal* and concluded that participation in the tests had no detectable effect on the participants' life expectancy. The study also failed to establish a causal relationship between the incidence of cancer and

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participation in the nuclear test programme. In particular, there was no evidence linking an increased incidence of any cancer with an increase in radiation dose, contrary to what might have been expected if the cancers were radiation-induced.

The 1983 report recommended that there should be further observations on groups of participants, that controls should be maintained for a further 10 years, and that a further report should be commissioned in 1992. The Conservative Government kept their word and commissioned that report. In December 1993 the then Minister, Jeremy Hanley—now quite rightly Sir Jeremy Hanley—confirmed in an answer to a parliamentary question that the follow-up report had reinforced the original report's conclusions. It had established that no case had yet been found that proved a causal link.

In May 1995, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, reaffirmed the Government's position when he said:

"Over a period of more than 40 years from the atmospheric nuclear tests in the 1950s and early 1960s, up to the end of 1990, there has been no overall excess of death and malignant disease among British nuclear test veterans. Out of over 20,000 veterans studied by the National Radiological Protection Board, more than 3,000 would have died, over 900 of them from cancer, if the veterans had suffered the same death and cancer rates as members of the public in the same age groups. In fact, fewer than 2,800 veterans died, fewer than 800 of them from cancer, these figures being no higher than for the matched control group in the NRPB study. These facts do not sustain a case for compensation."

When the Conservatives left office in 1997, we were committed to offering compensation to anyone who could be

"shown to have suffered injury or illness as a result of radiation from the nuclear tests."

No causal link had been proved, although independent scientists had recommended that further studies be undertaken, and we were bound to abide by their findings. The Conservative Government had made all decisions strictly in accordance with the recommendations of the independent scientists at the NRPB.

Recently, the debate has been enlivened by a newspaper campaign. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who I believe presided over a meeting here with the veterans, said that the veterans had no confidence in the NRPB. Indeed, he told us this morning that people were sceptical about scientists and, by implication, that he tended to agree with them. However, he holds a bachelor of science degree in genetics and I hope that he would feel that the public had some confidence in his views on genetics.

The NRPB has consistently found no causal link. We are making a serious charge when we say that we do not trust those scientists. Applying that distrust across the board undermines any study that the Government commission, and by extension undermines the evidence that others submit. It would be a grave crime against the people of this country if the NRPB had systematically engaged in a cover-up or a deceit that was not a cover-up but more a manipulation of the statistics to achieve a desired outcome.

Dr. Gibson: The hon. Gentleman is over-egging the pudding. That was not what was being said, which was that different people can assess scientific evidence in different ways. It depends on the questions asked. I made the point that it is a very difficult field in which to acquire hard evidence. It is difficult to determine that one factor in the environment is causing a problem when people are subjected to all sorts of assaults from their environment. No one is saying that the matter debases science itself. The argument is about the interpretation of scientific results.

Mr. Howarth: I am sure that everyone will be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for expanding his point. I have a great deal of time for him, as he knows.

It would be easy for the Opposition to jump on the bandwagon in support of a newspaper campaign, but I do not intend to do that. I will, however, have a little fun at the expense of the Minister, if I may. In 1986, a Mr. Neil Kinnock, whom some hon. Members in the Labour party might remember, wrote to Ken McGinley—then chairman of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association—saying:

"The next Labour Government, as a matter of urgency and priority, will set up a full judicial inquiry."

Four years later, Bob Clay—a Labour MP—promoted a private Member's Bill calling for compensation for the veterans. The Bill had the support of the current Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary, Leader of the House, the former Secretary of State for Scotland—the late Donald Dewar— the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the current Secretary-General of NATO, and others. That was a strong supporting cast, yet the Government have not offered a judicial inquiry.

I stand by the pledge that my predecessors gave when the Conservatives were in office. The Ministry of Defence owes a duty of care to everyone serving in the armed forces and a duty to compensate those injured in the course of service. If the *Sunday Mirror* has produced evidence that strongly asserts a causal link between participation in the test programme and any form of injury or illness, the Government should properly assess the validity of the new claims. I understand that the Legal Services Commission recently awarded the veterans funding to undertake a further review. I hope that that will be forthcoming and that the MOD will approach it in the spirit that both Government and Opposition Members would like it to have.

I have spelt out the Opposition's principled position, but add a qualification: despite the conclusions of many rigorous scientific investigations, anecdotal evidence remains to suggest at least the possibility of a link between participation in the programme and various examples of long-term injury. Anyone who has seen pictures on the television of the mushroom cloud and men standing there with their hands covering their eyes must feel discomfort at the apparent lack of protection that those men were given.

No matter how strong the statistical evidence to the contrary, we must be absolutely certain of it before we dismiss the claims of ex-servicemen who believe that

they have suffered terribly as a result of the tests. I therefore draw hon. Members' attention to a speech made some years ago by the now Minister for Transport, then a Defence Minister, in which he said:

"The vast majority of personnel who were present during tests were mustered in areas that were known to be safe from the effects of blast, heat and any prompt or residual radiation. At Christmas Island, for example, the muster points were in the areas of the main camp and the port, each of which was some 25 miles from the detonations."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1998; Vol. 305, c. 1009.]

I do not doubt the truth of that statement, but I emphasise the first three words: "The vast majority" of personnel were in safe areas. Will the Minister assure us that all personnel were safe, or is there a chance that some were not? Although the vast majority undoubtedly were safe, reports from a number of veterans suggest that a very small minority may not have been. Is there a chance that some veterans are suffering as a result of their participation, but that their numbers are too small to show up in a survey that encompasses all 22,000 personnel who took part? If the vast majority were safe, that raises a question about why all the personnel were included in a survey that was intended to show up any differences between the mortality rates of the veterans and of the civilian population.

If it is possible to separate out those veterans who may have been exposed to a higher risk during the programme of tests, that group should be analysed relative to the control group. Obviously, it cannot be a self-selected group of veterans who took part in the tests and subsequently fell ill. As I mentioned, from a group of 20,000 veterans, more than 3,000 would have been expected to die in any case. However, I remind the Minister that even if only a handful of veterans have suffered as a result of their participation, we owe it to them to find that out and compensate them if possible.

I was very touched by the case mentioned by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). To the layman, it must seem almost an open-and-shut case that a pilot flew through a mushroom cloud and subsequently developed various ailments. That also points to a new development: the genetic effect on subsequent families since the tests of 1983 and 1992. The Minister might like to address that. I shall conclude my speech now to give him a chance to respond to the many points that have been made.

10.41 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) has secured the debate. I cannot answer today all the detailed questions that were asked, but I promise that every hon. Member who asked a question will receive a full response as soon as possible.

Nuclear testing is a deeply emotive subject. Recent articles in the *Sunday Mirror* that coincided with the 50th anniversary of the first test conducted by the United Kingdom, which took place on 3 October 1952 at Monte Bello island off the north-western coast of Australia, have once again provoked much debate, some of which is clearly ill informed. I therefore welcome this opportunity to restate the position of the Ministry of Defence on this important matter.

The UK conducted a total of 21 atmospheric nuclear tests in Australia and at Malden island and Christmas island in the 1950s. Some 28,000 UK service personnel were involved in the test programmes, the majority in logistic support. Service personnel from Australia and New Zealand also took part.

For some years, a number of veterans of the test programme have claimed that their health was damaged by deliberate or accidental exposure to ionising radiation. However, my Department has consistently rejected those claims, on the basis that stringent safety precautions were in place at all times. Film badges were issued as necessary to some personnel to record radiation dosage, and environmental monitoring was undertaken. The majority of the service men involved were mustered at safe locations and advised as to what precautions they should take. Obviously, that means that some who took part in the tests were mustered at less safe locations. I think that they made up some 8 per cent. of the 1,800 in total who were issued with film badges. Obviously, there were degrees of exposure. No one, certainly in modern times, has denied that.

In response to concerns about the health of British service personnel who participated in the UK's test programme, my Department commissioned a comprehensive and independent epidemiological study by the National Radiological Protection Board and staff from the Imperial Cancer Research Fund in the early 1980s. The study—based on death certificate information and data from the national cancer registration scheme—cost £540,000 and an additional £160,000 was spent on a subsequent follow-up study. A variety of sources were consulted and, in order to secure accuracy, more than 100,000 records were examined.

The studies involved tracing the service records of 22,000 participants and identifying an equal number of servicemen matched for age and experience but who had no involvement in the test programme—the control group. The results of the study were published in 1988 and a follow-up study was later conducted and its findings published in 1993. Both studies showed conclusively that participation in the test programme had no detectable effect on the participants' expectation of life or on the risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases.

Leukaemia and multiple myeloma were particular concerns. The 1993 report stated that the possibility that participants in the tests experienced a small risk of developing leukaemia in the first 25 years could not be ruled out. The same report also stated that the possible multiple myeloma noted in the previous 1988 report was not confirmed. A third analysis by the NRPB into the incidence of multiple myeloma, other cancers and other causes of death among test veterans was commissioned by my Department. The results of that study, which has undergone peer review, are expected to published next year. Funding of £30,000 per annum is also being provided for the maintenance of the database of veterans, which has been used during the compilation of these three studies.

I should point out that the earlier studies were reported in the *British Medical Journal* in January 1988 and December 1993.

Mr. Todd: Can the Minister provide more detail about how the studies examined individual

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circumstances and the particular tests in which the service men participated? I raised the issue, and the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) confirmed that examining 22,000 individuals might conceal a significantly greater degree of exposure among smaller groups who conducted particular operations in a particular test environment.

Dr. Moonie: Without having the substantial study in front of me, I cannot reply now other than to say that we would be prepared to consider the possibility of examining the health experience of a sub-group that received slightly higher than average doses. One has to be careful not to bias epidemiological studies; the greater proportion of the group that is separated out, the more likely the bias. The studies were paid for by the Ministry of Defence, but were constructed on the most rigorous scientific methodology available. People who know what they are talking about have held them up as models of how epidemiological studies should be carried out. When we are debating scientific research, it is important to recognise that, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) would agree.

Informed criticism and debate of scientific studies is always welcome. Having been responsible for a programme of work on Gulf veterans, I know that procedures have changed over the years and that further studies are carried out in the light of criticisms of previous ones. We maintain an open mind and want to people to be as well informed as possible about what is going on. We recognise that the over-secrecy of the past is counter-productive to honest debate.

Mr. Jenkins: Is the Minister saying that the 1,800 servicemen who were issued with film badges were not separated out and did not become part of the population to which the tests were directed? Were they lost in the greater number of 22,000, so that the figures were subsumed in a greater population than the one that we should have been assessing?

Dr. Moonie: No, that is not the case. If my hon. Friend were to examine the records of the people claiming to have suffered effects, he would find that they are not all members of that sub-group. If we want to study the effects on the group as a whole, we must study the group as a whole and not select out and bias the results. If the results are biased, the research is valueless. Frankly, speaking as a scientist and someone who was an epidemiologist in the past—if not a terribly good one in comparison with Sir Richard Doll or other such luminaries—I know that we have to be careful when constructing the population from which we draw inferences about the incidence of diseases.

There is no doubt that those who are complaining of being ill are ill. They have our greatest sympathy. After all, they are people who have served us. Sad to say, illness comes to us all with increasing age. However, where people are attributing an illness to a particular condition, we must be able to show that it is reasonable to do so.

I will return to my brief because I have a lot to cover in a short time. The British Nuclear Test Veterans Association has recently submitted a dossier to my Department, which includes the *Sunday Mirror* study of the health of the grandchildren of test participants. Clarification of the methods used has been sought. Because the study has not been published in the peer-reviewed scientific literature, my Department will look for a source of independent review. However, it is doubtful whether such studies can be regarded as scientifically valid epidemiology. That is because they are generally based on a self-selected sample of a few hundred families with medical problems—out of more than 20,000 participants—and because there are no controls.

Obviously, we are sympathetic to those with health problems, but the seventh report of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment, which was published in August this year, has dismissed ideas of a general link between preconceptional exposure to radiation and cancer in offspring. The report states:

"A number of epidemiological studies have failed to find evidence for a general PPI"—

parental preconceptional irradiation—

"effect either among . . . survivors of the atomic bombs in Japan or of workforces exposed to radiation."

Current information on radiation health effects suggests that studies of cancer among people who have been exposed to radiation are likely to provide a more sensitive means of detecting such effects than studies of their children.

There is no current scientific or medical evidence to show that the health problems, or other physical problems, suffered by the children or grandchildren of test veterans could be attributed to the veterans' participation in the test programme. If the nuclear test veterans have further new evidence that supports their case, I invite them to present it for independent scientific review.

Mr. Todd: Confidence in the science has been part of this debate. That confidence would increase if sufficient resources were provided to the nuclear test veterans so that they could commission their own scientific advice to input to the debate. What is the Minister's reaction to that proposal, bearing in mind the fact that the New Zealand Government have adopted such an approach?

Dr. Moonie: That is a matter for the New Zealand Government. I have studied this matter both as a Minister and as a professional in the field and I am confident that rigorous standards have been applied to the work that has been done and that no back-up is required in the form of further studies. Such studies would use essentially the same test base.

I want to comment on other studies and, in particular, on the work of Sue Rabbit-Roff, who is a medical sociologist at the University of Dundee. My Department is fully aware of her work, which is supported by the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association, an organisation that covers about 10 per cent. of the known test participants. Her study is mainly descriptive and is based on the death notifications of 608 test participants, provided by the BNTVA. That figure, of course, has to be compared with the figure of more than 21,000 in the National Radiological Protection Board studies. Her study is therefore of a self-selected

population. We do not consider it to be fully representative. As her study does not use a matched control group, its methodology is open to question. She makes no attempt to compare the figures in her study with national statistics. That is in contrast with the NRPB studies, which have been fully independently reviewed and have stood up to scientific scrutiny. I should point out in passing that her work has not yet been published in a peer-reviewed journal, as is the case with the NRPB studies.

Two test cases against the United Kingdom Government were brought before the European Court of Human Rights by the BNTVA in November 1997. The first concerned allegations that veterans were being prevented from obtaining documents required for applications for pensions. The second involved the daughter of a test veteran who was diagnosed as having leukaemia at the age of four.

The court ruled in favour of the UK Government on both occasions. In the first case, it decided that the Government had neither denied access to documents nor falsely denied the existence of related evidence. In the second case, the court found that there was no reason to suppose that the veteran in question had been exposed to dangerous levels of radiation and that there were no grounds on which the Government should have taken positive action by warning of or monitoring a risk to his daughter's health.

Those veterans appealed against the findings on the grounds of alleged new evidence. However, the European Court of Human Rights rejected their request for a revision of the judgments.

Mr. Todd: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Moonie: No, I do not have sufficient time.

Turning to the matter in hand—and to repeat what I said at the outset of my speech—there is no evidence to support the test veterans' claim that their participation in the tests has had a detectable effect on their life expectancy or their risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases. Consequently, grounds do not exist for compensation to be paid.

However, my Department's Veterans Agency makes provision in the form of war pensions and associated benefits for ex-service personnel who suffer from an illness or injury that is attributable to their service. Over the years, many war pensions claims have been made by ex-service men who participated in the nuclear test programme.

Based on the first National Radiological Protection Board report of 1988, the normal policy was to award war pensions for claims for leukaemia—other than chronic lymphatic leukaemia—and multiple myeloma, as well as for some other illnesses such as polycythaemia. The second NRPB report led to a revision of that policy. Since its publication, on the basis of presence at atmospheric nuclear test sites, new claims for multiple myeloma are not accepted, but awards continue to be made for leukaemia—other than chronic lymphatic leukaemia—and for primary polycythaemia rubra vera that has clinical onset within 25 years of first presence at the test sites.

The reports did not causally link development of those conditions to ionising radiation exposure. Therefore, the policy is not an acknowledgment that those present at the sites were exposed to harmful levels of ionising radiation. The accepted service link is purely presence at the test sites.

The reports do not provide reliable evidence to raise a reasonable doubt that other cancers—such as liver and bladder cancer—might be attributable to service in the armed forces because of presence at the sites. Consequently, awards are not made for solid cancers on the basis of presence at atmospheric nuclear test detonations or clean-up operations alone. However, an award of a war pension for cancer may be made in any case where there is reliable evidence of service exposure to a sufficient level of ionising radiation and a recognised causal link between the claimed condition and such accepted exposure.

Compensation to service personnel of other states who participated in the UK nuclear tests has been the subject of some debate, particularly with regard to the Governments of Australia and New Zealand. In 1983, the results of a study commissioned by the Australian Government into the health of Australian participants in the UK tests that were conducted on Australian territory indicated no increase in adverse health outcomes.

It has often been claimed that, in 1993, the UK Government were prepared to pay £20 million in compensation to Australian nuclear test veterans at the expense of their own test veterans; although that claim has not been made today. That sum was paid to the Australian Government, but it was a contribution towards the clean-up operation at the Maralinga range in South Australia, which is now complete.

In Australia, military nuclear test veterans can apply for an award through the military compensation and rehabilitation scheme in respect of injury and disease resulting from their participation in the British nuclear tests. Where it is confirmed that a claimant has been exposed to ionising radiation and they present with a disease that is characteristic of such exposure, claims are accepted without further investigation and compensation is paid. That is similar to the process that is followed in the UK.

I understand that nine payments have so far been made to Australian service men, and that several other cases are under consideration, with each case being decided on the basis of available evidence. The health disorders for which payments have been made include malignant neoplasms and skin conditions.

In New Zealand, veterans who participated in the British nuclear tests are eligible for full coverage under the Pensions Act 1954. A veteran may lodge a claim for any disability. Acceptance of the claim is subject to medical verification of the disability and acceptance that the condition is attributable to the veteran's service. Benefit of the doubt is exercised in favour of the veteran if there is any uncertainty as to whether a disability is attributable.

As in the United Kingdom, the war disablement pension is tax-free and, once awarded, paid for life in weekly payments. There are no known cases of nuclear test veterans having been paid compensation by the New Zealand Government. Four nuclear test veterans

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have lodged claims for damages against that Government in the High Court. The claims are current, so obviously I cannot comment on them.

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order. We must now move to the next business.

Scottish Fishing Industry

11 am

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): I would like to thank the Speaker for choosing Scotland's fishing industry as the matter for debate today, at this critical time for the industry.

There is absolutely no doubt that our fish and fish processing industries are facing a crisis. If the European Union's current recommendations were put into effect, there would be devastating job losses, not only in fishing communities but in the fish processing industry, and those industries are often scattered throughout the country.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Is he as surprised as I am by the article written by the Prime Minister in this morning's *Daily Record*, in which he estimates that more than 14,000 jobs are connected to the industry? Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that there are far more than 14,000 jobs at stake in the current crisis?

Mr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Yes, certainly the figures that I have seen show that there would be far more than 14,000 jobs at stake. The Prime Minister, in those comments this morning, underestimates the scale of the crisis that the Scottish economy faces.

Although fish processing factories throughout the country would suffer losses, the weight of the losses would mainly fall on fishing communities where the bulk of fishing is for white fish. Such communities are, by their very nature, isolated, and there is therefore little prospect of replacing the jobs lost in fishing with jobs in other sectors. Make no mistake: the loss of the way of life in those fishing communities and the destruction of jobs would be for ever. The 80 per cent. cut that the European Commission is proposing in the white fish fleet would bankrupt the industry. The loss of the infrastructure would mean that even if quotas were restored in several years, there would be no vessels left, no processing industry, and no skills left to restart the industries.

The Commission's reason for the shutdown is supposedly to save cod, but its proposals are based on dubious science. For a start, the scientific data on which the proposals are based are a year out of date. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea report does not take into account many things that have happened in the past 12 months, such as the 2002 decommissioning schemes, under which 100 vessels in Scotland, and 70 each in Denmark and England, were decommissioned. As well as that decommissioning, licences have been sold to the pelagic fleet, and boats have often been sold to other countries. That would take the real reduction in fishing effort in Scotland to well over the 100 vessels decommissioned.

The effect of decommissioning was a reduction in effort of 8.6 million kW days in Scotland alone. We have to add to that the extra losses because of vessels sold elsewhere. Also, the ICES report does not take into account the technical measures introduced at the beginning of the year, such as the increase in mesh size in the EU sector of the North sea north of Newcastle.

Scientific research commissioned by the Scottish Executive shows that those technical measures are working. They are allowing the small fish to escape. However, the best evidence that the cod recovery plan is working comes from the ICES report and I quote its figures. In the North sea in 2001, the spawning stock biomass for cod was 30,200 tonnes. In 2002, that went up to 37,600 tonnes. That increase is not far short of the 30 per cent. target set for the current cod recovery plan. There are even larger increases in the Irish sea and off the west coast of Scotland. That is hardly evidence of a species in decline and it is absolutely no justification for the draconian action that Franz Fischler is proposing.

I shall summarise the scientific position. During the past year, Scottish fishermen have implemented decommissioning and technical measures. Cod stocks have risen during the same period. That is surely evidence that the present cod recovery plan is working and it does not support bringing the plan to an end and wiping out the industry.

The ICES report that recommended the draconian action was published only at the end of October. However, the European Union Fisheries Council will meet in a couple of weeks, in the middle of December, to discuss shutting down the industry. The six-week period between publication of the report and the meeting is not nearly sufficient time to discuss the evidence and to reach a proper and considered conclusion.

Ann Winterton (Congleton): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has thought that the conservation issue is being used as an excuse for integration within Europe? That is the reason why so many Scottish fishermen, in particular, have to go—to accommodate others who are coming in.

Mr. Reid: I have no evidence to support conspiracy theories; I would rather stick to the facts.

The cod recovery plan is working, but discussions will be held soon to shut down the whole industry without proper consideration. The sensible course of action would be to continue discussing the measures while allowing a proper assessment of the situation and a discussion of proper alternatives. It is important that the fishing industry is properly involved in the discussions because the livelihood of people in that industry is at stake.

Most of the fishing off my west-coast constituency is for nephrops—or prawns, as they are more generally known. The way in which the nephrops quota for next year has been handled is another example of just how confused the EU Commission is. I suspect that there is more confusion than conspiracy.

Everyone agrees that nephrop stocks are strong, but European Commissioner Franz Fischler threatened nephrop fishermen with extinction, all in the name of saving the cod, because he believed from the report that there was significant cod by-catch due to nephrop fishing. When the ICES report was published, Franz Fischler said in a press release:

"Our own scientific and economic committee is currently evaluating the ICES advice and will give its own opinion on 11 November. Unless it says anything different, which is very unlikely, I can see no other solution in the short term than to propose for 2003 . . . substantial reductions for . . . nephrops."

Two weeks later, he did not propose what he said that he intended. Instead of proposing substantial cuts for nephrops, he proposed a 5 per cent. cut. We can assume only that his scientific advisers advised him that the ICES report was wrong about nephrops.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): From the UK position, we can claim some credit for that. We sent detailed scientific advice to demonstrate to the Commission that cod by-catch in the nephrop sector was minimal. That shows the advantage of making a case based on a good, logical and scientific background. It also demonstrates that change can occur if a good case is made.

Mr. Reid: I am grateful to the Minister. I was planning to deal with that later. I agree that UK scientists did a good job on nephrops and that the Minister did a good job when he argued the case at the Council.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Given that encouragement, would it not be a good idea for the Commission to have scientific assessments of the changes with regard to 110 mm nets, square mesh panels and the impact of 20 per cent. of decommissioning during the past year? If it had received that timeously, it would not have had only the past few days, as it said this week, to look at the substantial body of evidence that was ignored in the ICES assessment.

Mr. Reid: Yes, it is important that everything is taken into account. I believe that that scientific analysis had not been prepared at the time of the ICES report. Now that that information has been published, it is important that it is fully taken into account by the Fisheries Council before it makes a decision.

That the Commission got it badly wrong over nephrops and United Kingdom scientists got it exactly right—something that the Commission has now accepted—shows the fallibility of the ICES report. If it was fallible with regard to nephrops, there is a good chance that it was fallible about cod. I am grateful to the Minister for sending me the graph that shows that reducing catches of nephrops may be bad, not good, news, for cod. The figures show that there is a negative correlation between landings of nephrops and landings of cod, whereas the Commission was arguing the opposite. They show just how little scientists understand how different species of fish inter-react with one another.

Published scientific data give us a reasonably good estimate of the size of stocks at a particular time, but not what is happening regarding the interrelation between the different stocks and why such changes are occurring. However, we can speculate about that and one reason for the reduction in cod stocks in the southern part of the North sea could be global warming. Scientific data show that cod are far healthier in the northern part of the North sea than in the southern part.

Prawns eat cod spawn. It is possible therefore that cutting prawn catches could be bad for cod—the opposite of the Commission's original proposals. We all agree that the cod by-catch from prawn fishing is

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insignificant and that the Commission's 5 per cent. cut should be resisted. The United Kingdom was successful in resisting the 25 per cent. cut last year and I hope that it will be successful in resisting the 5 per cent. cut this year.

Although the nephrops fishery is not threatened with anywhere near the same disaster as the white fish industry, prawn fishermen on the west coast of Scotland are worried that if Franz Fischler's draconian measures are put through, their livelihoods could be threatened due to displaced effort of the white fish fleet fishing instead for cod. I hope that the Government will put in place measures to stop that displaced effort and that small, local prawn fisheries will be protected from the threats posed by larger boats.

The Clyde Fishermen's Association already operates conservation measures. For example, a box is closed between February and April to protect the cod and there is a 70-ft limit on white fish vessels in the Clyde. The association has proposed further conservation measures. It suggests, for example, that the 70-ft limit should apply to all fishing vessels and that an engine size limit would be a better guide than the 70-ft limit.

Local fishermen's observations are also important and should be taken into account. They have told me that the area of seabed in the Clyde that is covered with mud has increased over the years and that the area covered with sand and gravel has decreased. Given that prawns favour a mud bottom and that cod favour sand and gravel, that could be another explanation for the fall in cod stocks.The Clyde Fishermen's Association has commissioned research into that phenomenon. There should be conservation measures, and scientific research with fishermen, scientists and Governments working together is how the whole fishing industry should be managed—by regional management committees, not by panic-stricken draconian edicts from the Commission with which we have been threatened recently.

Andrew George (St. Ives): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making a sound case. He responsibly emphasised the importance of sticking to sound science and the responsible approach taken unilaterally by fishermen in Scotland to attempt to manage their fish stocks themselves. Does he agree that the United Kingdom must make a strong case to the European Commission not to have regional advisory committees, but to have strong, regional management committees with real teeth so that fish stocks can be managed more effectively within fishing regions?

Mr. Reid: My hon. Friend is right. That is how the common fisheries policy should progress. The regional advisory committees that are proposed by the Commission certainly provide a step in the right direction, but they do not go far enough. They should be given real teeth and real management powers.

Another area of concern to fishermen on the west coast is the proposal to change the scallop-testing regime. It is important that the Food Standards Agency works with the fishing industry to devise a scheme that is viable for the fishing industry and ensures safety for consumers.

In two weeks, the European Fisheries Council will discuss the reform of the CFP and the total allowable catches for next year. There is little, if anything, that I would disagree with in the Government's proposals regarding CFP reform. Many of the Commission's proposals provide steps in the right direction and it is important that many of them go through. What is most important of all is that the present six and 12-mile limits should be made permanent. It is vital that that is agreed in December.

The Minister has a good case to put to the European Fisheries Council against the Commission's proposal for an 80 per cent. cut. We all know, however, that when it comes to meetings of the Council of Ministers science often goes out of the window and horse trading is the name of the game. Britain lost out during the horse trading earlier this year on the allocation of deep sea quotas off the west coast of Scotland. The original scientific proposal had recommended effort control and specifically rejected TACs. At the Council of Ministers meeting, however, that recommendation was overturned. We do not know exactly what happened at that meeting, since one of the many ways in which the Council is wrong is that it meets in secret. It certainly appeared that a political fix was proposed by the Spanish presidency and that the Dutch and the Irish, who originally opposed the Spanish proposal, were bought off by the promise of increased quotas. At the last minute the Spanish proposal was accepted. That meant that the Fisheries Council adopted a proposal that flew in the face of scientific advice and which also gave a miserably low quota to Scottish fisherman, who are based the closest to the fishing grounds. That example shows what is wrong with the way in which the CFP operates at present. It appears that the United Kingdom was outmanoeuvred in the negotiations. I hope that that will not happen at the December Council meeting, because the stakes will be much higher.

It is vital that the United Kingdom succeeds this time. The Government must make it clear to other countries that we are serious and that we are determined to win the argument and save the fishing industry. It is not good enough to huff and puff, bang the table, make a lot of noise about sticking up for the industry and then lose the argument. It is vital that we negotiate seriously and win. It is important that the Government send a high-powered delegation. Other countries will send Cabinet Ministers—the Scottish Executive will send one. I have every regard for the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), but, unfortunately, he is not in the Cabinet. In order to send the right signal a Cabinet Minister should attend. A solution would be for the Prime Minister to promote the Under-Secretary of State to the Cabinet—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, Hear!"] I see that that has widespread support. I hope that the Prime Minister is listening. It is important that we send the right signals and a high-level delegation.

The Government must do all that they can to resist Franz Fischler's draconian cuts. The scientific evidence that I outlined earlier indicated that the present cod recovery plan is working and that should be allowed to continue. The Government must enter the negotiations determined to succeed and they must succeed, otherwise our fishing communities will be devastated for no reason.

11.18 am

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) on securing the debate. It will give us all a chance to contribute to the debate on what is happening in the Scottish fishing industry. This time of year is always a worrying time, although this year seems to be even more worrying than past years. I get a sense of having been here before. This is like "Groundhog Day". Each year, the same crisis and the same problems seem to arise. Here we are again.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister is present when the Government send their delegation to the European Commission to argue on behalf of the Scottish fishermen and United Kingdom fishing industry. I do not want to be too sooky to him, but he knows more than any other Minister in Westminster or the Scottish Parliament—or the rest of Europe—about the needs of the UK fishing industry and the importance of the Scottish fishing industry to the Scottish economy. He is extremely well versed in all of the arguments about that. I do not want to put pressure on him, but I will do so; it is now up to him to speak up on behalf of the Scottish fishermen and to ensure that there is a resolution to this crisis.

The fishing industry is very important in my constituency; there are still some fishermen who live in it. Although the port is just outside it in the neighbouring constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran), most of the fish houses are in my constituency. In Aberdeen alone, at least 2,000 people work in the fish processing industry and half of them are my constituents. I say that despite the fact that I am sitting with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge). Because of the geography of my constituency, a lot of the workers in the food processing industry are my constituents and more than half of the workers in that industry work in my constituency—they travel to it every day. Therefore, it is an important industry.

I appreciate the fact that Scottish fishermen have strong feelings about the fact that their livelihood could be decimated if the proposals from the EU Commission are implemented. However, there are onshore repercussions too and I hope that hon. Members will not mind if I concentrate on them, as I am sure that many contributors will talk about the offshore side of the industry.

As they stand, the Commission's proposals are unacceptable—I think that everyone agrees that that is the case. Any attempt to ensure that the cod stocks recover—or to prevent any cut in the cod stocks—will result in the closure of the white fish fisheries. All hon. Members who are present know—because they constitute a more knowledgeable audience than most in this House—that if fishermen are not allowed to fish for cod they will not be able to fish for haddock or whiting either because we are discussing mixed fisheries.

In effect, what is being proposed is closure; that is unacceptable. Even if it were possible to fish for some cod, the amount of haddock and whiting that could be caught would not sustain the industry. Any major cut in the amount of white fish that can be fished would have a devastating effect on all of the communities on the north-east coast of Scotland.

Sometimes it is said that that would be all right for the fish processors because they could import white fish—frozen or not—from around the world. That might be true for some of the bigger fish processors, but I recently heard an estimate that if no white fish was fished in the North sea we would be lucky if two or three of the very large processors in Aberdeen survived. Moreover, most of the fish houses are fairly small businesses and it would be devastating to them if no local fish could be landed and processed.

Therefore, the key issue is not just the amount of fish that is available for processing; it must be local fresh fish, as any dependence on imports would be devastating to the community. In most fish houses in Aberdeen, less than 40 per cent. of the fish that is processed is imported. No company could survive the loss of 60 per cent. of its production. Many fish processors operate on narrow margins as things are. As I said, we have been here before—we have had crises upon crises and therefore several of the processors are already highly indebted to the banks. Obviously, they are concerned that any reduction in their throughput could be the final straw that will lead to their closure.

I would be concerned even if there were to be a short-term closure. The proposal states that if cod stocks recover, we can return to fishing for cod, haddock and whiting. That was tried with herring in the 1970s, and the skills that were needed to process herring were lost. Such jobs are highly skilled. I know that people do not think of fish processors as particularly highly skilled, but they are. It takes several years to become a skilled gutter. It is not the most glamorous of jobs, or popular, but it is a job in which many take great pride. If we find that there is not enough haddock and cod to be processed and if the fish houses close, even temporarily, people will find other jobs. One young girl told me recently that she was going to become a care worker, for a lot less money than she would receive working as a fish processor. She did not want to smell of fish any more. For some people that is quite a nice thing, but she thought that she was not going to get a boyfriend while she smelled of fish, and becoming a care worker was attractive to her.

Fortunately, most people who work in the fish processing industry do not think like that, but if opportunities come up, and they find themselves out of work, they will find other jobs. They will not sit and twiddle their thumbs waiting for the fish industry to recover.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Does the hon. Lady share my concern that not only is there a possibility that people will leave the industry, but there is a specific risk that they will leave rural Scotland? That is one of the most substantial risks in the whole process.

Miss Begg: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Being an Aberdeen Member of Parliament, I suppose that I tend to look at things from an urban perspective. I would hope that because people like living in Aberdeen, they will continue to live and work there. He is absolutely right. If one considers the smaller communities throughout the north-east of Scotland, whether it is Johnshaven, Gourdon or those further north, there are no other jobs for people to take. I appreciate that in Aberdeen, where there are other jobs

[Miss Begg]

available, we are in a slightly better position than that of many fishing communities. The hon. Members who represent those communities will put their cases forward this morning, and the sense of crisis and fear is much greater in those communities than in Aberdeen.

That is not to say that that feeling is not present in Aberdeen, as is the fear that an industry could be lost as the result of even a temporary closure. My appeal to the Minister is to ensure that that does not happen. We must retain the skills, and the people working in the industry, to ensure that they are not lost. During a temporary closure, the infrastructure is lost, and markets can be lost, which happened to herring in the 1970s. The public taste for herring disappeared and that market has never properly recovered. It is not as simple as saying, "If we do not fish for cod, the cod stocks will recover." What is the point of their recovering if the taste for cod has gone and the processing skills and fishermen have gone as well?

There has been much argument about the reliability of the science. I am not going to get into an argument today about how reliable the science is. If the Commission is proposing any action, it has to be convinced that that action will work. If the proposal is to ensure that the cod stocks recover, the Commission has to be sure that that will happen. I have it on good authority that when there was a moratorium on cod fishing off the coast of Canada, the cod stocks did not recover because cod is one of the fish that is preyed upon. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute mentioned that prawn feed on cod spawn. The very action that the Commission is proposing may decimate the cod stocks further, rather than leading to their recovery. Hopefully, one of the arguments that the Minister will take to the Commission is that its proposal will not have the end result for which it is hoping. Apart from the devastating effect on the communities, it will not help the cod to recover.

When we discuss what we do not want the Commission to do, we also need to come up with solutions. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute that the cod recovery plan has been working because cod stocks have, to some extent, recovered. Measures that Scottish fishermen have already taken, such as decommissioning—there has been a great deal of decommissioning—increased mesh sizes and the introduction of square mesh panels, are beginning to show results. I appreciate that the results are fairly new, but I hope that the Minister will take them to the Commission to ensure that the measures that Scottish fishermen have introduced are taken into account. Progress may have been slow, but it has been made. The proposed draconian measures would set that progress back and would not achieve the Commission's objective.

Ultimately, we have to look at the reform of the common fisheries policy. It seems like "Groundhog Day" as we lurch from crisis to crisis, which is not the way to maintain a sustainable, long-term industry. We cannot have a yearly round in which the Commission makes a proposal to which everybody in the Scottish fishing industry reacts adversely. Since I was elected, I seem to have delivered almost the same speech every year about the need for sustainable fisheries. The solution is the reform of the CFP and zonal management, which would make people responsible for the areas in which they fish. That would turn fishermen into harvesters rather than hunters, as they are at the moment. There would be an incentive to ensure that stocks were kept high because they would be the fishermen's future, their children's future and the Scottish fishing industry's future.

I thank the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute for giving me the chance to speak this morning. I hope that the Minister is taking seriously the plight of not only Scottish fishermen but the onshore industry. I hope that he delivers a tough talk to the Commission to ensure that it changes its plans.

11.32 am

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) on securing the debate, which is important. It is particularly timely because tomorrow there will be a mass lobby of the Scottish Parliament in which a petition against the European Union proposals will be presented to the Public Petitions Committee. Make no mistake, the issue is causing great alarm and fear in north and east Scotland.

Unfortunately, there is little fishing left in my constituency, although there was once a busy fishing port in Arbroath. There is, however, a large fish processing industry, which the proposals from Europe would destroy along with many jobs. In the town of Arbroath, we have collected some 4,000 signatures to the petition to the Scottish Parliament in just a few days, which amply demonstrates the concerns felt for the future of the fishing industry in one small town.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute also highlighted the problems facing the prawn fishery in his area. Boats from Arbroath, which is in my constituency, mainly fish for prawns. They used to fish for haddock, but earlier cuts have all but destroyed that fishery. They changed to prawns to survive and if the EU proposal goes ahead we have to ask whether many more boats will try to move into the prawn fishery, which would cause problems for it. In the future, we may be back here discussing European Union proposals for drastic reductions in the prawn fishery.

Perhaps the greatest irony is that the recommendations have come about because of the alleged state of the cod stocks. The vast majority of Scottish boats target other stocks, with which it is generally agreed that there is not such a problem. However, the Scottish fleet will be destroyed by the proposal. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea recommends the closure of all fisheries where cod may be caught, even as a by-catch, which would obviously result in the complete closure of the haddock and whiting fisheries. Such a move would immediately result in a drastic reduction in Scottish fisheries. Even the alternative proposals from the Commission for an 80 per cent. reduction in the total allowable catch for white fish would be little better than total closure because the industry could not survive such a reduction.

Much has been said about fishermen's attitude to the matter. Indeed, during the previous debate on this subject accusations were made that many fishermen

were trying to get round measures to conserve fish. Specifically, it was alleged that higher mesh sizes would have no effect because some fishermen were using their nets upside down. I want to quote from a letter from a fisherman, John Clark of Macduff, which appeared in this Monday's edition of *The Press and Journal*, in which he describes fishing in such a way. He says:

"on top of a net there are normally an average of around 60 floats to keep the net open. On the bottom of these nets are heavy rock hopper discs which weigh around one or two tonnes, so letting a net out upside down would mean the heavy rock hopper discs would have to be at the top of the net. I have been a skipper . . . for nine years and I can assure"—

you—

"that if you were to do this you would not catch one single fish, and probably your net would be torn to shreds."

Why do some people believe all ill of our fishermen and their efforts to conserve stocks in the North sea, yet remain unwilling to tackle some of the real problems with the North sea fishery—especially the impact of industrial fishing on fish stocks?

Some of the Minister's colleagues have been attacking fishermen, but he seems to have united them—if only, for the moment—against himself. I stress to him that Scottish fishermen have accepted many measures to deal voluntarily with stocks in the North sea. They have accepted larger net sizes and used them properly. They have accepted voluntary tie-ups. Boats have been decommissioned. Yet they are not given credit for that; they are attacked in the manner that I described. As the Minister well knows, the original proposal made to the Commission did not take into account those measures taken by Scottish fishermen, and the Commission had not even received the research commissioned by the Scottish Executive. Can he assure us that all that information has been put forcibly to the Commission and that it will be taken into account in the discussions at the Council? When Scottish fishermen visited Brussels, they were given the impression that the Commission was not in the least bit interested in the measures that they had taken.

Despite what has been said about them and what happened at the Commission, Scottish fishermen by and large accept that to do nothing is not an option. However, they believe, as I do, that any action plan should look to maintain the integrity of the industry, with the long-term objective of developing and maintaining a sustainable and viable industry for catching and for processing. The Scottish Fish Merchants Federation has put forward proposals including zonal management, central to which would be the establishment of exclusive zones favouring cod. In other areas, fishing would be permitted, including, for example, a haddock quota—although we would have to accept that that might be reduced in the circumstances—and a cod by-catch.

The federation's information is based on research by Professor McIntyre of Aberdeen university. It believes that it may be possible to achieve a two-thirds reduction in cod catch, combined with only a one-third reduction in haddock and whiting catch. Other sensible measures such as real-time closures have been proposed as practical ways for the industry and the Commission to work together. The fishermen are willing to work on this, but are the Government and the Commission willing to show the same commitment to the North sea?

Why are we rushing into this disaster? Given the seriousness of the situation for the Scottish fishing and fish processing industries, it is not unreasonable to ask that we stop and draw breath—that we have a short moratorium on a decision before condemning whole industries and communities around the north and east of Scotland.

The EU Commissioner has stated that the industry will not be expected to bear the burden alone. Fishermen and companies directly disadvantaged by the primary cuts in the cod quota should expect appropriate compensation. Indeed, to be fair, the Minister has hinted that in the event of a closure or a very substantial reduction there may be decommissioning schemes. That is all very well, and it would help to some extent those engaged in fishing and fish processing—although in Scotland the bulk of the cost would probably be borne by the Executive, not the UK Government—but it will not protect jobs for the future in the rural communities of north and east Scotland. Boats that are decommissioned or a plant that is shut cannot employ people in the future. Inevitably that will lead to further, perhaps drastic, economic decline in many fishing communities in Scotland.

Today, we heard about the article in the *Daily Record* by the Prime Minister, which said that some 14,000 jobs are dependent on fishing. That is a gross underestimate of the total. The Scottish Executive figures refer to 44,000 jobs being directly or indirectly dependent. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) noted that in the town of Fraserburgh in his constituency some 55 per cent. of those in work depend on the fishing industry. It is a huge industry in Scotland and it is despicable that the Prime Minister does not seem to understand the scale of the problem that is facing north and east Scotland.

Mr. Morley: No one underestimates the scale of the problem for the Scottish industry, but it is important not to talk it up to sections of the industry, such as those dealing with nephrops or the pelagic fishing and other sectors that are not facing as severe a situation as the white fish fleet. The figures are taken on the basis of those people who are directly involved. No one is being complacent about the situation or underestimating its impact, but we must try to be as accurate as possible about everything.

Mr. Weir: The 44,000 figure comes from the Scottish Executive and a large percentage of those people are directly involved in the white fish industry. We are not being alarmist: there is a serious problem. Scottish fishing has for many decades been sold out in European negotiations. We seem to have reached an impasse. If that happens again, it may mean the death of the white fish industry.

Mr. Salmond: I happen to have the Prime Minister's article here. It clearly states:

"More than 14,000 jobs are connected to this industry",

[Mr. Salmond]

meaning the fishing industry in Scotland. The article is absolutely clear. If the Prime Minister, six weeks into this crisis, realised the scale of the industry—44,000 jobs throughout Scotland—perhaps he would be three times as concerned as he seems to be.

Mr. Weir: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend.

Ann Winterton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for supporting the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) in his attack on the Prime Minister. The fact is that the Prime Minister has only influence, not power. The Scottish National party however stands for an independent Scotland and it believes that if Scotland had true independence it would have the power to control Scottish fishing policy. It is sadly mistaken. The leader of the SNP has said that such policy would be part of the EU—the acquis communautaire would be signed and Scotland would be in exactly the same position that it is in today.

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order. Interventions should be brief.

Mr. Weir: I do not agree with the hon. Lady at all.

Ann Winterton: Of course the hon. Gentleman does not.

Mr. Weir: Tory conspiracy theories about the EU abound, but when the Tory party was in power, it sold out the Scottish fishing industry on successive occasions—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order. Hon. Members must obey the Chair.

Mr. Weir: All the blame cannot be put on this Government, although they are not blameless.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) mentioned the herring industry. That is a measure of what could happen. Although herring stocks are now increasing according to the ICES report, little expertise exists for dealing with herring, nor is there much of a market for it, because of the previous closure of the fishery. If the white fishery were closed, is it not the case that the same would happen to the Scottish fleet and the processing industry? Even if stocks were to recover, Scotland would not receive the benefit and our fleet and industry would have long gone.

As the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South said, the fish processing industry is irrevocably linked to the fate of the fishing industry. If the white fish fishery is closed or severely restricted, it will devastate the fish processing industry. The large processors—the Young's of this world—may well survive, because they will have the economic power to import fish from overseas. Indeed, I suspect that some of them already do so. The small producers do not have that option; they rely exclusively on fish landed at Scottish ports. Small fish processors in Arbroath in my constituency buy their fish from the fish markets in Aberdeen and Peterhead. They do not have access to fish from overseas. They do not require the quantities and therefore do not have the economic leverage to import fish.

Arbroath has a specific problem because it requires haddock. There are many small family processors in the town and they produce the world-famous Arbroath smokie, which relies on a steady and reliable supply of haddock. You cannot make smokies from other types of fish. The supply is now in doubt and the future of the smokie hangs in the balance. Make no mistake, if the haddock goes, the smokie goes with it and the smokie is part not only of Arbroath's heritage but of its potential future. Only a few months ago, there was an Adjournment debate on attempts to have the smokie protected under European regulations. Now it appears that we have to try to protect it from the European Commission. There were high hopes that the smokie could find new markets and help the economic recovery in Arbroath, but all that could now go.

Processors and fishermen cannot understand why only last year there was an increase in the haddock quota and smokie production was able to increase. For a short time, the Minister was even a hero among those in the fishing industry. Yet this year we are talking about complete closure and the devastation of an industry as a result of what appear to be panic measures to protect cod. Fish processors cannot make plans because they do not know from one year to the next what fish they can have. One processor told me that he did not know whether to buy a new van to go to the fish market in Aberdeen because he did not know whether there would be a fish market to go to by January.

I do not question the science, but I question the way in which the European Commission has interpreted it. If the science was wrong last year in relation to the quotas, can we be sure that it is correct this year, without taking into account all the matters that have been referred to? Are we on the point of destroying a major industry and bringing untold misery to the north and east of Scotland for nothing? The Minister should be in no doubt that the issue is vital in Scotland. A poll by System Three showed that 73 per cent. of Scots consider the future of the fishing industry to be very important and a further 21 per cent. consider it to be quite important. I hope that Ministers will give the matter the same priority when they go to Brussels.

11.47 am

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid), not only on securing this debate but on giving a balanced speech. This has generally been a well-balanced discussion.

At the last Scottish Office questions, I raised two important points. It is important that the science is accurate. That point was well made by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute and by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) and I think that it has also been raised by the industry. Questions about the science relate to the fact that the mathematical model is new and it is untested at present. We need to be certain that our decisions are made on a sound and accurate basis.

At Scottish Office questions, I also raised the importance of conserving not only the fish but the catching and processing sides of the fishing industry. My

right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland gave a very satisfactory answer to my question. I reiterate the compliment that has already been paid both to the Secretary of State for Scotland and to the Minister. I agree that he is well worthy of Cabinet rank. There is a general recognition that we are well represented not only by Ministers here but in the Scottish Executive.

On the whole, the debate has shown that there is good all-party co-operation on the issue. I was a little sorry that, in an otherwise good speech by the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), we entered into a rather sterile debate about whether the words in a newspaper article referred to the most directly affected—

Mr. Weir: Does not the hon. Gentleman think it important that the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom knows the full extent of the damage to Scotland? There is a huge difference between 14,000 and 44,000.

Mr. Savidge: The difference lies in whether one is talking about people involved in part of the fishing industry or in the fishing industry as a whole. We know that tabloid articles simplify things, so it is silly for us to get involved in sterile party political point scoring when the parties share similar feelings about the matter and the industry wants us to work together on its behalf.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Let us leave the job figures aside for a moment. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that the Prime Minister gives another so-called fact in the same article. He says:

"North Sea haddock is well down too."

The Prime Minister should be aware, as the hon. Gentleman is, that the spawning stock biomass for haddock is at its highest level since 1971. Will the hon. Gentleman explain that?

Mr. Savidge: I agree that haddock stocks are well up. I am not prepared to analyse the text of the article in the *Daily Record*, which I have not read.

I want to move on from party political point scoring to the importance of the industry. Global warming has been a contributory factor in the reduction of cod stocks for two main reasons: it is believed to have an effect on breeding patterns, and cold water fish tend to swim further north. I have been told that the fish used to be full of roe, but now they appear to lack it. We must also recognise that over-fishing has contributed to the problem. In part, we can blame foreign and factory fishing, and it is reasonable for us to say that factory fishing should be curtailed. Fishing for sand eels also affects the food chain for cod.

There is also the problem of the by-catch of small fish. It would be reasonable for us to ask for far stricter inspection of factory ships and for them to be banned from sensitive areas. There is also a strong argument for the total decommissioning of fishing for Norwegian pout, which is largely a mixed catch of fish containing a large amount of small fish. Scotland has had to accept a great deal of decommissioning, so we may reasonably ask Denmark—Norwegian pout is caught mostly by Danish fishing—to decommission its vessels.

Mr. Salmond: I very much agree, but the question of industrial fishery relates not only to the white fish that get caught up in it but to the removal of the food source from the sea. There is anecdotal evidence of a substantial recovery in certain stocks in areas such as the Wee Bankie after they were closed. Does not the hon. Gentleman find it remarkable that we have not scientifically analysed and made the connection between allowing more food in an area and having more fish?

Mr. Savidge: I have disagreed with the hon. Gentleman's party in the past, but I am glad to agree with him now. His point was exactly the one that I was making. If sand eel fishing is to continue, we should be able to say that certain sensitive areas should not be fished, because fishing removes a basic food resource from the food chain, as the hon. Gentleman says.

In Scotland, we have already taken action on decommissioning, as I said. It should also be recognised that we have taken action on mesh size and square panels. If we are facing a crisis, we should insist on the early introduction of the appropriate mesh size and square panels for fishing in sensitive areas.

As we said, cod stocks are down. Most of the fish that tend to be part of the same mixed fishery are haddock, whiting and saithe, stocks of which are currently up, as far as we can tell. Incidentally, because of their life-cycle, cod tend to predate on nephrops and herring, which are both up at present. The cycle is counter-balancing because, at different stages, they, in turn, predate on cod. An excessive reduction in the domestic fishing catch would certainly have a devastating effect not only on the catching but on the processing industry.

To back up my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South, representatives of the processing industry recently told us that many firms in Aberdeen—it is even worse in other north-eastern areas—are between 40 and 90 per cent. dependent on domestic fish. It is untrue to claim that they can rely solely on imports: some can, but others would go to the wall. Knock-on effects would also harm employment outwith the fishing industry.

We should continue to examine decommissioning throughout Europe. I prefer long-term to short-term solutions such as tie-up, though there might be a case for considering days at sea again. On decommissioning, we should consider not only owners but trawlermen and workers within the industry. The Government's recent action on compensation in respect of the Icelandic cod wars provides a good example of assessing impacts on everyone in the industry—not just those at the top. It is vital to recognise common interests and the industry needs to co-operate. We must encourage co-operation between organisations representing the catching side of the industry, those on the processing side and the trade unions. We need more dialogue and co-operation across the industry during this crisis.

Finally, we must cut out cheating. Arguments about others cheating—whether in other parts of Europe or other parts of the industry—can always be heard. At a time of crisis, the temptation to cheat is always greater, but it is vital to eliminate it. It is in the interests of all to have improved surveillance and enforcement. Satellite surveillance is already present, but it is in the industry's own interest to increase it. We need greater stringency of inspection and the registration of buyers and sellers.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South said, in citing one of the processors, we need to move from a hunter-gatherer industry with a plentiful supply

[Mr. Savidge]

to one based on a farmed and harvested resource that must be conserved for the long-term interests of the industry. I repeat that we often end up in a panic at this time of year, so it must be possible to work towards longer-term planning in Europe.

11.58 am

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I, too, join in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) on securing this debate. It has often struck me as a parliamentary curiosity that we congratulate each other on winning a raffle, but on this occasion I congratulate my hon. Friend not just on securing the debate but on delivering a well balanced and thoughtful speech, which was commendable for its detail and handling of the issues. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) knows that I was born and brought up in his constituency and it is satisfying to see that my own family's concerns remain in good hands.

The other great cliché of Westminster Hall debates is that the debate is timely. It is difficult to imagine a more timely debate in view of the present position of the Fisheries Council. However, I did not realise just how timely it was until I picked up my copy of the *Daily Record* this morning over what became a rather spoiled breakfast in the Tea Room. I do not know whether that is your paper of choice, Mr. Benton, but if it is not, I commend it to you. I certainly commend its, "Save our Supper" campaign. That is an excellent example of how a responsible tabloid can campaign for an industry that is crucial to parts of Scotland beyond those that are represented here today.

Unfortunately, like other hon. Members, I have been less than impressed by the Prime Minister's article in that paper. Reference has been made to the 14,000 jobs and I find that situation difficult to explain. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North was asked to explain the Prime Minister's assertion that haddock stocks were down, given that the spawning stock biomass, which is the important indicator for fish stocks, is manifestly up.

Mr. Morley: I gave those hon. Members who met with me the clear figures relating to the North sea. We have had one of the best spawning years for haddock for a long time, which means that there is a lot of haddock in the sea, but recruitment in the past few years has been poor, so there will be a decline in the overall haddock stocks. That cannot be ignored.

Mr. Carmichael: I certainly do not ignore that issue, any more than the Minister or the Prime Minister should ignore the fact that the SSB is at an all-time high. Having read the Prime Minister's article, I am afraid that I am left with the image of a world war one general sending his infantry men over the top, while carefully crafting a plan to blast them with their own heavy artillery, machine guns and tanks from behind.

The Minister may be able to assist us on one point. Incidentally, I presume that the Prime Minister wrote the article because it says that he did. I am sure that he would not have let anyone else write it for him. I did wonder whether someone from a school on work experience at No. 10 Downing street had written it for him, but no. The Prime Minister says:

"I met with Mr Fischler. We—"

whoever that is; it was the Prime Minister who met him—

"made it clear any EU emergency plan must take into account steps already made by Scots fishermen."

Will the Minister tell us more about the Prime Minister's meeting when he sums up the debate? What did he tell Commissioner Fischler and what response did he receive?

As I have found and others have said, the response from Brussels has been rather less than encouraging. The Prime Minister need not take my word for that; others have corresponded with me on the issue. The local branch of the Federation of Small Businesses in Shetland recently wrote to me to express its concern. It identifies the fishing industry as one of the main drivers of the Shetland economy. Picking up earlier points from the debate, it said that implementing the closure plan would have the serious effect of speeding up the train towards population decline, thus killing off our communities.

If the Prime Minister is looking for useful information for future articles, I will be more than happy to send him a copy of the document from the Shetland Oceans Alliance—SHOAL—which is a partnership between Shetland Islands council and the Shetland fishing industry. The document's title refers to the future of Shetland's white fish fleet. I do not know whether the Minister has seen a copy of it; I have only one. It has what we used to call marginal annotations when I was a solicitor, and is an excellent piece of work.

I place on the record the document's estimate, based on a fair amount of local research and calculation, that the loss to the local economy in Shetland in the event of the closure of the white fish sector will be some £43 million. That is considerably larger than the figure of £28 million, which was simply taken from multipliers. I am talking about some 25 per cent. of Shetland's productive economy and a loss of 531 jobs, representing 17 per cent. of full-time employment in the productive economy and 7 per cent. of the total full-time employment in the wider economy. Over four years, it is expected that the loss of the demersal fleet would remove approximately £170 million from the Shetland economy.

In the past, others have suggested that I tend to be emotional in dealing with this issue. I make no apology for being emotional when I see the potential effect on the communities that I represent. Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg), there is nothing else to keep people in Shetland. If the white fish fleet goes, the people will follow. Once the critical mass of the population in a community such as Shetland goes, it is gone for ever. There will be no return.

There are various other management measures for the North sea fisheries promoted in the SHOAL document. In the short time that remains to me, because I am keen to allow the Minister as long as possible to respond, I will ask for some consideration to be given to those measures.

The question of tie-up would have to come with funding, but would have to be part of measures related to the reduction of fishing effort. The Shetland industry believes that it is preferable to have a limit on the number of days at sea and an extended tie-up.

The industry in Shetland, and throughout the rest of Scotland, is concerned that the innovative measures that it has taken—not particularly welcome in Brussels, for some reason—including the use of larger mesh cod-ends and square mesh panels, should now be implemented in other areas. Although the white fish industry is located predominantly in Scotland, those measures should also be implemented south of the border. Will the Minister comment on that?

In connection with the implementation of new technical conservation measures to reduce the capture of cod and juvenile fish in mixed fisheries, a great deal can be done with measures such as separator trawlers. I hope that something along those lines is being devised in the Minister's Department in conjunction with the Scottish Executive.

I have spoken for nine minutes—

Ann Winterton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carmichael: I am reluctant to give way to the hon. Lady at this stage. I will cheerfully speak to her later, as she knows, but I am anxious to allow the Minister as long as possible.

12.07 pm

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): With my slightly croaky voice, I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) on his good fortune in securing the debate at such a critical moment for Scotland's rural communities.

During the debate on 21 November, I said that it was unfortunate that Members such as the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute and I, who had a critical interest in the future of Scottish fishing, were restricted to brief remarks at the end of the debate, because of its nature. The debate today has provided a useful additional means of raising the pressure.

I should say to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) that I am a supporter of the "Save our Supper" campaign.

Mr. Carmichael: We can both claim that.

Mr. Duncan: Yes, we can.

This debate cannot be understated. Several hon. Members on both sides of the House pointed out that it requires passion. Without exaggeration, the debate is about the future of substantial areas of rural Scotland. It is not about a small factory closure in one area, but about significant rural employment. It is several Ravenscraigs. Even on the figures given by the Prime Minister, who has substantially torn the rug from underneath much of the case that has been made on both sides of the House in the past couple of weeks, this is two Ravenscraigs. We all know that the real figures from the Scottish Executive demonstrate that 44,000 jobs are at risk in Scotland.

It is worth examining some of the other factors that have not been considered. This is not purely a fishing issue. Only 8 per cent. of fish mortality is due to fishing for human consumption. The effects of the discharge from the Ruhr valley in Germany and of global warming are well known, and I know that the Minister understands them. Those factors have a major impact on fish stocks; indeed, it is as big as, if not bigger than that of all North sea fishermen. There is substantial resistance and resentment because the industry is being threatened with the imposition of control measures when fishermen are responsible for only a small proportion of the impact on fish stocks.

On factory fishing, the Danish fleet is hoovering up much of the fish in the North sea in a very inefficient process, which, as the Minister knows, requires 8 lb of raw soup from the ocean floor to provide 1 lb of farmed salmon. In many respects, that process is insane, yet it accounts for much of what we are discussing. The issue has not been explored as widely as it could have been.

The scale of the problem cannot be underestimated. We are talking about the future of 800 vessels, out of a Scottish fleet of 2,500. Those vessels represent the most substantial part, or the core, of the fleet. For every offshore job that is threatened, four or five onshore jobs are put at risk. In that respect, I would slightly chastise the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), who concentrated on north-east Scotland. The problem affects the whole of Scotland. As the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) mentioned in the debate on the Floor of the House on 21 November, Annan is one of the communities that is critically affected. Who would have thought that a rural community in Dumfriesshire would be one of those most at risk? The present proposal could sound the death knell of communities the length and breadth of Scotland—in the south-west as much as in the north-east.

Mr. Salmond: It emerged from that debate that Scottish Executive research showed that 35 per cent. of employment in Annan was fishery related because of the two major fish-processing factories there. That demonstrates that the problem's impact is being felt from the Shetlands, through the north-east and right down the west coast to south-west Scotland.

Mr. Duncan: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's clarification. What is more, the processing industry in Scotland is geared to a great extent towards a domestic catch. On average, 80 per cent. of the fish is Scottish caught, but the figure in England is regularly as low as 40 per cent. That implies that the industry will be incapable of adjusting in the short time that remains. I repeat that that is madness. We are contemplating the end of an industry between 26 October and the end of the year. That is no way to go about things. We all know that it is crazy, but we are going ahead with things yet again. I take the Government's point that this has happened under successive Governments, but the common fisheries policy has presided over the industry's decline and it will continue to do so. It is failing our fishermen.

Although the science is regularly quoted, the fact is that this is about politics. We need only look at the settlement in the west coast deep-sea sector. Scotland has an historic claim to that area, but it now faces an allowable catch of only 2 per cent. Eighty per cent. will go to the French, while the rest will be split between the Irish and the Spanish. The Minister knows that because he corrected me in the Chamber when I got the figures the wrong way round. What makes the situation totally

[Mr. Duncan]

crazy is that the Scottish are expected to police the arrangement. That is madness, and any pretence that the present approach revolves around the science flies in the face of our experience of the CFP over many years. Such claims also ignore fishermen's real, justified concerns about deals being done behind closed doors and about the fact that they know little about them until they happen.

To conclude, I share the concern of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland that the Minister should have as long as possible to respond to the debate, because many questions need to be answered.

We cannot leave the Minister in any doubt on this matter. One of the most depressing aspects of the article in today's *Daily Record* is the implication that the Government are doing what they can to minimise the spin on the problem. That is an appalling travesty. The Secretary of State for Scotland regularly accuses us of talking down Scotland whenever we present a critical analysis of what is happening. Now we are accused of talking up the problem in Scottish fishing. That is crazy. The figures are the Scottish Executive's own. There are 44,000 families in Scotland facing oblivion.

We want distinct action from the Minister in the next couple of weeks. We also want the Prime Minister to take up the invitation that has come from both sides of the House, and to act with the same determination that he has shown in other matters. In other areas of foreign policy he has been the most determined person. He has access to the top, around the world. Now is the time for him to act, and not to let down Scotland's communities, because we shall not stand for it.

12.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) on securing the debate and on a balanced and reasoned speech. He made some good points.

I also welcome the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on what, I think, is his first outing on the Opposition Front Bench. I also greatly appreciate being joined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. Her presence is an indication of how united we are, at all levels of the Government, in our approach to and concern about the problem in Scotland.

I do not think that it would be helpful to dwell on the figures, but the Sea Fish Industry Authority figures for employment in Scotland give the number of people employed on the catching side as about 6,650 and the number employed in processing as 7,900. There are, of course, associated onshore jobs. I might also mention the shellfish, nephrops and pelagic sectors, as well as those processing sectors that import fish for processing—which, I accept, is not all. Of course, many of them depend on the haddock fishery in particular and face problems. However, it is important to try to be accurate. There are many jobs at stake in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom and we should focus on how to tackle that issue in relation to the proposals that have been made.

Mr. Salmond: The text of the Prime Minister's article speaks for itself, and people will draw their own conclusions from that. The point that hon. Members were trying to make was that an appreciation of the Scottish Executive figures, showing that the entire industry employs at least 40,000 people in direct, indirect and related jobs, might concentrate minds at the highest level in Government. That is why we find it difficult when we see figures that minimise the industry's importance. All we want is Government understanding that a huge industry, with 40,000-plus jobs connected with sea fishing, is involved.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman knows that I exactly understand the implications for the Scottish industry and that there is an important regional dimension to the issue. As we have heard, there are parts of Scotland, in particular, with very high levels of unemployment connected with the fishing industry. In Orkney and Shetland, of course, there are often few other opportunities. I understand that. I have met representatives of SHOAL several times and I congratulate them because they have tried to deal in a thoughtful and pragmatic way with the current circumstances. Not all of the suggestions are practical, but some are worthy of consideration and SHOAL sets a good example in recognising the problem. That is the point: we have a real problem with the state that the stocks are in and we cannot ignore that or wish it away.

As hon. Members have said, we need careful and critical analysis and interpretation of what the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea and the Commission say. The Commission recommendations must be justified. My Scottish Executive colleagues, my right hon. Friend and I have made it clear that we do not think that it is realistic to close down the North sea. I made it clear at the Fisheries Council last week that the suggested alternative of an 80 per cent. reduction is not very different from complete closure. It is not a realistic option.

Mr. Peter Duncan: Has the Minister reflected on the experience in Canada, where the Newfoundland Grand banks were closed 10 years ago to restore cod stocks, but nothing happened to regenerate them. Fishermen are now, I understand, fishing for plentiful snow crab and shrimps, but there are no cod there after 10 years of closure.

Mr. Morley: The Canadian situation is at the back of all of our minds. I met with the Canadian Fisheries Minister not long ago, and have spoken to Canadian scientists. They have told me two things. First, both the industry and politicians were denying the scientific assessments right up to the bitter end until the cod fishery collapsed. That is worth remembering. Secondly, while the Canadian cod situation is not fully understood, there is a scientific theory that the stock was fished below a crucial, critical level, which meant that its

spawning biomass was not in a position to recover. Those issues are debatable in relation to the results, but we cannot ignore them.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Morley: I have only nine minutes left, but I shall give way briefly.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is very generous. He will accept that the aim is not to preserve one species of fish but to preserve an industry. If he had total control and could make a decision without going to the Commission, what would be his policy and approach? Secondly, given that anything that comes out of this effort is likely to be a disaster, is there not an overwhelming argument for trying to delegate it to the states concerned—rolling over? Is he aware that Commission officials said this week that they are waiting for such an option to be proposed by a member state?

Mr. Morley: I shall certainly go through what I think should be done. I shall talk about the issues that I have discussed with the industry, for which I shall argue in the Council. They are measures that, if we had complete control in UK waters, I would apply within UK waters—perhaps in different ways and at different times. However, I believe that the principal measures represent the right way forward.

Ann Winterton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morley: I cannot give way as I have many points to get through in eight minutes, but I apologise to the hon. Lady because I respect the interest that she takes in the issue.

I should like to stress what the industry has done to reduce effort—that is important. ICES will not take that into account in its brief, because it looks at the present state of the stocks and makes recommendations to the Commission accordingly. The Commission has to decide how to respond to that.

The scientific measure of the reduction in effort necessary to have an effect on stocks must be considered. We can debate what is realistic, what is reasonable and what will have an effect. Once a credible level is identified, we can also consider what the industry has done in the past two years in terms of decommissioning, bigger mesh sizes and the move of licences from the white fish fleet to the pelagic fleet. Those points constitute a strong case. I have discussed them with the Commissioner and with the presidency and I assure the House that we will ensure that they are taken into account, in the same way that we have already succeeded in having account taken of the work that we have done on nephrops and the fact that the original proposals were entirely unjustified. We have made progress in that respect and I have every confidence that we shall do so in relation to the industry's effort reductions. That will move us a long way from where we are at present with the Commission's suggestions, but more work is to be done. Although our scientists made a case—we could back it up with justification—to exclude nephrops, they are not challenging the thrust of the ICES findings on present fish stocks.

The news is clearly bad for the industry, but it is not in anyone's interests to ignore it. Nor would it be in anyone's interests, and it would be impossible, for me to take a populist position that was not credible given the science and the terms of the case. Our position has to be seen to be credible. That does not mean that we will not support the industry, or that we underestimate the impact of the recommendations on it. Everyone—me, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Scottish Executive, right up to the Prime Minister in No. 10—is committed to making the case.

When I go to the Council, I will be joined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. My discussions and negotiations have the authority of the full Government and the devolved Administrations. There is a team approach. In that way, I speak with some authority, with the full clout of the full machinery of Government behind me, including up to the level of the Prime Minister. I have talked to No. 10 almost daily since the most recent Council about the problem and the issues that we want to raise. It is important to stress that.

Ross Finnie and I have been attacked by some sections of the Scottish fishing industry, but we cannot take a fundamental decision by denying that there is a problem. I have had responsibility for fisheries for some time and the job is not for the faint hearted. On occasion, Fisheries Ministers have to act as a lightning rod for the industry, especially when it is under stress. However, some of the attacks—they have tried to exploit divisions and play petty politics—have not been in the interests of the industry at the moment. It would betray the industry if we were distracted from the need to unite on the impact on catching, processing and onshore jobs. We must think about what we need to do to mitigate the problem and ensure that the industry is not destroyed in the way hon. Members have described.

We recognise the severe short-term problem, but we must consider longer-term issues as well. I do not want to stagger from crisis to crisis. We have done so, partly because choices on reductions in fishing efforts have been ducked by the Council of Ministers as they were difficult for the fishing industry, which was against it, and unpalatable for Fisheries Ministers from various countries. That is one reason why we find ourselves where we are at present. We must take short-term action. I do not disagree with the idea that it will be painful and we must think about the consequences. However, the action need not be what the Commission proposes, as we can make a credible case for changing that.

We need to consider closer relationships between fishermen and scientists, reform of the common fisheries policy, and research into long-term environmental change such as global warming. The rise in sea temperatures cannot be ignored, especially in relation to cod. We need effective control and enforcement, as misreporting and misinformation helps no one. It certainly does not help scientists in their assessments. Control of effort, gear, technical measures and closed areas are also important.

We must acknowledge the role that the industry has had. On Friday, there were discussions about some of the issues that have been mentioned today—how we could argue for certain measures and how we could apply them to benefit fish stocks and the long-term

[Mr. Morley]

sustainable management of fisheries. The work of the industry was also recognised. There is an alternative case to put to the Commission about its proposals, and we can make that case.

We must tackle short-term and long-term issues. We as a Government are committed to defending the interests of the whole United Kingdom industry. The debate is on Scotland, and rightly so. As a result of the scale of its involvement, the implications for the Scottish white fish fleet are severe. It is right to focus on that, but I emphasise that all levels of Government are committed to defending the industry's interests in a credible and effective way to minimise the impact of the proposals and ensure long-term sustainable management.

Transco

12.30 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): There is a joke currently doing the rounds in one of the synagogues in my constituency: what is the difference between a Rottweiler and a Jewish mother? The answer is that the Rottweiler eventually lets go. I do not know whether I more closely resemble a Rottweiler or a Jewish mother—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. Would hon. Members leaving the Chamber please do so quietly?

Mr. Gardiner: Thank you, Mr. Benton.

For more than four years, I have refused to let go of the issue of regulation of the gas industry, in particular the risk posed to public safety by the actions and failures of Transco. I am confident that, in preparing a response to the debate, the officials of my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction will have taken the prudent step of checking whether any questions remain unanswered following my Adjournment debates in June 1998 and July 1999. They may even have checked my examination of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets regulator at the Public Accounts Committee hearing three years ago. Let me start, however, with those easy questions to which the Minister will no doubt have the answer.

Before the establishment of Transco in 1994, British Gas responded to more than 99.9 per cent. of uncontrolled gas escapes in one hour. The response rate varied during the following five years, but dropped to as low as 92 per cent at one time. Given that there were more than 1 million calls each year to attend uncontrolled escapes, that means that, in some years, 80,000 uncontrolled escapes were not responded to within the target response time. Can the Minister tell us the current target rate and the actual percentage for attendance at uncontrolled escapes within one hour? Furthermore, can he assure the House that nothing has been done to modify the smell of gas so that the incidence of emergency call-outs, rather than the incidence of leaks, is reduced?

In Feburary 1999, in response to repeated representations by, and on behalf of, my constituent, Mr. Andrew Duffield, Ofgem took the unprecedented step of making an order against Transco. The background to that order is as follows. The Gas Act 1986, as amended in 1995, introduced competition into the business of connecting premises to the mains gas network. Before that, the market had been a monopoly controlled by British Gas Transco. In January 1997, my constituent, who had been a senior engineering manager at Transco, left to set up a specialist gas connection company known as EGS, which competes directly against Transco for business under the Gas Act. However, Transco is charged with custodianship of the gas mains network and all competitors such as EGS must apply to Transco for a quotation for the final connection to the mains when laying the pipe system for any new scheme or development.

Until it has obtained that costing for the final connection from Transco, EGS cannot provide its customer with an accurate quotation for the total cost of

the work. Clearly, if Transco were to abuse its position and delay the provision of that information or inflate the price of final connection, it could make EGS look inefficient and expensive by comparison with its own connections team, competing for the same business. For that reason, Transco has a statutory obligation not to abuse its position as final connector to the mains. Transco broke that statutory obligation four years ago. I am sorry to tell the Minister that it continues to break it now, and that

"there have been unacceptable delays in Transco's quotations for connections, that there has been overcharging and that Transco's behaviour is anti-competitive".

Those words are not mine; or, at least, not mine alone. I use them to refer to the current anti-competitive practices adopted by Transco against EGS. They are taken directly from a decision document issued by the Office of Gas Supply when it investigated Transco's behaviour four years ago. It concluded:

"There is a likelihood of continuing breaches, if action is not taken".

Most damningly, it stated that

"information provided by Transco in the course of the investigation has proved to be untrue".

Hon. Members must always seek to use most carefully the privilege that speaking in the House gives, and must not make reckless statements under the protection that they are afforded. I therefore assure you, Mr. Benton, that I do not lightly say that those speaking on Transco's behalf were found then to be liars, and that Transco was found to be acting illegally and anti-competitively to try to bully a small competitor out of business. Transco has not changed: it is still acting illegally and anti-competitively, and it is still lying and bullying.

One thing has changed, however—Ofgem, the regulator. In 1999, it was never dynamic or proactive in its enforcement of the regulations, or in its interpretation of them. Now it is positively spineless, failing to act when there is a clear track history of anti-competitive behaviour, and seeking to hide behind any legalistic cover, rather than perform its duties to regulate the market properly and to stamp out anti-competitive behaviour. Worse than that, it has maintained a stunning silence since 24 April this year over fundamental issues of public safety. If Ofgem is the guardian of the gas industry, I ask the Minister, "Quis custodiet custodes?"—who will regulate the regulator?

I have made some serious allegations, and I must now back them up. On 7 November 2001, Transco wrote to EGS with calculations purporting to show its performance in response to EGS's connection inquiries during September 2001. That was the result of the order made against Transco in 1999. That order required Transco to introduce a scheme of liability payments that were payable whenever Transco failed to meet its own published standard response times to requests for connection quotations, or where it supplied false information.

Hon. Members may find it strange that Transco is charged with monitoring its own compliance. They may find it even stranger that attachment 2, paragraph 7, subsection (ii) of the order provides that

"If, before the expiry of five working days from the submission of the claim the quotation is adjusted by Transco so that the reason why it was thought to be excessive has been addressed to the reasonable satisfaction of the person who submitted the claim, no compensation shall be payable by Transco".

The effect of that provision is to provide a perverse incentive to Transco to continue overcharging, secure in the knowledge that if it is challenged, it has five days in which to amend the price to the proper level before any penalty or compensation becomes payable to its victim.

So much for the robustness of the order. On the basis of that order Transco wrote to EGS, explaining that of the 43 quotations that EGS had requested in September 2001, 34 had been provided within Transco's agreed time and price standards. As a result of its 79 per cent. compliance, and in accordance with the order, it offered EGS compensation of £790.

That was a pretty normal month—or so Transco thought. In fact, EGS had long suspected that Transco was substantially overestimating its own performance. Put more accurately, it was substantially underestimating its service failures; hence, it was substantially under-compensating EGS. Despite repeatedly challenging Transco on that point, EGS was not able to persuade it to deal with the problem. During September 2001, therefore, EGS took the highly unusual step of logging and analysing all its dealings with the company. I need hardly mention that it was an extremely costly exercise.

EGS's analysis showed that there had been 47 quotations, not 43, during that September, and that only 57 per cent. rather than the 79 per cent. claimed by Transco had been provided within Transco's agreed time and price standards. The analysis showed that Transco had failed to record four quotations for which compensation was due to be paid, and that Transco had stated that a further seven quotations had met the standards when they had not and should have generated substantial compensation.

Transco now accepts that EGS's analysis was substantially correct and that almost twice as much compensation as it first offered is in fact due. EGS has extensively documented similar failings and passed them to Ofgem. Ofgem accepts that Transco has over-quoted by 78 per cent. at a development called La Formair; by 900 per cent. at Ossington buildings; and by a staggering 1,683 per cent. at Pennyfan road.

Given the scale of overcharging, and given that it was precisely to stop such anti-competitive practice that Ofgem put the order in place against Transco three years ago, it seems reasonable to expect Ofgem to take positive enforcement action against Transco. In its response of 2 October to EGS's complaints, however, Ofgem concludes that Transco is not in breach of the 1999 order. Again, it tries to hide behind a legalistic loophole. It states:

"The 1999 Order was made in relation to Transco's connections operations. The 1999 Order was made following a finding that Transco was in breach of Section 9(2)(a) of the Act and standard condition 11 of its licence condition 4D".

It goes on:

"Transco has introduced the systems and compensation schemes provided for in the 1999 Order. In each case, the scheme introduced covered at least those matters set out in attachments to the 1999 Order. Ofgem does not consider that on a strict interpretation the 1999 Order requires Transco to update or amend the schemes made to comply with the 1999 Order."

Ofgem's conclusion that there had been no breach of the order is based on the fact that the order required Transco merely to introduce systems and compensation

[Mr. Gardiner]

schemes. Ofgem's position is that those systems have been set up, that that is therefore the end of the matter, and accordingly that there is no breach. It cannot be sensible to interpret the order as meaning that, as long as a system is set up, it does not matter whether Transco in fact operates that system or the schemes, or whether such systems or schemes work at all. On that basis, Transco would not fall foul of the order in circumstances where none of its quotations within a given month is within standard. The order must be construed against the factual background that gave rise to its making in 1999 and of the mischief that it was designed to prevent.

The Transco connections investigations document from Ofgas, which accompanied the original order in February 1999, stated that the order was made because of Transco's appalling performance in relation to connections. The document states:

"The responses to the consultation confirmed the findings of the investigation that there have been unacceptable delays in Transco's quotations for connections, that there has been overcharging, and that Transco's behaviour is anti-competitive in effect."

It added that

"the proposed order should have the effect of securing compliance".

In its interpretation of the order, Transco has patently failed to secure compliance.

Even if that were the sum total of my complaint against Transco, I am sure that the Minister would take it seriously. However, it is not. On 24 April this year, EGS sat down with Miss Karen Briggen of Ofgem and explained not simply the problems of anti-competitive behaviour but fundamental problems affecting public safety. Transco is required to notify EGS of the pressure of the connection valves that it uses. As hon. Members will appreciate, it is absolutely vital that the correct pressure of those valves is notified to EGS. They can be high, medium or low-level pressure valves.

Problems have arisen when Transco notifies EGS that a pressure valve at the connection point to the system is at a different pressure to the true one. I know of three cases in the past two weeks involving incorrect notification, and I will refer them to the Minister so that they can be investigated. Problems were found at the IMEX Spaces business centre, unit 77, Station lane, Birtley, County Durham; at plot B, Twelvetrees crescent, Bromley-by-Bow; and at the Academy of Light at Whitburn moor in Sunderland.

On each occasion, EGS was notified that there was a low-pressure connection valve connecting to the mains network when in fact all three valves were of medium pressure. If an incorrect valve is fitted at that point, it may function for a while before eventually having a catastrophic failure. The consequences of such failure are clear.

On 24 April, EGS outlined to Ofgem other problems that it had experienced. All self-lay providers must give Transco a copy of the as-laid drawings showing the new mains network that Transco then adopts. However, Transco's system of recording digitised plans is a catastrophic list of errors. On one particular development—the Brook Street business park in Tipton—six months after Transco was contracted to lay a service pipe, it provided a digital version of the plans that EGS had submitted to Transco. Half the network that EGS had laid was not shown on Transco's digitised plans. The other half bore little relation to that which had actually been laid. EGS gave Transco a further copy of the plans so that it could adapt its plans and get it right. Still later, that had not happened.

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the debate is to conclude at 1 o'clock, and there will not be much time for the Minister to reply.

Mr. Gardiner: I appreciate your guidance, Mr. Benton. I am just bringing my remarks to a close. However, it is absolutely critical that the Minister should appreciate that this is not simply a commercial spat between two companies. This is a grave issue of public safety. If Transco does not properly record the as-laid drawings, cases will occur such as that at Larkhall in Lanarkshire, in which a family was tragically killed. It is suspected that the drawing that covered the part of the network responsible incorrectly showed a pipe of cast iron as being made of polyurethane.

I shall not go into the details of the case; the Minister will know that it is subject to a court case that is yet to be heard, so it would be improper for me to do so. However, I believe that a family of four was killed in that explosion as a direct result of the sort of incompetence that Transco is showing in the recording of the gas mains system. It is vital that Ofgem, as the regulator of the industry, takes firm and swift action to put Transco's house in order.

12.51 pm

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on securing the debate. He has pursued the matter tenaciously and acquired a lot of information on it. On this occasion, it is quite useful that he took up more time than I will because, as he will appreciate, I cannot give a detailed response to many of the issues that he raised.

My hon. Friend made extremely serious charges, which is a legitimate use of such debates as long as the charges are backed up with hard and specific evidence. He has certainly set out to do that. I am sure that Ofgem, Transco and others will read what he has said with the greatest interest. For my part, I shall want an equally detailed rebuttal—or acceptance—of the charges that he has made and the actions that flowed from them.

The public safety issues are of great importance. If there are concerns on safety grounds, it is completely proper that they should be raised in Parliament. On the other hand, no one wants to start scare stories about the general nature of the gas infrastructure, because the subject can cause some alarm. We must get that balance right. It is important in such a case—my hon. Friend has been specific in the charges that he has made—that evidence is pinned down for every example given, particularly those that affect safety. I give him an assurance that that will be done, and that I will pursue the matter.

Much of what my hon. Friend said related to a company in his constituency, Exoteric Gas Solutions, and that company's complaints against Transco. For the benefit of other hon. Members, EGS is an engineering company that, among other activities, designs and installs, or oversees and procures the design and installation of gas pipes and arranges for connection to a local distribution zone owned and operated by Transco. I understand that the company recently moved into the metering market, and that it installs meters that are supplied by Transco and oversees meter installation. My hon. Friend has vigorously championed the company's cause for several years and I commend him for that. I recently corresponded with him in response to his latest concerns expressed in his letter dated 14 November. I have offered to meet him to discuss those concerns, along with a representative of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. I am sure that he will wish to take advantage of that meeting and to ensure that EGS's concerns are fully represented to Ofgem, preferably in advance of the meeting.

I understand that inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive's hazardous installations directorate have recently investigated a series of complaints made by Andrew Duffield of EGS to Ofgem on 8 July. The complaints concern six premises—I guess that they are the same ones to which my hon. Friend referred—and include a list of alleged deficiencies at each. I am told that Transco has taken corrective action and that HSE has sent Ofgem a detailed response to the complaints. Mr. Duffield has raised further unrelated safety issues with Ofgem, which will also be followed up by HSE.

The director general of HSE, Timothy Walker, wrote to Mr. Duffield as recently as 18 November emphasising the seriousness that HSE attaches to Transco's safe operation. The letter explained that a further inspection visit to examine Transco's record keeping for newly installed plant and to consider specific complaints about operating pressure errors would take place on 21 November. The visit did take place and, as a result, Transco has been asked to commission an independent audit of its systems to ensure that it better manages safety-related information in future. HSE has promised to write to Mr. Duffield to let him know the outcome of the meeting on 21 November. I hope that that illustrates the thorough and professional approach that we would all expect when safety complaints are made to the regulator. My hon. Friend might see that as evidence that what reaches us is taken seriously and acted upon.

I shall address briefly the day-to-day handling of safety responsibilities for gas transportation. The responsibilities rest with the gas transporter—in this case, Transco—but regulation is carried out by the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive. Ofgem's health and safety function is dealt with under section 4A of the Gas Act 1986, as amended. In order to meet those requirements, a memorandum of understanding has been agreed with HSC and HSE, which are responsible for the regulation of most of the risks to health and safety that arise from work activities in Britain, including the regulation of the gas supply network. Structures are in place to deal with safety issues, and Ofgem handles complaints. It recently reviewed all the complaints that were raised and how they were dealt with. My hon. Friend raised serious points about how Ofgem's complaint-handling procedures have operated and the effectiveness of its responses.

I do not want to pretend that what I am saying responds to the detail of my hon. Friend's speech, which was unusual in the sense that it was very specific and included serious charges. I have no doubt that he believes that he has evidence to back up the charges and that it is in the public interest for them to be investigated transparently to reveal the justification for what he said.

Police Funding (Bromley)

12.59 pm

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): Antisocial behaviour and crime are important issues for my constituents, and I welcome the opportunity to air their concerns and to bring the situation in Bromley to the Government's attention.

The exact figures on the funds for policing in the London borough of Bromley were given to me in a written answer. In 1997–98 funding was £27 million; in 1998–99 it was £26.4 million; in 1999–2000 it was £22.9 million; in 2000–01 it was £23.7 million; and this year it was £24.6 million. Tomorrow, we will know next year's figures, although we are just ahead of the point at which they are traditionally announced. The Minister will recognise that his figures show a decline over the past five years, although I agree that there has been a small upturn in the past two or three years.

The decline in funding has been reflected in the number of police in the London borough of Bromley. In December 1996, for example, there were 471 police officers in the borough. That figure declined steadily to 432 in December 1999 and fell further to 412 in December 2000. In January 2002, the figure rose to 424, and I believe the current figure to be about 427, a figure with which my local police officers would agree.

A comparison with nearby boroughs is interesting, and shows the unfairness to Bromley. Bromley's official crime rate is 29,196 crimes per year. The figure for Lewisham, 29,173 crimes per year, is almost exactly the same. Whereas Bromley has approximately 427 police officers, however, the London borough of Lewisham has 615 police officers. The number of officially recorded crimes in Greenwich, which has 588 police officers, is similar to the figures for Bromley and Lewisham. Given the number of crimes committed, Bromley is clearly disadvantaged by the present arrangements.

In terms of numbers of residents, Bromley is equally disadvantaged. There is one officer per 696 residents in Bromley; one officer per 366 residents in Greenwich, which is twice as many officers per resident as in Bromley; and one officer per 393 residents in Lewisham. Bromley records more burglary, criminal damage and theft than Greenwich or Lewisham, so it is not surprising that the people of Bromley feel hard done to by the existing arrangement.

It may interest the Minister to know that at a recent local residents association meeting, a gentleman who had moved from Catford in Lewisham to Biggin Hill said that he felt safer in Catford than he does in Biggin Hill, which is part of the alleged leafy suburbs of south London, because he observed more policing in Catford than in Biggin Hill. That is a consequence of the disparity in the number of police from which we suffer in Bromley by comparison with neighbouring London boroughs and the decline in police numbers over the past five years—I accept that there has been a small increase in the past couple of years.

The Mayor of London pledged that there would be another 1,000 policemen on the streets of London, but Bromley has seen none of them. Bromley is a fairly affluent borough that gives a huge amount through its precept to finance the Mayor, the Greater London Authority and the Metropolitan police authority. We have got nothing back in terms of police numbers, which the Mayor indicated that he would increase.

Bromley put in for 10 community safety officers in the first tranche of requests and was turned down. Even a small request has been rejected by the Mayor's Office or the Metropolitan police authority—I am not sure which. To add insult to injury, the Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Tope, undertook about a year ago to revise the formula used by the Metropolitan police to allocate funds among the boroughs. The result would, unbelievably, have further disadvantaged Bromley. I understand that it has now been tweaked and the disadvantage might not be as great as was originally foreseen. None the less, that indicates how much Bromley has been disadvantaged.

Conservative councillors in the borough are, therefore, organising a petition. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) and I will join them in Bromley high street on Saturday morning when they will ask people to sign a petition to Lord Toby Harris, chairman of the Metropolitan police authority, which reads:

"We the undersigned, note with concern that Bromley with a higher crime rate and a larger population has only 427 police officers compared with Lewisham's 615. We call upon the Metropolitan Police Authority to review its current unfair funding policy and increase the number of police on Bromley streets."

It is not only a question of fewer police officers; there are fewer police stations. When I became the Member of Parliament for Orpington in 1992, there were three police stations in my constituency—St. Mary Cray, Biggin Hill and Orpington. Two of those have been closed to the public since then. The one in St. Mary Cray was only opened—by a Conservative Government—six months after I became the MP, and it is now closed to the public. We have only one operating police station. I accept the argument that it is sometimes a mistake to put the money into bricks and mortar rather than into people. I am sure that the Minister will make that point. Nevertheless, all the evidence suggests that the presence of a local police station diminishes crime in the surrounding area, and it is a means of getting a quicker response than might otherwise be the case.

Unsurprisingly, as a result of the declining support for funding in Bromley, declining numbers of police officers and fewer police stations, crime has increased. I shall quote briefly from the report that I received in September from the Bromley police community consultative group, which I attend as often as I can and certainly when it is in my constituency—it rotates between the three constituencies in the borough. It is a worthwhile organisation because it enables ordinary people to ventilate their concerns. The figures show that last year saw a 10 per cent. increase in burglary in the borough; the target for this year is a 2 per cent. reduction. In street crime—the number one target of the Metropolitan police service at the moment—Bromley saw a 49 per cent. increase. Disorder—measured by calls from the public about such things as disturbances, drunkenness in the streets and youths hanging around on estates and intimidating people—increased by 14 per cent. last year. Three problems that are of great concern to my constituents—disorder, street crime and burglary—have increased, some by substantial amounts.

I understand from my local chief superintendent that the trend has got better in the past two or three months. I welcome that and am delighted to hear it. I am very impressed by my local officers. Chief Superintendent Dillnutt, who looks after the whole of Bromley, and Inspector Tullett, who looks after Orpington, are excellent officers. I am impressed by their performance and that of all the Metropolitan police officers I have met. I went out on night duty with a patrol earlier this year and I was fascinated to see how they operate. Chief Superintendent Dillnutt rightly says that his job is to do the best that he can with the available resources and I fully respect that.

Relations between the police and my local council are good, partly because the cabinet member responsible for community safety is a former policeman and understands the problems very well. In addition, an active local newspaper, the *News Shopper*, has run a good campaign called, "Shop a yob", whereby CCTV pictures of youths involved in crime or antisocial behaviour are splashed across the pages of the newspaper. The campaign has led to arrests and charges and I am delighted that it recently won the Newspaper Society's community award.

As well as the "Shop a yob" campaign, the newspaper has run an airgun control campaign. Like me, a number of hon. Members from south London and north Kent—I am thinking in particular of the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw)—have supported measures to bring airguns under stricter control, particularly when they are being used by young people and teenagers. All too often, the guns are used for target practice not only on property but on people and pets.

I do not want to go down what I call the Dunblane route of heavy-handed control on such guns because that would disadvantage legitimate shooters. None the less, controls on that sort of activity by young people must be tightened. The Minister may be interested to hear that Bromley police and Bexley police have run a surrender policy over the past two weeks and that has led to young people surrendering a substantial number of airguns.

Despite efforts by the council, the police and my local newspaper, the figures are as I quoted. They have become worse. There is a slight trend showing improvements over the past two months, but the figures are still unacceptable to local people. In case the Minister regales me with official statistics, I point out that, as he will know from recent reports, the official statistics underestimate the amount of crime. Recent estimates by Civitas show that crime is running four times higher than official figures show. Mr. Simmons, the head of the Home Office crime statistics unit, has seen the figures used by Civitas, confirmed that they are accurate and said that he is content with the report's findings.

Often people are afraid to report crimes or do not report them because they believe that nothing will be done. Sometimes they try to report crimes but give up because of the difficulty of getting through to anyone who will respond sensibly to their concerns. In view of that, I was surprised that when Lord Toby Harris came to Bromley he made the following remark in a report that he gave to the council:

> "Local surveys and crime audits regularly show that the fear of crime and the perception that crime is increasing are at odds with reality."

He is looking at the official statistics, but the people of Bromley are looking at what is happening on their doorstep and in their streets and they know that the situation is bad. Saying that all is well because the official figures do not show it to be too bad means that he is not facing reality. My residents are the people who are facing reality. I also notice that Lord Tope said at one stage during his investigation of the allocation formula that there could be too many police. Again, who is living in the real world? I suggest neither the Liberal Democrat nor the Labour peer.

The situation is well encapsulated by a series of letters that I received from a public-spirited resident in Biggin Hill—one part of the constituency, but it is representative of what is felt in other areas, which all report the same things. He was a victim of an assault in August when he tried to prevent some youths forcing a young mother with a child in a push-chair off a public path. He was beaten up and the youths said, "We do as we like. There is not enough of them"—that is, the police—"to do anything about it." Swear words accompanied that fusillade, which amounted to saying "I do not give tuppence for you." The Minister can well imagine the scene.

In September, there was another incident in the same area, which the resident gave me extensive notes about. On that occasion, nine homes were attacked by a gang of youths, who said the same things: "You can't touch us, the police will take ages to get here." They moved off. The police did come, after umpteen phone calls, but no one would give any evidence for fear of reprisals. That is the vicious circle in which people find themselves.

I cite the letter that I recently received from that resident about Hallowe'en and fireworks night, in which he reported an increase in police activity. The area was specially targeted by Bromley police, and as a result things were a lot better than they were on previous Hallowe'ens or fireworks nights. He is grateful for that, and asks me to record his gratitude for what Orpington police did. Of course, once fireworks night was over, the police presence was relaxed, and as a consequence the situation has become bad again, although it is not as bad as in previous years. He writes in the final paragraph of his letter:

> "Surely this only goes to prove that a permanent higher level of policing in Biggin Hill"—

as I have said, for Biggin Hill, write the whole of Bromley—

> "is warranted and I trust this information may assist you in your efforts to bring this about."

We all know that there are many causes of crime and antisocial behaviour, such as the role of parents, schools and television, but we have to start somewhere. In the case of Bromley and Orpington, I believe that it is necessary to have a fairer deal on resources so that more police are deployed on the beat in order to significantly reduce the level of antisocial behaviour and crime.

1.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) on

[Mr. Bob Ainsworth]

applying for and securing the debate, so that he could raise some of the issues that concern his constituents in the Bromley area. Similar issues could be raised by many other hon. Members throughout England and Wales. Despite the issues he raised, I am sure that he would not want the impression to go out that Bromley is anything other than one of the safest boroughs in which to live in the London area.

The Government are determined that the police service will have the resources it needs to provide the first-rate service that our communities deserve. We have already put significant levels of investment into the police service to bring about record numbers of police officers, and to underpin the programme of police reform that was taken through the House of Commons last year. The first ever national policing plan was recently unveiled by the Home Secretary. That set out the strategic direction for the police service and our priorities for policing during the next three years. Those include tackling antisocial behaviour and disorder, and reducing volume crime and street, drug-related, violent and gun crime, which is a particular problem in parts of the capital. We also need to concentrate on serious and organised crime, which operates behind the scenes and feeds so much of the front-line crime from which our communities suffer.

The policing plan crosses boundaries while leaving infrastructure in place to tackle crime effectively. It provides a national framework for raising the performance of all forces, and will form the basis of local plans to be drawn up by chief officers and police authorities to improve standards in their localities.

We recognise the continuing blight of antisocial behaviour. We are working across Government to address it. We recently announced our intention to introduce an antisocial behaviour Bill in this Session. The hon. Gentleman referred to a specific area of antisocial behaviour—the misuse of airguns. I do not know whether he was in the House the other day when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made it clear that we were looking in exactly the direction that the hon. Gentleman indicated he would support. We want to clamp down on the abuse of guns, particularly that by under-age users, in a way that does not impose a huge bureaucracy on the police, move resources from other things that they should be tackling, or impinge on the lawful use of air weapons in sport and elsewhere. We seek a satisfactory route whereby effective measures are taken and the police are given appropriate powers to deal with abuse without unnecessarily burdening lawful users. If we do that, I hope that we will receive the hon. Gentleman's support.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that I cannot announce any of the figures for this year's spending before tomorrow. However, I can tell him that we will continue to build on the already significant investment in the police service over the past few years. Spending on policing, supported by the Government, rose by 10.1 per cent. in 2001–02, and this year it has increased by a further 7.3 per cent. to £9.117 billion.

There is a problem between some of what the hon. Gentleman says here, with which his colleagues agree, and what is said, quite rightly, in other forums. It is the Government's job to provide the money necessary to fund the police force. However, it is not necessarily our job to get involved in the micromanagement of allocating resources. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want us to do that.

Much of the hon. Gentleman's anger was directed at the formulae that were being applied in the Metropolitan police force area. He has had the opportunity to have those arguments: the resource allocation formula governing the distribution of resources in the Metropolitan area was open for consultation. Everyone had an opportunity to have their say. The adjustments that were made to that formula following the review by Lord Tope made a positive difference for Bromley. There was not the fall in Bromley's allocation that there would have been with a pure allocation of figures.

Although the hon. Gentleman complains about the lack of an allocation of community safety officers in Bromley, I am sure that he accepts that the Metropolitan police have been at the forefront of using the powers and new staffing arrangements introduced by the Police Reform Act 2002. The use by that force of community safety officers to provide visibility in central London does not mean that there is no knock-on benefit for Bromley, as those people are doing jobs that would otherwise have to be done by constables employed by the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Horam: I accept that, but we too would like some community support officers, which have been provided in central London. The problem always seems to be that the suburbs get nothing, while central London gets it all. As regards Lord Tope, his initial views were disadvantageous to Bromley, and only the fact that some pressure was put on him created a situation that was at least no worse.

Mr. Ainsworth: I think that the hon. Gentleman accepts the thrust of what I said—that an alteration in the formula led to a better allocation for Bromley than that which was originally intended at one point in the consultation.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Lord Toby Harris's comments about recorded crime. Like hon. Members of all parties, I accept that there is considerable under-recording of certain categories of crime. However, no one would dissent from the proposition that, broadly speaking, whether measured by recorded crime over the years or by the British crime survey, most categories of crime are falling. The hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench team does not argue with that, but he appears to be doing so. There is a discrepancy between what he says and what others generally accept. There are problems involved in getting people to report crime, in giving them the necessary confidence and in reducing the fear of crime in line with the falls that are taking place in recorded crime, but broadly speaking crime in most categories is falling.

Mr. Horam: One can argue about statistics endlessly and come to different conclusions, but the fact is that in

my area the fear of crime is now greater than I have ever known it to be during my time as Member of Parliament for Orpington.

Mr. Ainsworth: I understand that. Certainly, the fear of crime is not falling—that is a problem throughout the country that we need to address by building on confidence in policing within communities.

The Metropolitan police service revenue budget is £2.038 billion for 2002–03. That is an increase of £95 million, or 4.9 per cent., over last year. In addition to the £1.676 billion provided by central Government support from the principal police grant—including £197 million for the Metropolitan police service special payment to reflect the special position of the capital and the special responsibilities held by its police officers—we have provided many extra resources in the Metropolitan police area in the current financial year. Those include £62 million from the crime fighting fund to continue funding for crime fighting force officers recruited in 2000–01; £44.5 million in capital allocation for the Metropolitan police over the past year; £41 million in the capital for Airwave, the new radio communications system; and £1 million for two successful bids from the £20 million premises improvement fund. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the new police station that will open in Bromley in September 2003 as part of a private finance initiative that will also include new stations in Sutton and in Lewisham.

The hon. Gentleman said a great deal about comparisons with other boroughs. He mentioned Bromley's contribution to funding for the Metropolitan police service. This year, the borough will contribute £16.9 million, or 4.7 per cent. of police funding raised, through the police precept on the council tax. It comes as no surprise that Bromley, with a population of around 297,000, contributes more than the boroughs of Lewisham, whose population is 242,000. The population of Greenwich is 215,000. For a locally provided service, it is appropriate that police authorities should be allowed the flexibility to raise some funding locally. However, more than 80 per cent. of the funding comes from central Government. That will continue to be the case.

Post Office Services (Morden)

1.30 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I am grateful to have secured the debate on an issue that is of great concern and worry to my constituents who live in and around Morden. I secured the debate to express as strongly as I can in this place the local anger that has been caused by the cavalier announcement by Safeway on London road in Morden that it will close its in-store post office. The closure threatens a vital public service in the centre of Morden.

The debate is not only about the future of postal services in Morden, although that is an important issue, especially on a day when the Communication Workers Union is lobbying the House. It is also about the future of Morden, its shops, services and civic identity, as well as the future quality of life for local residents, especially pensioners and those with limited mobility who rely on the services in Morden.

Post offices in town centres such as Morden provide an essential community service, and the council and local residents welcomed Safeway's request to include a post office in its in-store services when it opened in the mid-1990s. The in-store post office saved a postal service when the old Abbotsbury road post office closed. Incidentally, that building is still there and is empty.

One only has to look at the long queues that form whenever the post office is open to see how essential a post office is to Morden town centre. It is not slowness of service that causes the queues but the popularity of, and need for, a post office. People collect their pensions, pay bills, add to their savings, buy stamps and apply for licences. Each activity is essential to them; it is an essential part of a service that they have every right to expect. That service is in peril for no apparent reason other than Safeway's wish to maximise its floor space. The chain has given no rational justification for its decision, which appears to have been taken for national business reasons. It is blind to local need and its responsibility to a vulnerable town.

It is small wonder that people are cynical about big business and its so-called corporate social responsibility. I understand that a meeting is taking place this afternoon, during which the council intends to push for some answers. Morden's post office is being treated like redundant stock or a discontinued line. That is utterly unacceptable, and I would welcome the Minister's assurance that he will make strong representations to Safeway to change its decision. I have written to Safeway, and I urge him to do the same.

At a time when Merton council is striving hard to sustain shops and services in Morden and to attract new businesses to the area, it is totally counter-productive and shows a serious disregard for the needs of customers for a major trader such as Safeway to decide that it no longer needs to house a post office. I have received many calls, letters and e-mails from local people who have heard that the post office is to close. They tell me anxiously that they have heard that other shops in the town centre will soon follow suit. They ask me what will be left if such and such a shop goes, and what the Government are doing for Morden.

Rumours have a habit of starting when something as significant as a post office closes. That is understandable when people are worried for the future of their town

[Siobhain McDonagh]

centre. In this case, I am confident that the rumoured closure of those other shops is just that—a rumour. However, as the Minister will doubtless agree, in high street after high street, in town or country, once a post office goes, that service vacuum sucks significant life out of the local economy. People start to go elsewhere, and the future of other shops begins to seem doubtful. As a sign displayed in the window of a furniture shop says, "Use us or lose us".

The rumour mill can have a damaging effect on the efforts of local authorities and other bodies seeking to regenerate an area and encourage new investment. It can have a demoralising effect on local people when they look around and see empty shops, pound shops or a proliferation of charity shops. Fantastic as the work of charity shops is, it must be said that they do not provide the sort of shopping opportunities that a town such as Morden needs to get back on its feet.

A domino effect starts when a post office closes—not an effect that the people of Morden want to see. They have enough to contend with. Antisocial behaviour and youth nuisance—graffiti, fly tipping, abandoned cars and the general lack of respect for the community—are giving the area, previously regarded as well-off suburbia, an undeserved bad name.

So far I have spoken about my local area. Many facts can be supplied to back up the emotion. I shall draw on the results of two surveys. The first, conducted by Merton council in 1999, comprised

"a strategic review of town centres in the Borough in order to inform the review of the Unitary Development Plan and to provide a robust basis for the preparation of new policies and development proposals to enhance their role in the future".

In seeking to define the catchment areas for Wimbledon, Mitcham, Morden and Colliers Wood, including the Savacentre based there, the study drew on earlier research into Wimbledon and a residents' survey of February and March 1999. The study reported a significantly high level of empty premises in Morden and showed that Mitcham and Morden displayed a relatively high number of convenience retailers, as opposed to comparison goods retailers, against the national average. It further demonstrated the limited investment in Mitcham and Morden, noted that shopping in those places was characterised by locally based comparison and discount retailers, and highlighted the lack of a critical mass and anchor store to support other multiple retailers.

Specifically focusing on Morden, the survey indicated that 20 per cent. of respondents had been using Morden town centre less often for shopping over the past five years. The main reasons provided by 52 per cent. of respondents for their declining use of shopping facilities were the quantity and quality of shops. The Savacentre in Colliers Wood, a huge pantechnicon of a hypermarket, opened some years before the five-year period started, drawing people away from Morden in the absence of much that would induce them to stay. We should not forget that that was before the other two local shopping centres in Colliers Wood—Tandem and Priory Park—were fully operational. The main destination for food shopping was Savacentre at Colliers Wood, used by 33 per cent. of respondents. Twenty-eight per cent. used Safeway in Morden for their main food shopping. The majority of top-up food shopping was undertaken in Morden.

It was noted that the use of the town centre for shopping was declining and that the most desired additional facilities were better quality clothes shops, mentioned by 39 per cent. of respondents; shoe shops, mentioned by 33 per cent.; a cinema, mentioned by 22 per cent.; and a Marks and Spencer's, mentioned by 15 per cent. Interestingly, if we substitute the Co-op department store for Marks and Spencer's, those are the sort of shopping facilities that Morden used to boast of before its decline.

I have carried out my own survey in the Morden area since the beginning of autumn. From time to time, I carry out surveys in different areas of my constituency to ascertain what is concerning local people and to keep in touch with their worries. Hundreds of residents responded to my survey, either on the doorstep, on the phone or by freepost. I should take a moment to praise the valiant postman who delivers my mail to my constituency office. While he retains his job, there is hope for postal services in Morden.

Morden residents who responded named crime and environmental problems such as graffiti and fly tipping as their two major concerns, but almost without exception they were unsatisfied with the facilities and appearance of Morden town centre as well as the intimidating gangs of youths gathering outside the tube station. Though praising the excellent transport links that local residents have on their doorstep—the Northern line, the nearby tram, two Thameslink stations and the many buses running from outside the tube station—they virtually all commented on the unkempt nature of the town centre and the lack of adequate shops.

Merton council is working to cure the mismatch between excellent transport links and poor town centre services. As long as we protect essential services such as the post office, there is no earthly reason why Morden should not have a town centre to be proud of. I call on Safeway to live up to its much-vaunted corporate social responsibility by providing a post office service at least until a suitable new venue in the heart of Morden and a new postmaster can be found.

Given the strong local opposition to the proposed closure of the post office, I would be interested to hear the Minister's comments on the review of urban post offices, which has just begun. It has already caused disquiet in several corners of my constituency, and the visit by a local development manager was taken to be the death knell for the local post office. Given that all my constituents rely on urban post offices and that all the post offices in my constituency are to be reviewed, I would be grateful for my hon. Friend's assurance that the review will be carried out with due regard to residents' customer needs and to securing the future of communities. Can he tell me what safeguards are in place to ensure that the process is transparent and welcomes residents' views?

As I said, post offices are vital community services. The initial closure of Morden's purpose-built post office in Abbotsbury road and its transfer to under Safeway's roof, under the banner of Post Office modernisation, were greeted with scepticism, and it would appear that

local fears were justified. Once a corporate partner such as Safeway decides to operate a post office counter, it should not have the freedom simply to renege on its commitment, in the same way that it might randomly decide not to stock any more cans of beans. If there is such a thing as corporate responsibility—I presume that the Minister thinks there is, because it is part of his portfolio—it does not appear to have been worth more than a can of beans in this instance. I would welcome his comments on anything that he can do to encourage Safeway to take a more socially responsible look at its duty towards the people of Morden.

1.41 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing the debate. She has a deep understanding of the issues that affect the quality of life of her constituents and, in particular, her elderly constituents. She also has a good understanding of the tough challenges facing the Royal Mail Group, and she has spoken about that on the Floor of the House.

I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said about Safeway's behaviour and I well understand her concern. My understanding is that the post office franchise in the Safeway store formally came to an end on 1 November, and that the store originally proposed a closing date in January—that is to say, next month. I am told, however, that it subsequently moved the date to October 2003, not least in response to representations from my hon. Friend. She referred to a further meeting, which is due to take place this afternoon.

It is certainly the intention and the hope that Post Office Ltd., which is responsible for the post office network, will continue to provide a post office branch facility in my hon. Friend's area. It is continuing its search for suitable premises and for someone to run the business. I hope that delaying the closure until October will give it an opportunity satisfactorily to achieve that.

My hon. Friend asked me to comment on the process on which the Post Office is embarking in relation to the urban post office network. I assure her and the whole Chamber that we fully recognise the importance of the sub-post office network. We are committed to maintaining the network, because sub-post offices are very important. She made the point very effectively that they are important focal points for local communities. That is well understood in the context of rural areas, but it needs to be understood equally in the context of urban areas. Post offices are very important for urban communities and, in particular, for the elderly and those who are less mobile.

The post office network serves 28 million people each week. It is the largest retail network in Europe. It has half as many branches again as all the banks and building societies in the country put together. It is precisely because it is so important that the Post Office needs to respond to the changing demands of its customers and to the opportunities arising from new technology. The truth is that people are not using post offices as often as they used to, and that presents challenges to Post Office Ltd., to the individuals who run post office branches and to us in government, too. Some 42 per cent. of benefit recipients now access their benefit payments via bank accounts rather than by order books, compared with 26 per cent. in 1996. There has been a sharp drop in the number of people using giros and order books for reasons that we can all understand.

Over the past five years, the number of recipients of retirement pensions and widow's benefit payment has increased by 1 million, but the number of those paid by order books and giros has decreased by more than 1 million: from slightly more than 6 million to less than 5 million. Incapacity benefit payments at the post office have fallen even more dramatically, from more than 2.5 million to less than 1 million. Similarly, over the past five years, Girobank transactions at post offices have fallen by 37 per cent. and the number of stamps sold at post offices has declined.

Such changes create big challenges for the Post Office. Last year, it's overall operations lost £1.1 million per working day. A major process of change is now taking place. It is backed by substantial investment on the part of the Government to enable the Post Office to be renewed and to return to commercial good health. The problems in the network have affected the ability of sub-postmasters to sell on their businesses; they have taken a severe knock. A vibrant market in respect of the buying and selling of post offices is important to sub-postmasters who serve their communities.

My hon. Friend is familiar with the fact that the Prime Minister asked the performance and innovation unit to develop a strategy for modernising the post office network. Its report made 24 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Government. Since that acceptance was announced, we have been working closely with Post Office Ltd. and the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters to implement the recommended measures. The PIU found that, over the years, the network of post offices had not kept pace with change, or built on its highly trusted status to develop a wider range of financial services. The Post Office is uniquely trusted; it is one of the most trusted brands in the country, which gives it huge potential. The unit found that it had lost touch with what many of its customers wanted; that it was losing business. As business people, sub-postmasters have found it increasingly difficult to make a living and have begun to leave the network in increasing numbers.

In many urban areas throughout the United Kingdom, there is too little business for the number of post offices that are operating. Of just more than 9,000 urban post offices, more than one in eight has 10 or more other branches within a mile and 155 post offices have 15 or more other branches within a mile. The volume of business is not sufficient to support so dense a network of branches. The Post Office is taking forward a programme that is intended to restore the urban network to commercial viability, restore the confidence of sub-postmasters and attract much-needed new investment so that customers can continue to enjoy access to a full range of services. It must be able to deal with problems such as that described by my hon. Friend when she referred to the decision by Safeway, and be willing to open and to run a replacement office.

My hon. Friend has asked me to set out some of the thinking behind the proposals that Post Office Ltd. has made for closures under the programme that I mentioned. Those proposals will be determined on the basis of the proximity of offices in a particular area, the

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

current and projected business volumes of each office and whether individual sub-postmasters have already indicated that they want to leave the network, which is important in the early days. Post Office officials will walk the streets in every area and make a careful study of the location of the offices relative to each other. Those officials will consider important factors for customers: the convenience of alternative branches nearby, if there are any; the availability of public transport links; the provision of access for the disabled and other facilities for people with mobility impairments; and the ability of branches nearby to absorb the extra work that may result from the closure of a particular branch. There may even be potential for expansion in such branches.

A formal consultation will be carried out before any changes are made, in accordance with the existing code of practice on post office closures. That is designed to meet the call for transparency that my hon. Friend underlined. In every case, that would involve consultations with local communities, interest groups, councillors and Members of Parliament. In every instance, there would also be extensive consultations with the consumer body Postwatch, which has taken seriously the importance of its role in the process. We have given that body additional resources so that it can do the job thoroughly and well.

One aim will be to ensure that, if a particular office needs to close, it is as easy and convenient as possible for customers to use other offices nearby. Another aim will be to maximise the amount of business from a closing office that can be captured by other branches nearby. It is, of course, in the interests of the Post Office to retain as much of the business from the office as possible. Equally, it is in the interests of all of our constituents that their concerns be taken fully into account. The programme will start with smaller urban post offices, in which sub-postmasters are under the greatest pressure. The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters has had a full discussion with the Department and the Post Office about how the process can be taken forward as successfully as possible.

There is, properly, a compensation process for sub-postmasters whose post offices will close. European Commission approval for Government funding of that compensation was received on 18 September. Parliamentary approval for the programme itself was gained on 15 October. Post Office Ltd. wrote to all hon. Members on 25 October with a full explanation of its objectives for the programme. When a sub-post office closes under the programme, the Government will meet the costs of compensation, which we expect will total £180 million over the next three years. In addition, a further £30 million will be available for modernising, adapting and investing in those post offices that remain. That will apply, for example, if it is necessary to add another counter to a post office so that it can handle the extra business that comes its way. The key to improving the standard in the offices that remain will be the increased volume of business that they can expect. There will also be grants of between £5,000 and £10,000 for each office that expects to take on a significant number of additional customers. That amount should be matched by the proprietor of the office. Those grants will also be an important boost for the offices that remain.

This is the first time that there has been a programme of Government investment in urban sub-post offices. That programme is an additional measure to those that were recommended in the performance and innovation unit report. The fact that investment is being made reflects the importance that the Government attach to the urban sub-post office network. The Post Office will generally require offices that receive trade from an office that has closed to improve their facilities and to increase their opening hours, so that increasingly sub-post offices will maintain the same hours as associated retail business. That will considerably improve access to post office services for customers in urban areas.

I think that my hon. Friend will agree that having a properly managed programme of the kind that I have described is preferable to the alternative, which would be unmanaged closures resulting from dwindling income. Without the programme, many more urban sub-postmasters would shut their business altogether—not for the reasons that applied in the case that she described, in which the decision was made by a big corporate organisation, but because the sub-postmasters felt that they could not carry on with such a falling off in business. Such a random process of unmanaged closures would cause much greater disruption to customers than the properly managed process that I have described.

Even after the changes, when whatever closures are needed have taken place, 95 per cent. of people in urban areas will still live within, at most, a mile of their nearest post office branch. The majority will, we expect, live within half a mile. I assure my hon. Friend that, other than in exceptional circumstances, the scope of the programme will not extend to post offices in the most deprived 10 per cent. of urban wards in the country if they are more than half a mile from the next post office. Indeed, we intend to improve and sustain post offices in deprived urban areas. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will shortly be announcing details of a programme of funding to support post office services and the development of associated retail facilities in those deprived districts, precisely because post offices have such an important role in struggling urban shopping centres of the kind that my hon. Friend described.

The programme to restructure the urban post office network will run for three years. It has only just begun. There is no predetermined list of offices that will close. Nor is any arithmetical formula being used to determine the number of closures in an area. Sub-postmasters have already been asked to express possible interest in closing under the terms of the programme, but initial expressions of interest are not binding either on Post Office Ltd., or on the sub-postmaster. Before any changes are made under the programme and before any closures can happen there will be meetings with sub-postmasters and full consultation will take place. Postwatch will examine every proposal and monitor the programme.

The performance and innovation unit suggested not only that the Government should help if the Post Office found that fewer offices were needed in urban areas but that we support the introduction of the concept of universal banking. That will be important for the future well-being of the urban post office network. The introduction of universal banking has been made

possible because the Government have made the biggest ever investment in the Post Office—£480 million for online computer systems for every post office in the country. We are making good progress on preparations to introduce universal banking services from next April. The ambition is to build on the Post Office's uniquely trusted brand and to modernise and extend its commercial banking arrangements, so that it becomes the nation's leading provider of access to bank accounts—the universal bank. Increasingly, the message to be conveyed to my hon. Friend's constituents will be, "Do your banking at the post office." The Post Office has had some big successes with new products and services, including travel insurance and bureau de change services. We shall need more new ideas and additional investment, so that post offices can thrive again by providing the services that people need. All the high street banks have now signed up to their part of the universal banking arrangements. Those will be in place from April through the basic bank accounts offered by all the high street banks and major building societies and through Post Office card accounts. Those will be usable only at a post office. Many people will want that simple form of account, so that they can receive their benefit payments.

Our aim must be to restore the urban network to commercial viability and to restore the confidence of sub-postmasters. That is critical if we are to attract much-needed new investment to the network.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 5 December 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Climate Change and Sustainable Development

[Relevant documents: Third Report from the International Development Committee, Session 2001-02 HC 519-I, and the Government's response thereto, HC 1270.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

2.30 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I welcome this opportunity to debate the Select Committee on International Development report on global climate change and sustainable development. A significant number of Committee members are present today, including the hon. Members for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty), for Putney (Mr. Colman), for City of York (Hugh Bayley) and for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington). I am sure that all hon. Members, in their own way, will base their contributions on the impressions that they drew from a fairly extensive inquiry that lasted a number of months. Some hon. Members may not have had the opportunity to read the evidence, but I hope that the report will stand the test of time as being worthwhile.

The United Nations world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg two months ago was the first summit of its kind for 10 years. A number of Committee members were fortunate enough to be able to attend. Frustratingly and somewhat disappointingly, and despite the attendance at the summit of the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for International Development, no ministerial statement was made on the subject when the House returned shortly afterwards, which would have put what happened there into perspective. Today's debate is the first opportunity that we have had to consider what happened at Johannesburg.

Perspective and scale are imperative when considering climate change. One of the things that struck me while listening to the evidence of witnesses during the Select Committee inquiry was that such a dramatic scale of change should have taken place in so a short time. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its third assessment report published in 2001, observed that the concentrations of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere had risen, that carbon dioxide was at its highest concentration for the past 42,000 years, and that the rate at which its concentration was increasing was unprecedented in the past 20,000 years.

Those are dramatic figures. A number of witnesses, including the Hadley centre for climate change, observed that during the next 100 years temperatures around the world are likely to be higher than in millions of years past. We are in a period of considerable and dramatic change. I wonder whether the Department for International Development is sufficiently forward thinking on the matter.

I note that in paragraph 12.2 of their response, on the Select Committee's encouragement of enhanced funding of the global environment facility, the Government state:

> "We are not in favour of any prior allocation of funds within the GEF overall budget".

That is unfortunate, given that the global environment facility is one of the central mechanisms to ensure that environmental objectives are reflected within development projects—and, moreover, to identify climate risks such as famine sooner rather than later.

DFID does not seem to mainstream our concerns on climate change through its development policies. The Secretary of State's evidence to the Committee was, as always, robust and welcome, but it does not seem that DFID has a coherent policy on climate change. I believe that that is inadequate. The result is that policies in developing countries, including poverty reduction strategy papers and national strategies for sustainable development, often contain little to address climate risk. Unless DFID helps poorer countries to develop policies to deal with that risk, climate change will continue to undermine development.

The Select Committee heard the Secretary of State talk at length, although understandably, about "northern greens" during her evidence sessions, but I believe that that sometimes misses the point. Conclusions 5 and 6 of the report help us to put the world summit on sustainable development into some perspective. Conclusion 5 states:

> "Developing countries have a different view of climate change to developed countries. They see it not as a problem of pollution or of how to sustain economic growth but as a problem of human welfare that threatens survival itself".

That might be a different perception, but it should make DFID put the wider implications of climate change into perspective.

The World Bank said that the WSSD should have focused on Africa, and I agree. Asia and south America contain developing countries, but most of Africa contains only poor countries. The fact is that the effects of climate change will not be spread evenly across the globe but will be felt disproportionately by the poor. Poor people are likely to be the most vulnerable because they are unable to withstand even the slightest shock to their livelihood.

Since 1997, DFID has pursued a sustainable livelihoods approach to development. It was encapsulated in the 1997 White Paper and has been the backbone of much of DFID's policy. The most widely accepted definition of sustainable livelihoods was proposed by an academic, Carney, in 1995:

> "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base."

One point that I hope to make this afternoon is that millions of families in Africa are so beset by food shortages, drought and HIV/AIDS that they can no longer cope with or easily recover from stresses and

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shocks. I hope that hon. Members will forgive me for focusing a little on the plight of two regions of Africa. I and many other members of the Select Committee have just returned from visits to Malawi and/or the horn of Africa, and those examples may best illustrate the approach that DFID should adopt to climate change.

It is estimated that as many as 14 million people in southern Africa and another 14 million in Ethiopia and the horn of Africa are at risk of starvation. That means that nearly 30 million people are suffering almost silent starvation, because the media are only intermittently interested. Understandably, overseas coverage in the broadsheets these days deals almost exclusively with Iraq. Some people suggest that we are not dealing with the Ethiopia of 1985. I have been to Ethiopia, and that may not yet be the case. Film crews looking for tents full of skeletal children will be disappointed, but this is no less a holocaust of hunger. In that respect, the media cannot be guaranteed to act as an early warning system. An article from the current edition of the Institute of Development Studies' journal asserts:

"The case of Malawi in 2002 reveals the limitations of this argument. The media is a late indicator of distress, not an early warning. Journalists and television crews arrived in Malawi like spectators at a car crash: to observe the tragedy, not to prevent it."

Africans starve, journalists come, food aid dribbles forth, the journalists go and the Africans still starve.

If the media do not fully recognise the scale of Africa's plight, do Governments? I am sure that they do, but I want the House to consider two statements from the past fortnight on the prospects of African famine. Statement No. 1 reads:

"From my latest assessments in the field for southern Africa, certainly the peak period for assistance will begin in December and it is about 14.4 million people. In Ethiopia they have assessments in the field now and the 14 million, I think, was the worst case looking at all factors".

Statement No. 2 reads:

"A total of 427,000 tonnes of food aid was requested to help meet the needs of some 5.9 million people who were at risk. That followed the generally good harvests of 2001." —[*Official Report*, 3 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 885.]

I believe that hon. Members would agree that those two statements are somewhat at loggerheads. The first statement was made by Judith Lewis, the World Food Programme regional director in southern Africa, in evidence to the Select Committee two weeks ago. The second statement was made by the Minister in an Adjournment debate in the House the day before yesterday. There is a huge difference between 14 million and 6 million. The response of DFID to the African crisis appears to be based not on the requests of UN agencies in the field, but on its judgment of what scale the crisis should be. Before the Minister rises to say that the World Food Programme always overestimates, there is no cogent argument to suggest that the WFP has miscalculated need by a factor of three.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would read the rest of my quote, in which I think I gave best-case and worst-case scenarios. I think that he will find that my worst-case scenario agreed pretty much with that of the WFP. Otherwise, I will see whether the Department can check the figures.

Tony Baldry: I was in the Chamber and took careful note of what the Minister said because I was anxious not to misrepresent her. If she cares to re-read what she said in *Hansard*, I think that she will find that she referred to the figure of 5.9 million and said that the Government were waiting for further reports from the field about what is happening. Either DFID agrees with the World Food Programme or it does not, and I shall refer later to other examples of how it seems to me that the Secretary of State and the WFP are not speaking in a similar way.

I suggest that Ministers read an analysis of the 1985 Ethiopian famine recently published by IDS, which observes how

"the early warning system adequately picked up the problem, but failed to mobilise the kind of response needed to avert a disaster, in short, because donor agencies were sceptical about the needs figures."

Why are Ministers now being sceptical? On whom does DFID rely in order to feel confident that fewer than 6 million people are threatened by famine? Why is DFID failing to recognise in its country assistance plan for Ethiopia the WFP's estimates for the African crisis?

My concern is that I am not confident that DFID fully grasps the colossal scale of the famine facing much of Africa. Judith Lewis made it clear that her calculations account for all factors. DFID does not. However, it is not only Judith Lewis from whom the Select Committee has heard recently. James Morris, the executive director of the United Nations World Food Programme, recently met members of the Select Committee. I kept a careful note of what he said. He observed that there is

"a disaster unfolding, with 14 million people in the Horn of Africa, and 14 million in Southern Africa needing food aid. This could not be sustained by the World Food Programme."

In a press release issued on the same day, 28 October—just a few weeks ago—James Morris said:

"These figures are large and dramatic and the international community should take notice...unless we come to grips with this problem very soon, we face the real possibility of facing a devastating wave of human suffering and death early next year."

He went on to comment that

"while modern society is not prepared to tolerate the face of mass hunger, agencies like the World Food Programme—as well as hundreds of highly effective NGOs—are finding it increasingly difficult to find the resources to respond adequately to the growing number of emergencies.

Dependent on voluntary contributions WFP and NGOs are caught between the rising needs of millions of hungry people and government budgets that are already stretched and contending with a global economic slowdown."

James Morris concluded, somewhat alarmingly:

"The sad truth is that as things stand the humanitarian system faces the prospect of being completely overwhelmed. It is clear that business as usual is insufficient to address the rising humanitarian crisis we confront."

Nothing that I have heard from the Government or that has been reflected in the media seems to tackle adequately the concern of UN agencies such as the World Food Programme, which is that

"the humanitarian system faces the prospect of being completely overwhelmed."

Is DFID's estimate of those at risk of starvation lower because it believes that many people are dying of HIV/AIDS rather than food shortages? The two are interlocked: hunger helps to beget HIV/AIDS, and HIV/AIDS helps to beget hunger. The WFP believes that the first fight against HIV/AIDS is about food and, likewise, it wants to distribute food to HIV sufferers foremost.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Did my hon. Friend hear the Secretary of State's interview on the "Today" programme? She compared the estimates of those at risk of famine in southern Africa and Ethiopia, and suggested that the threat was worse in southern Africa because of the enfeeblement of the population by HIV and AIDS. I have carefully looked at the *Hansard* report of the debate on Ethiopia a couple of days ago, and cannot find maximum and minimum figures. However, the Minister stated:

"We expect to have the first estimates from surveys of the present situation within the next few days".—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 885.]

It would seem that the assessment in the media was given before the correct information was available to the Department.

Tony Baldry: The World Food Programme, which is there on the ground, seems to be clear about the scale of the need. Like my hon. Friend, I was surprised by the Secretary of State's interview on "Today". As members of the Select Committee know, I am generally not slow to compliment the Secretary of State and DFID on their achievements. I was surprised when she was reported as saying that talk of the threat of famine in Ethiopia was irresponsible.

When the Minister replies to the debate, perhaps she will tell us which of the comments made by the WFP's executive director is irresponsible. Is it his suggestion that there is

"a disaster unfolding, with 14 million people in the Horn of Africa, and 14 million in Southern Africa needing food aid. This could not be sustained by the World Food Programme"?

Is it the statement:

"These figures are large and dramatic and the international community should take notice...unless we come to grips with this problem very soon, we face the real possibility of facing a devastating wave of human suffering and death early next year"?

Is it the suggestion that the World Food Programme is

"finding it increasingly difficult to find the resources to respond adequately to the growing number of emergencies...The sad truth is that as things stand the humanitarian system faces the prospect of being completely overwhelmed"?

Do the Government agree with that assessment by James Morris, or do they think that the WFP has in some way got things wrong? I do not think that it is irresponsible for the Ethiopian Prime Minister to seek more food aid while the UN's World Food Programme estimates that 14 million of his country's people will soon be under threat of starvation.

Thus far, the WFP's emergency appeals for both regions have not received the response from donors for which one would hope. In southern Africa, that has meant that only about 13 per cent. of food aid has been delivered to those who need it.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): At last, the hon. Gentleman is coming to the nub of the problem. There is not much difference between the Government's position and that of the World Food Programme. The WFP has put out an appeal, but unfortunately only 56 per cent. of the amount of donations needed has been received. That is not the problem in any case. The real question is why the WFP has not had the response that it had for previous impending famines. The reason should be in this debate. We are talking about climate change and decreases in world food supplies. Will the hon. Gentleman address those subjects a little?

Tony Baldry: I am sorry if the hon. Lady has missed the first of the serious points that I am making: that we all need to understand the scale of what is happening in Africa. It is unprecedented, in relation to climatic as well as other factors—it is, for example, the first time ever that both rains have failed in Ethopia. However, James Morris was telling the Select Committee that we are nearing the stage at which so many people in Africa need food aid that, even if we could get the food into the pipeline, the pipeline could not cope.

I shall in a moment say something about how increasing endemic poverty increases the difficulty.

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): It may be important for those of us who also attended the relevant meeting to recognise that the World Food Programme representatives talked of last year's very good harvest in Ethiopia and explained the need for long-term reform. They said that the World Food Programme was placing strong emphasis on dealing with long-term agricultural needs. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would reflect on his recollection of that meeting, and agree that James Morris and his cohorts made those suggestions.

Tony Baldry: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I wanted to make it clear that a long-term food security programme is among the things that are needed. One of my concerns is that, in Ethiopia, in years when there has been no drought, the number of food-insecure people has been growing. People who have exhausted their coping mechanisms in difficult years cannot recover, even in years of good harvest. However, the quotations that I have given the Committee are fair and accurate reflections of what was said at the meeting.

In Ethiopia the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission estimates that something like 250,000 tonnes of grain will be needed between now and the end of the year. That takes no account of the exacerbation of the situation that both the relevant regions will face next year because of what is happening this year. The Minister said in the Adjournment debate:

"Those positive developments include the effectiveness of early warning systems, and the willingness of the Government and the international community to work together."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2001; Vol. 395, c. 885.]

She listed the comparatively high level of food aid so far donated by the United Kingdom. I do not think that anyone would dispute that the UK has responded or that the Department for International Development was among the first to respond. However, whatever the early warning systems are telling the UK Government, an average of one in three people are still hungry because they are not getting enough food aid.

I do not dispute that DFID is working multilaterally. I should not expect anything less from it. However, that does not alter the fact that the UK is responding to a

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level of crisis completely different, in many people's view, from the one that the World Food Programme is witnessing. My concern is that there is too little recognition of the scale of the crisis. Until it is recognised, Africa's suffering cannot be stemmed. I echo what has been said by the hon. Members for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and for Putney (Mr. Colman) about the need for a long-term solution as well as a short-term one.

That brings me to the second recommendation in the Select Committee report, at paragraph 6 in the list of conclusions and recommendations, which is, I believe, crucial in the context of famine prevention and climate change. It states:

"Given their relative contribution, the burden of finding a solution to the problems posed by climate change should fall mainly on developed countries".

One of the problems posed by climate change is food shortage. The one is exacerbated by the other. They are symbiotic. If food aid is not donated now, there will come a point at which the food pipeline will be overwhelmed. There is not sufficient physical capacity. I do not think that the problem of physical capacity is being fully recognised by DFID. I suspect that what we are now witnessing in Ethiopia and southern Africa is the longer-term impact of a food pipeline unable to cope with the volumes of food aid now needed. Africa is stuck in a cycle of grinding poverty and vulnerability. When I visited Ethiopia and Malawi I saw that in many parts of those countries people are so incredibly poor that the merest breeze of adverse conditions blows them over. No capacity means no coping mechanism.

Every year, almost irrespective of whether there is a drought, more and more Ethiopians appear to be becoming food-dependent. That is a reflection of the deepening poverty and destitution of those living in rural areas. Unless the trend is reversed it will not be many years before we see something like 20 million people being food-dependent, which would clearly be impossible to cope with by way of food aid. A long-term food security strategy is needed. I quote briefly from the country assistance plan drawn up by DFID for long-term assistance to Ethiopia, which was published at the beginning of last month:

"Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world, ill-equipped to cope with the current droughts to which it is prone...Ethiopia like other countries in the Horn of Africa is subject to highly variable and erratic climatic conditions. Drought is a recurrent problem. Most parts of the country 'normally' have at least two rainy seasons in a year but one or often both of these frequently fail. When this happens, harvests are poor and livestock may die. During prolonged droughts many households exhaust their own food supplies and have to sell what assets they have to buy more. When their assets run out, they become dependent on Food Aid and if this does not reach them, death from starvation results. Unless action is taken to control the spread of HIV/AIDS, then the effect of drought on populations affected by the pandemic can be devastating. The combination of HIV/AIDS and frequent drought is therefore a significant risk to poverty reduction."

Food insecurity is identified as a major contributor to poverty and poverty is a major contributor to food insecurity. The report continues:

"Extreme poverty has led to land degradation, associated problems of deforestation, over-grazing, loss of soil fertility and disruption of the water cycle."

Perhaps one of the most disturbing features of erratic weather and recurring droughts is that when people sell their assets during a drought, they are rarely able to rebuild their families' coping mechanisms. Perhaps one of the greatest concerns about countries such as Ethiopia is that, irrespective of whether there is a drought, the number of food-insecure people grows year by year. To return to the point made by the hon. Member for Putney, when I was in Addis Ababa, I went to see the European Union's team. They gave me a paper written by the food security adviser to the European Commission's office in Addis Ababa, which makes the point that many

"households are slowly falling into destitution over the years as a result of asset sales during ever more frequent crises. As a consequence, coping mechanisms have lost their effectiveness and even small downturns in production translate into major shocks for large numbers of rural livelihoods."

The paper goes on to make an extremely important point, which has been overlooked in recent reporting of what is happening in Ethiopia and elsewhere:

"Once more we are back into emergency appeals and the scramble for metric tonnes."

As has often been repeated, but perhaps not often enough, food aid fulfils only one of its three objectives, saving lives—the other two being saving assets and improving nutrition—and it does not do that well. Furthermore, emergency food aid is of limited use in addressing the structural problems at the basis of the current crisis in Ethiopia.

" Asset depletion over the long term continues unabated and under the current scheme of things, donors will be facing a caseload of 20 million food insecure people by 2015, a clearly unsustainable situation."

Those are not my figures. That is the European Union's food security adviser, on the ground in Addis, saying that unless something dramatic changes, all that will happen will be that year on year there will be more food-insecure people in Ethiopia and other parts of Africa, and predicting a potential 20 million people starving in Ethiopia alone. The EU paper rightly concludes:

"The main challenge is to reverse the 'one step forward, two steps back' tendency in the Food Security policy dialogue."

In order to do that, we have to be forceful in our message that crisis reinforces rather than supersedes the need for a long-term structural approach to food security. For that reason, we need to give longer-term support to agriculture extension programmes, supporting farmer training with a broader range of agricultural technologies made available to farmers, help with road building to enable them to get goods to markets more easily, improve market information and develop organisations that can advance credit to farmers. The eventual elimination of food insecurity and dependence on food aid must be an objective. However, that point should not disguise the poverty of so many countries in the world. To help them we need to tackle their poverty.

When I met Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, he made it clear that he considered it imperative that his Government should have a longer-term food security strategy. He recognises that Ethiopia cannot go on, year after year, depending on financial and food handouts from the donor community. I hope that DFID will pursue a longer-term approach. Everyone needs to be clear that climate change and poverty are interlinked. Everyone seems to recognise that they must be tackled together.

Meeting the UN's millennium development goals, therefore, requires policies that both address climate change and ensure sustainable development. However, Africa is not meeting the millennium development goals. DFID's last annual report contains, I think, 14 graphs on each continent's progress towards the millennium development goals. Not one shows Africa going forward. Most show it going backwards. Of the six countries in the southern African crisis, five are still at the very bottom of the human development index. They are the poorest of the poor: they have the highest malnutrition rates in the world, the highest chronic malnutrition in the world and the highest rates of wasting and stunting in the world. Why? Because of food insecurity.

Food insecurity is caused primarily by drought and HIV/AIDS. Those are the two ugly sisters blighting Africa. How can they be combated? Broadly speaking, aid is imperative to control HIV/AIDS, and trade is important to combat drought. To take Ethiopia on trade, for example, a longer-term food security strategy will mean getting more people in rural areas out of destitution. Famine and food shortages in Ethiopia are not simply weather-related but poverty-related issues. Some 85 per cent. of Ethiopians depend on agriculture for their income. They have been hardest hit by the fall in international coffee prices, which has not only affected the income of individual farmers and their families but substantially depleted the Ethiopian Government's finances.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. Mr. Baldry, a Member is trying to catch your eye, but you have not looked round the Room, and it might be that you go past the point at which he wants to intervene on you.

Tony Baldry: Mr. Hancock, it is usual for hon. Members to say, "Will the hon. Member give way?" I apologise—I was keen to say a lot, and I do not want to take up too much of the debate.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The hon. Gentleman brings a passion and concern to the debate, insisting that we do not become complacent about the scale of the problems in Africa. I think that we all appreciate that in his leadership in our Committee.

I know Malawi rather better than Ethiopia—I was there recently. I have checked the weather reports, and it is raining in Malawi now. That is important, because the rain season has started. The problem is not that there was not a rain season last year, but that it was intermittent and missed. Apart from AIDS, which is hollowing out the society and Malawi's capacity, the biggest problem when we were there was the lack of seed and fertiliser. To be fair to DFID, it was doing its best to distribute seed and fertiliser packs to jump-start in the medium term the possibilities of a harvest next year. However, when we asked the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation, they did not seem to realise that part of building for the future is ensuring that people have seeds to plant to catch the rain now; otherwise, we shall be discussing food shortages and food aid again this time next year.

Tony Baldry: I do not disagree with any of that. I think that there tends to be broad agreement on the Select Committee. I do not believe for a moment that the World Food Programme is the repository of all knowledge. In quoting the World Food Programme, I am concerned that there be a wider understanding of the scale of what is happening. Whether we visited Malawi or Ethiopia, we are all concerned about the failure of the FAO to provide help to encourage agriculture. There is a hole there. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that, notwithstanding the terrible problem of HIV/AIDS, unless people in Malawi can grow more food, the situation there will become increasingly difficult.

I shall briefly return to the problems of Ethiopia. Its main export is coffee, but coffee prices are at their lowest in 16 years. Ironically, Ethiopia's poverty may be of benefit to the country: because it is so poor, fertilisers or pesticides are not used, so Ethiopian coffee is genuinely organic. One way forward would be to brand its produce as Ethiopian coffee and promote it as a niche organic product.

I appreciate that DFID has been very much involved with a supermarkets initiative, but the labyrinthine procedures of the European Commission make it difficult to get coffee certified as organic. I hope that officials from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in Brussels can offer some help, particularly by ensuring that the Commission and others do not make wholly unrealistic demands of Ethiopian farmers to prove that they have never used pesticides or fertilisers; otherwise, Ethiopia will be dependent for any improvement in incomes on greater access to other markets, whether regional—such as Saudi Arabia and the middle east—or European.

The position is even more difficult in Malawi. The country may have a democratic Government, but I doubt whether it has the political leadership: even building a Bailey bridge on an ordinary road never seems to happen. We all recognise that countries such as Ethiopia and Malawi face HIV/AIDS as well as drought. Sadly, Africa is poor because it is sick and sick because it is poor.

The scale and perspective of famines have changed. Poverty and climate change have exacerbated them and sustainable development in Africa is now a far bigger challenge. Earlier this week, the Select Committee took evidence from its special adviser, Dr. Stephen Devereux. Members who heard his evidence—he is an expert on famine and has written extensively about it—will know that he views current developments as of a different order from those of the past, requiring new thinking. We have too often considered how past famines were dealt with by early warning systems and other mechanisms without realising that those mechanisms are inadequate to deal with Stephen Devereux's new "seismic factor".

Finally, because the scale of famine has changed, the amount of food aid that the World Food Programme needs to obtain gets greater each year. However, the World Food Programme never knows when it will receive the money from donors, so it has to go cap in hand to secure pledges, which have to be turned into commitments, which have to be turned into money, which sometimes arrives too late. We need a new system to avoid one humanitarian crisis giving way to another. UN donor countries and aid recipients now need a continually supported emergency budget to be distributed as humanitarian crises—sadly, likely to be frequent—happen. Many Governments of developed

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countries are sometimes reluctant to give aid to developing countries. As the hon. Member for Richmond Park said, all too often it takes all too long for requests to be honoured.

In the long term, more needs to be done to deal with the following famine equation: drought plus HIV/AIDS minus fair trade equals famine. Otherwise, Africa will have 30 million people dependent on food aid, and for Africa alone, the 2015 targets will become the 2030 millennium goals as Africa continues to starve silently.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Given that the hon. Gentleman is talking about the long term, will he accept that, in the long term, the solution lies as much with the Department of Trade and Industry and energy policy as with the practical support that DFID can give to relieve famine? Does he agree that it might have been useful had his report made a recommendation to the DTI, or a submission to the current energy review, stressing the absolute importance of reducing CO_2 emissions, not only to our current commitment of 20 per cent., but to 60 per cent., as the royal commission on environmental pollution recommended?

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. This is getting close to a speech, Mr. Chaytor.

Mr. Chaytor: I shall be brief, Mr. Hancock.

Recommendations 9 and 30 in the report are about the link between climate change and equity, and suggest that the Government should pursue a policy of contraction and convergence in their approach to CO_2 emissions.

Tony Baldry: I am sure that every hon. Member will make their own speech. In fairness, the report, which was written and published before the Johannesburg summit, makes considerable recommendations on climate change and energy policy. I have not gone through all those recommendations this afternoon because hon. Members can read the report.

Since the report's publication, the Select Committee has been to Malawi, and others of us have been to Ethiopia and Malawi. We have seen, and are seeing, a disaster emerging in Africa, so it seemed appropriate to concentrate my remarks on that. The hon. Gentleman takes an active role in GLOBE—the Global Legislators Organization for a Balanced Environment—which I and many other Opposition Members also support. I am sure that he will focus on the issue that he has raised. I have chosen not to this afternoon, although not because I think that it is unimportant. Colleagues on the Committee and in the House may disagree with my view and think that I have got things out of proportion, but I think that, collectively, we must understand the scale of what is taking place in Africa.

What is happening now is different from what happened in 1985, and requires a different response. It requires long-term food security policies and the improvement of the mechanisms for supporting the WFP. It is not fair to accuse people who raise those issues of being irresponsible. I am sure that we can get them in proper and rational proportion. They are important issues that need to be addressed if huge numbers of people in Africa are not to starve.

3.12 pm

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I shall follow on from some of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), the Chairman of the Select Committee, and pick up the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), so that the Department responsible for energy policy is mentioned almost obsessively in the debate.

One of the best features of the Government's policies is that they have moved some of the biggest issues facing humanity closer to centre stage instead of allowing them to be peripheral. DFID has been an enormous success. With the backing of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, international development has moved from the sidelines to the centre of affairs, so that more Members are able, and willing, to talk about debt, trade and so on.

However, we need to go much further on many issues, some of which are covered in the report. Some of the most important issues facing mankind hardly ever feature in the House. It is difficult for those of us with young grandchildren, who we hope will live comfortably towards the next century, to be cheerful about the prospects for them and billions of fellow human beings if we continue with our present behaviour. We could do much more to improve their lives. On issues such as climate change, the consequences of the damaging behaviour that we do not stop now are unlikely to be reversible in future.

We criticise others for short-termism, but there are very few long-termist politicians. Looking back at the report, I think that we were not political enough. It is a fascinating report in an academic sense, but we do not say clearly enough what will be the political consequences if we do not act. Climate change is one of those developing features. It is easy to be unconcerned about what seem to be tiny reported increases in temperature. However, not only are those small increases much more significant than we think, but they have a huge impact when they interact with other changes.

It is staggering to know that the 15 warmest years since record keeping started have occurred since 1980. If this year finishes as it began, it will be the hottest year ever. The consequences can be seen in extremes of weather such as more storms, withering heat and damaging floods. This year, peak flood levels in India were almost incomprehensible in their scale. As the hon. Member for Banbury said, climate change affects food security and water.

It is when climate change interacts with other things that its effect is huge. The distinguished American environmentalist, Lester Brown, demonstrates that by highlighting the links between rising population, climate change, falling water tables and falling grain supplies. I use his work extensively in my speech. The World Bank published a report showing that a rise of 1m in the sea level would inundate half of Bangladesh's rice land, and that Bangladesh's population will increase from 133 million to 209 million by 2050. That is the scale of change that we are confronting. Every 1° C rise in temperature above the optimum for germination leads to a 10 per cent. fall in the germination rate of seeds.

In 2000-01, world grain yields were lower than expected, which links to what the hon. Member for Banbury was saying. That has various causes, but a major factor is falling water tables in key food-producing areas such as the north China plain, the Punjab and the southern great plains of the United States. We are now seriously over-pumping water, by which I mean that water that is pumped out is not replaced. Some 480 million of the world's 6 billion people are being fed with grain produced by the unsustainable use of water. China has some of the greatest problems. Beijing stands more than 1 km above water. Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, stands 2 km above water, which lies in a basin.

China will soon be going to the world's grain markets, with serious consequences. It will be able to pay for its food, but what will that do to the people of Africa who cannot afford to pay for their food? Incredibly, it takes 1,000 tonnes of water to produce 1 tonne of grain. The most efficient way for water-deficient countries to import water is to buy grain from elsewhere. I invite hon. Members to think about the African context: as the hon. Member for Banbury said, it is clear that, with all the food programmes of southern Africa, the challenges for the World Food Programme are far greater than ever before. The problems used to relate to donors, resources and logistics. Now the question is whether there is enough food.

Water shortages are becoming more and more prevalent, so that desertification is advancing in many parts of the world. In five years, the Gobi desert expanded by 20,000 sq km. Last week, newspapers published the story of an incredible Chinese plan to channel water from the Yangtse over thousands of miles to the plains in north China. Lester Brown says that no country has ever faced an ecological disaster like the one that is developing in China. The water problems that China faces are not unique; all north Africa and the middle east have huge problems too. I will return to the problems faced by the middle east.

Another part of the equation is the rising world population, which increases by 80 million per year in the poorest regions of the world. The biggest increases in population occur where food scarcity, desertification and poverty are worst. Those increases do not occur by choice, but because the wealthiest countries in the world fail to give the poorest countries access to one of the cheapest technologies in the world—the condom—the price of which is 2p, and which the poor would use if they had the choice. The price cannot be the excuse, but the will is.

Some of the poorest countries with the highest fertility rates, such as Afghanistan, Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi and Liberia have seven children per family. We know that families in those poor countries would not have as many children if they had a choice. Some 350 million women a year do not have access to family planning.

In helping to produce the report I learned about the degree of interaction of environmental and climactic factors. We wrote on page 16 that people tend to operate in their tiny, narrow worlds so that climate change has tended to be

"the preserve of climate scientists and environmental groups."

Returning to what I said at the beginning of my speech, I am glad that development has moved much closer to the centre of political concerns. We have proved in this country that debt and international development can be forced on to the international agenda, and that the World Bank and G8 countries can be moved. The millennium development goals now exist as a sort of ten commandments, but we also need a different kind of foreign and environmental policy that includes energy. It must be about the future of the planet and its citizens.

I shall give some examples of what foreign policy should be about. My first example may seem strange at first—it sounds minor but I believe it to be important. At the beginning of this year, President Bush refused to pay any money to the United Nations Population Fund because it had programmes in China. Congress was willing to support it, but Bush refused. That sounds like a minor story, but it is not.

Why did Bush refuse US funding to the UNFPA—not the UNFPA in China, but the UNFPA as a whole? In hock to the religious right in the United States, he asserted that the presence of the UNFPA gave support to China's one-child policy and forced abortions. That was contradicted by his own investigation team, and also by MPs from this House—I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty) is here. They showed that the UNFPA was not associated with abortion, that it was having a positive effect in weaning China away from the undesirable one-child policy, and that the abortion rate was falling in the countries where the UNFPA was working. The withdrawal of funds by Bush would actually increase the number of unsafe abortions in China.

Bush's action in withdrawing services from the whole world because of China received almost no attention. It had the effect of withdrawing condoms from Africa, which is ravaged by AIDS. The UN calculated the consequences of his actions. It estimated that for every $1 million not spent on condoms there are 360,000 unwanted pregnancies, 150,000 abortions, 800 maternal deaths and 25,000 deaths of children under five. I call that a weapon of mass destruction. We do not, however, take it seriously.

The world's poorest countries need 8 billion to 10 billion condoms per year to help stem the spread of AIDS, which infects 14,000 new people and kills 6,000 every day, but those countries receive only 1 billion condoms. We could save thousands of lives and infections at a fraction of the cost of the expenditure on the war on Iraq.

Dr. Tonge: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am sure he knows that I agree with everything that he has said. Does he not think that a lot of blame lies with the Roman Catholic Church, which absolutely refuses to condone the use of condoms in the third world? With the AIDS epidemic raging, however, that would be a pro-life measure.

Tony Worthington: The hon. Lady can make her own speech and be sent to hell with me.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Do not wish it on her!

Tony Worthington: My central point is that we do not take the issue seriously enough in foreign policy, even

[Tony Worthington]

though it will cause far more damage than anything that Saddam Hussein might do. A growing population and a lack of choice about family planning leads to thousands of deaths, unsafe abortions and increased poverty in the world's poorest countries. Far more people are killed in that way than by armies.

On sustainable development, my other main example is Iraq. Why did no one talk about oil in our debate on Iraq last week? We and the Americans are in a conspiracy of silence about oil. The Russians, the French and the Chinese know that Iraq is about oil, because they have deals with Saddam which they fear will collapse. The Arab nations also know very well that Iraq is about oil. In a superb article in yesterday's *Financial Times*, Martin Wolf, who is not a Socialist Worker conspiracist, said:

"Many critics of US policy towards the region complain that it is largely about oil. One would certainly hope so. There are other reasons for concern, notably weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. But oil is the starting-point in consideration of the region."

Our fossil fuel consumption is a major cause of global warming. Like many people, I believe that America's determination to secure oil reserves for itself is a major reason why it selected Iraq as its next target. It will be monstrous if American companies gain control of Iraqi oil as a consequence of the invasion. The people of Iraq should be the beneficiaries of that oil. Efforts to deal with the invasion's aftermath must come solely under the control of the United Nations. In going to war, we have gone to a lot of trouble to bring matters under UN control, but not a word has been said about UN control of those efforts.

Look at what happened in Afghanistan. American companies failed to negotiate access to the Caspian reserves with the Taliban, who provided succour to al-Qaeda and subsequently became the Antichrist. However, they did negotiate access within weeks of America winning the war. A pipeline now runs, under American control, from the Caspian sea, through Afghanistan and to the coast. We should not be surprised.

I urge people to look at the new American national security strategy, which I meant to bring with me. Under the heading "Enhance energy security", it states:

"We will work to strengthen our own energy security and the shared prosperity of the global economy by working with our allies, trading partners, and energy producers to expand the sources and types of global energy supply, especially in the Western Hemisphere, Africa, Central Asia, and the Caspian region."

That is foreign policy. Within about a year, the Americans will probably have gained unfettered access to the Caspian and Iraqi reserves.

Mr. Colman: Would my hon. Friend accept that three Members of the House went to the United Nations three weeks ago and met representatives of the Iraq oil-for-food programme, which is otherwise known as the Iraq programme? It is under the auspices of the UN, which ensures that the benefit of all Iraqi oil exports—with small deductions to pay for Kuwaiti reparations and for the search for weapons of mass destruction—is given back to the Iraqi people in the form of food, housing and health systems, and in many other ways. Planning is going on at the UN to ensure that the system continues in the event of military action so that oil taken out of Iraq under UN auspices is used for the Iraqi people. That is the way forward.

Tony Worthington: Well, we shall see. It will console me if the young children of Iraq do not die in the same numbers, do not have the diseases that they have at the moment and if their health recovers. That is the first time that I have heard it said—I have not heard it announced by the Americans or by ourselves—that, after a war, Iraq will be under the control of the United Nations. That is an important statement.

Mr. Colman *rose—*

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): To be fair, we should continue.

Tony Worthington: Basically, that means that the biggest consequence of the Iraq war will be that the Americans will continue to produce at least 24 per cent. of greenhouse gas emissions and the people of Iraq will remain poor. The United States would not join in at Kyoto and is safeguarding its supply from abroad now that it has consumed its indigenous reserves. The United States Department of Energy calculates that there will be a 54 per cent. increase in oil production by 2020, mainly in the Gulf, and the Americans intend it to be under their control. If we are concerned about climate change and the resulting problems, we should not continue to ignore the consequences of that policy.

In the middle east and in north Africa, many people are currently being fed with grain produced by the unsustainable use of water. That is a serious problem. In Iraq, the population will increase from 13 million in 1980 to 32 million in 2015, and we should remember that one in two Iraqis is a child. Environmental changes are, therefore, intertwined with political concerns, but I have not heard them raised with those concerns in discussions on Iraq.

Our collective response to some of the biggest problems in the world, such as water shortage, HIV/AIDS, population growth and climate change, is hopelessly inadequate. We shall still spend billions on war, and it will not surprise me in the least if expenditure on the Iraq war is greater than the aid given to developing countries around the world—and we will then need to start rebuilding. We need to think differently about those issues. Easily the biggest problem about Iraq is that millions of poor people, especially children, are suffering. Their relief should be our priority, yet the United States and ourselves are willing to contemplate killing those children to depose a leader whom neither they nor their parents chose. When we win, will the survivors be any better off? I do not think so.

Foreign policy is in a time warp, obsessed with the rights of nation states and their often appalling rulers, rather than those in need. We need a different framework. I came across a glimmer of that recently in Canada, where a multinational working party was recently set up under the joint chairmanship of Gareth Evans, the former Foreign Secretary of Australia, and

the distinguished international diplomat, Mohamed Sahnoun of Algeria, with other distinguished participants, such as Cyril Ramaphosa and Fidel Ramos.

That became the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. It produced a report called "The Responsibility to Protect", which is now being considered by the UN General Assembly. I am sure that people such as Kofi Annan think that the way we deal with the world's problems is antiquated and hopelessly inefficient. I cannot do justice to that document, but if we used it as a driving force behind foreign policy, it would transform the way that we look at things. It illuminates the difficult concept of humanitarian intervention and justifies the circumstances in which we intervene in countries.

Security is crucial, but its meaning has become very broad. The traditional concept of security leaves out the most elementary and legitimate security concerns of people in their own lives, such as hunger, disease, inadequate shelter and unemployment. The traditional language of the nation state seems inappropriate in a globalised arena with big problems such as hunger and water shortages.

As the hon. Member for Banbury said, 28 million people in Africa are on the cusp of starvation, and our response gives them no hope. Those people are often more in danger from their Governments than from any other factor, but we seem to be prevented from intervening. It is difficult to find out what action is being taken, other than the overwhelmed humanitarian response of the World Food Programme. Our current investigations show that there is no food plan for Africa, despite all the UN organisations, Governments, think tanks and so on. There is no glimmer as to what Africa will do in its current situation.

As parliamentarians, many of us are frustrated by our peripheral nature to big issues of the day such as world poverty, climate change, AIDS health and so on. It is a privilege to serve on our Committee, because we can consider those issues whereas other parliamentarians cannot. However, one idea that comes out of the report is that hon. Members should urge DFID and other parts of the Government to take further what that Department has started. They should consider again what is meant by foreign policy and our priorities on it.

3.36 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am grateful to be called to speak in such an important debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and the members of the International Development Committee on producing a magnificent, profound and comprehensive report on some of the vital issues that face Mother Earth.

I have the privilege, if that is the right word, to be chairman of the 44-nation Council of Europe sustainable development committee. As such, I went to Johannesburg and there met several colleagues who are now in this Chamber. I pay tribute to the Government for ensuring that 76 people attended that important conference.

The global issue is that we are relentlessly and deliberately destroying the world's ecosystem. Our climate is changing. I agree with the main conclusions of the Select Committee's third report, which are:

> "Irreversible changes are occurring in our climate ... Environmental issues and poverty are closely linked. They have to be tackled together",

and:

> "A lack of policy integration has undermined action."

It is understandably difficult to get agreement among all the countries of the world, and we must have that if we are to save its ecosystem.

Our air and atmosphere are increasingly polluted. I do not want to drown hon. Members with statistics. I shall mention a few but keep off them as much as I can. Our seas, waters and rivers are becoming dirtier. For example, the Black sea—the name may be appropriate—reaches depths of 6,000 ft and is dead from 300 ft down. We are depleting our fish stocks.

Our land is becoming more contaminated. Our deserts are expanding. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) mentioned the Gobi desert. The Sahara expands by several miles every year. Our urban areas grow remorselessly, which means that less land is available to grow food. Our rain forests are shrinking rapidly. So far, we have lost 70 per cent. of the world's forests. In the past 20 years we have chopped up 2.6 million sq km of rain forest. That is a meaningless statistic, so I shall explain it: it is the equivalent of 11 United Kingdoms. That process cannot go on; if it does, the world will be irreparably damaged. All is not doom and gloom, however. We have managed to stem the shrinking of temperate forest and, indeed, modestly increase its area, mainly in the northern hemisphere, of course, by about 170,000 square miles.

All that is happening at a time when, as the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said, the world's population is escalating. It is interesting that it took until 1830 for the world's population to reach 1 billion. Then it took only 100 years for it to reach 2 billion. It has increased in the past 70 years from 2 billion to 6 billion and, as the hon. Gentleman said, it is expected to be 10 billion by 2060. Population growth, with reference to the poorest countries, is not only a question of whether they are provided with birth control mechanisms. People living in a country where death from disease or starvation is likely tend to have more children, to ensure that some will survive. I am sorry to put it in such stark terms, but it is true.

Even today, with 6 billion people in the world, while a quarter of the world's population is over-nourished, the other three quarters are anything from under-nourished to starving. Those are the statistics of the madhouse in which we are living.

Dr. Tonge: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would be interested in one more statistic for his armoury. On asking what effect on world population the AIDS pandemic would have, I was told that if all the millions of people with AIDS died tomorrow it would take only 20 weeks to replace them.

Sir Sydney Chapman: That is an interesting statistic that I confess I had not heard before. I hope that copyright on that is only a couple of miles around Richmond Park and not further.

We had, effectively, the first Earth summit in Stockholm 30 years ago and I am old enough to have attended a conference that was held adjacent to it. I felt

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

when I attended the Johannesburg conference that the wheel had come full circle. Ten years ago the Rio summit was held, and five years ago at the Kyoto summit the protocol on climate change to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions was brought into being. I hope that that will be ratified shortly. It is necessary for 55 countries, accounting for 55 per cent. or more of emissions, to do so. One country, with 5 per cent. of the world's population, is responsible for 25 per cent. of harmful emissions, and it is a bitter disappointment that the United States does not at present feel that it can ratify the protocol. I am delighted that China, India and Brazil recently agreed—I may be out of date in my information—to ratify the protocol. I hope that it will become a reality.

When we talk about sustainable development we all have one thing in common—we all represent the cleverest and most distinguished constituents. However, I wonder how many of our constituents know exactly what we mean when we talk about sustainable development. As the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty) will recall, while we were in Johannesburg, I suggested that we should have a competition to see who could define sustainable development in the simplest terms and in as few words as possible, so that everyone could understand it. This answer was not the winner, but I would define it as conserving the world's finite resources for future generations. That is only eight words, and it may not be a good definition, but it makes a serious point, which is that if we want to get the people on our side, we must ensure that they know what we are talking about.

Many people were disappointed with the relative paucity of specific commitments at the Johannesburg world summit on sustainable development, even though it was long on aspiration. However, certain specific commitments were given, and I want to speak for a couple of minutes about a few of them.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): There was a lot of adverse press coverage on the paucity of new commitments emanating from the conference. However, does the hon. Gentleman share my view that, after Rio and a lot of other UN conferences on poverty and international development, a stack of commitments—hundreds of them—remain unfulfilled? Surely, the priority at Johannesburg should have been to work out how to start fulfilling some of those commitments rather than adding yet more to the wish list.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I agree, except on one point: some specific commitments still have to be made. One, which I welcome, is to reduce by 800 million, or by more than half, the number of people who lack proper sanitation. Such a commitment is necessary. The question is: why not 100 per cent. by such and such a date? I do not want to get into any tautology, but such an essential, specific commitment must be necessary when we have to live with the obscenity of 6,000 children dying every day through water-borne diseases.

I welcome the commitment to increase aid to the third world by an extra $12 billion, half of which is to go to the countries of Africa. However, that money must be seen in the context of the $55 billion of aid that Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries collectively provide each year to the developing countries. Moreover, that $55 billion is only one seventh of the money that developed countries use to subsidise their own agricultural industries. It seems that we live in a haywire world where the total amount of aid going to developing countries can be only one seventh of what relatively rich countries give themselves—perhaps as an insurance against the developing countries being able to export their food products to the rest of the world. Again, that is an obscenity.

I welcome the specific commitment to end gender discrimination by 2012. In many African countries, girls are not valued as much as boys. Another commitment was that primary education should be available to children throughout the world by 2015. I welcome all that, but most commitments are aspirational. For example, the only commitment made on agriculture was a call to end subsidies. No country has agreed on a path to achieve it. We must make greater use of renewable resources.

I had hoped that we could build on Kyoto and make more specific commitments. Fish stocks have been mentioned, as has marine pollution protection by 2012. I do not demean the aspirations that have been agreed. However, we should have a greater sense of urgency about making further commitments if we are to save Mother Earth.

One of the good things about the Johannesburg summit was the parliamentary input. A lot of politicians were there from the 15 countries of the European Union and the 44 of the Council of Europe. Many others were represented by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. We have a role to play. I commend the actions of the previous Government and the current one in this regard, but there is an urgent need for parliamentarians in other countries to understand that their Governments should be encouraged in their aspirations, and that the commitments that they made in Johannesburg should be monitored and met. Together, as parliamentarians, we can ensure that they do so. The issue far transcends parochial political party games. The Johannesburg world summit on sustainable development was a very successful summit. If nothing else, it was the environmental wake-up call for the world.

3.51 pm

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): We have heard a great deal from the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) about the future of the planet. None of us can predict the future, but I was struck by the latest projections from the scientists who gave evidence to the Select Committee, which suggested that the average global temperature in the 21st century could rise by between 1.4 and 5.8° C.

Ten years ago, global warming was a matter of conjecture. Now we see it affecting peoples all around the world. The Inuit of north America see it in the disappearing ice cap, the starving polar bears and unusual whale migrations. That is threatening their unique way of life and putting their survival at risk. The people of shanty towns from Latin America to south-

east Asia see it in lethal hurricanes, landslides and flood waters. We Europeans see it in vanishing alpine glaciers, Mediterranean droughts and freak storms. Researchers see it in absolutely everything—tree rings, lake sediments and bubbles trapped in ice cores. The world has not been warmer for a millennium, and it has probably never been warmer than in the past 25 years. If my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie is to be believed, the last five years have been warmer than ever before.

With the physics of the greenhouse effect a matter of scientific fact, it is hard to disagree with the overwhelming evidence of climatologists, who say that what we are seeing is man-made change. Wet areas are becoming wetter, dry areas are becoming drier, El Niño and the Asian monsoon are becoming more extreme and more unpredictable. Inevitably, areas already affected by famine will grow less food, while many rich lands, which do not need it, will grow more. Sea level rise threatens hundreds of millions of people from the Nile delta to the islands of the Indian ocean and the south Pacific. Many continental coastlines are also at risk, and they contain much larger populations: such regions are already home to half the world's population, and they have population growth rates that are double the global average.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) said that the global human population has doubled since 1960, to 6.1 billion, with growth mostly in poorer countries. Consumption expenditure has more than doubled since 1970, with increases mostly in richer countries. During that time, we seem to have created wealth on an unimaginable scale, yet half the world still exists on less than $2 a day. We have learned how to extract resources for our own use, but not how to deal with the resulting waste.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) referred to CO_2 emissions. I understand that they increased twelvefold between 1900 and 2000. In the process, the world's climate changed. The human and ecological impact has included rising oceans, increased flooding, coastal erosion, and loss of coastal cropland, wetlands and living space. The intensity and frequency of hurricanes and other hazardous weather appear to be increasing. The growing population that lives in coastal areas is endangered.

I think that the great question for our new century is not whether the activities of the 20th century have set us on a collision course with the environment, but how we are going to deal with it—what are going to do about it? Human ingenuity has got us this far. We need to apply it to the future. How are we going to ensure the well-being of human populations, and still protect the natural world? Everywhere we face critical decisions. How can we protect and promote fundamental values, such as the rights to health and human dignity? We also need to think carefully, but urgently, about the choices. We should extend the time in which to understand the implications of those choices.

Today, every part of the natural and human world is linked to every other part, and local decisions have a global impact. Global policy, or the lack of it, affects local communities and the conditions in which they live. Humans have always changed and been changed by the natural world. However, the prospects for human development now depend on our wisdom in managing that relationship. I think that one of the key factors will be population. On that issue, most countries in the world, except for the US, the Vatican and a few right-wing Islamic states, agree on action to broaden choice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie mentioned President Bush's withdrawal of funds from the United Nations Population Fund on very spurious grounds indeed. I wonder if hon. Members are aware of President Bush's most recent statement, that he is withdrawing the United States' commitment to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change programme of action. I believe that that is an absolute disgrace. It is a very serious blow for women's health, human rights and the sustainability of the planet.

In 1998 I was in Yemen, which is one of the world's poorest countries. I met the Minister of Health, who said that Yemen only had enough water resources to last for the next 10 years, if the population remained stable. Yemen still has one of the highest fertility rates in the world. As far as I am aware, it has three family planning clinics and one specialist women's doctor, courtesy of Marie Stopes International. The Americans have recently considered bombing Yemen. They need not bother—all they have to do is wait, and the Yemenis will eventually die of thirst. A lot of questions arise when we can consider bombing a country as poor as Yemen, which needs as much help to limit its population and feed its starving.

Population and the environment are closely related, but the links between them are complex and varied, and depend on specific circumstances. Generalisations about the negative effects of population growth on the environment are often misleading, and population scientists abandoned such an approach years ago. As the human population increases and globalisation proceeds, the key questions must be how to use available resources of land and water to produce food for all; how to promote economic development and end poverty so that everyone can afford to eat; and how to address the human and environmental consequences of industrialisation and the loss of biological diversity.

Understanding how population and environment are linked means examining how affluence, consumption, technology and population growth interrelate, and considering previously ignored social concerns such as gender roles and relations, political structures and governance at all levels. The relationship between environment, population and social development is now better understood.

There is broad agreement on the means and the ends. Women's empowerment is a development end in itself, and removing the obstacles to women's exercise of economic and political power is one of the means to end poverty. Reproductive health is part of an essential package of health care and education. It is a means to achieve the goal of women's empowerment, but is also a human right that includes the right to choose the size of the family and the spacing of children. If all the donor countries lived up to their commitments, everyone who wanted access to reproductive health services would have it. It would save the lives of 500,000 women, half of whom are in Africa, who die in childbirth or of pregnancy-related disease every year, and it would limit the spread of HIV and AIDS.

[Chris McCafferty]

Achieving equal status between men and women, guaranteeing the right to reproductive health and ensuring that individuals and couples can make their own choice about family size will also help to slow population growth rates and reduce the future size of the world's population. Among other things, slower population growth in developing countries will contribute measurably towards relieving environmental stress.

Changes in the size, rate of growth and distribution of human populations has an enormous impact on the environment and on development prospects. People and human activity are altering the planet on an unprecedented scale. More people are using more resources more intensely, and they are leaving larger footprints on the Earth than ever before. I therefore welcome the long-overdue decisions taken at the Johannesburg summit, especially those on water sanitation, renewable energy and reproductive health.

I regret that the United States insisted on goals rather than targets, especially for renewable energy. Goals are merely aspirational, but targets are more concrete, and it is sad that a country that is as rich and has as high a standard of living as the United States did not feel able to set such targets for those in the developing world.

As other hon. Members have said, what is important is implementation. We need to ensure that decisions taken in Johannesburg are implemented, and I hope that the Minister will be able to tell hon. Members what projects the United Kingdom Government are undertaking to aid that implementation. With the Rio summit statement in mind, I also hope that those projects will put human beings at the centre of sustainable development.

4.3 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): What strikes me in this welcome debate is how much has moved on since our report was published. We have had the conference in Johannesburg, and we are discussing international crises, and this will prove to be an interim rather than a final report. I welcome the Government's response.

Some 10 years ago, the Earth summit—the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development—brought the two huge areas of environment and development together for the first time. Some of us were environmental specialists, others were development specialists, and never the twain shall meet. The two groups even conflicted, so that some people argued that it was better to save the forest than to save people, rather than seeing that saving the forest and the people went together.

I especially welcome a couple of statements in the Government's response. Paragraph 9.1 says:

> "We agree with the Committee's conclusion that climate change has social and humanitarian impacts, in addition to environmental and economic dimensions".

The big words are there, but the problem is carrying them through.

Paragraph 7.1 appears under the wonderful heading, "Mainstreaming climate change into national development strategies". I sometimes wonder what this cliché "mainstreaming" actually means in practice. It is the same with another familiar phrase, "joined-up government": we use it, but does it ever happen? I suggest that mainstreaming means not only bringing together the big words "environment" and "development", but linking together north and south and recognising that the policies and practices of the north interact with the south. That is a crucial element of the environment debate's contribution to the study and analysis of development.

If pollution molecules teach us anything, it is that molecules do not accept but transcend politically drawn national boundaries. They demonstrate that our world is a small, fragile and interconnected place. Too often in the past we have used the word "mainstreaming" without realising that our energy policies in the north are polluting strategies for the south. Our trade strategies also directly affect the south.

I am not and never have been a Malthusian, to put it in old historical terms. I do not believe that the number of people is the cause of the problem or that we have a shortage of resources—food, water or energy—on the globe. The northern world is overwhelmed with the production of food. We could argue, as Shakespeare said, that it is a matter of distribution and undoing the excess. Getting the food and water into the places where it is needed is required to tackle poverty, thus linking north and south.

One of the biggest issues, which is perhaps not taken seriously enough by the Select Committee—though our analysis of trade is getting close to it—is dumping. We need to put a question mark over dumping food. The Americans have drifted into the debate with the controversial, sometimes deeply misunderstood, issue of genetically modified foods. Food is being turned away because it is GM and not milled in Africa. We have to face up to the debate and ask whether that amounts to dumping rather than sustainability, which we are still a long way from achieving.

I welcome the fact that we now debate climate change rather than global warming. I never believed—perhaps it was just a dream—that as a result of global warming, my city of Leeds would become a warmer place, allowing people to grow oranges in their back gardens. If the Gulf stream current were switched off, the climate of the north of England would be more like Nova Scotia in winter than the south of Spain. The impact of climate change has not yet been properly analysed and understood. It is a danger that needs further study by the experts. I welcomed the experts who gave evidence to our Committee, but we need to continue to study the problem, not assume that we already know the trends and their likely impact.

I read an article in a newspaper in London last night, saying that some of the city's stores had already begun their winter sales because of the milder autumn: people have not started wearing their winter woollies. That will affect sales figures in the shops and begin to affect the economy more widely. If we are already feeling the effect of a warmer autumn, imagine the massive impact of climate change on poor countries.

I was recently in northern Nigeria with other members of the Select Committee. Our Chairman, the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), used the phrase

"the shocks that hit the poor even harder".

I witnessed desertification, to use another big word, when the sands swept into northern Nigeria over previously harvested land. The people have no chance of clawing it back again. I saw rivers of old that had completely dried out and would never be rivers again because the rains have moved south and the northern deserts are moving into sub-Saharan areas. That means fewer possibilities for inland irrigation and the crops that used to grow there. The impact of climate change on developing countries can be viewed as incremental, but compared with the shocks that we get on climate change, it is massive.

As we have brought together the development of people and environmental concerns, I shall refer back to pollution. We tend to think that pollution is a northern problem, and that if we address it here, we may, as a sort of trickle over, affect the south. China and India, the two most populous countries in the world, will have massive problems with fossil fuel burning in future. We must address that in a more holistic, global fashion now. If we can address the pollution problems here, particularly carbon dioxide generation and fossil fuel burning, we will set the patterns of trade and accessibility for the rest of the world, because the technologies in renewable energies that we can develop will then be cheaper for developing countries to use. We must move faster down that road.

It has been said that 1 billion people are without safe water to drink. Twice that number lack sanitation. Management of water resources means transcending boundaries and working out subtler political strategies between countries that share resources. That will be a challenge to the politics of the future in Africa, the former Soviet Union countries, Europe and elsewhere. How should we manage rivers that transcend national borders? The templates that we draw up for that in Europe will help other countries, including those in Africa.

Two billion people do not have access to modern energy services. Let us focus for a moment on wood burning, which is linked to illegal logging. If people strip the land to stay alive, because they have no other means of cooking, what alternatives have they? To be more positive, in Ghana, which the Committee has also visited, some of the forestry management by local people brings together their knowledge with environmental sensitivities to achieve sustainability and conservation. There should be positive local strategies, rather than outsiders moving in on a huge scale with no sensitivity to the local people. That must be the way forward.

The reports from the Johannesburg summit lacked practical examples of small-scale practices that could be amplified elsewhere. Even the House of Commons Library research paper on sustainable development and the summit gave a bleak summary, saying that it was widely considered to have made little progress. In a way, we all know that, but to be repeatedly told it leads on to the incredibly ugly and quite dangerous expression "compassion fatigue", describing those who have heard it all before and have no energy left to do anything. We must not run out of energy for this agenda, but keep driving it forward.

I should like to affirm a few of the things that happened at the summit. As the research paper states, it

"reaffirmed sustainable development as a central element of the international agenda and gave new impetus to global action to fight poverty and protect the environment."

At the very least, the summit insisted that that theme should be up there on the agenda at every G8 summit, international debate and debate in our national Parliaments. The paper continues:

"The understanding of sustainable development was broadened and strengthened as a result of the Summit, particularly the important linkages between poverty, the environment and the use of natural resources."

Even the parts on water were welcomed as moving the debate on a little further. Five years ago, we talked about global warming; now we talk about climate change.

The language and the subtleties of understanding are also changing. An article on the summit website states:

"The summit resulted in major government commitments to expand access to safe water, proper sanitation and modern, clean energy services, as well as to reverse the decline of ecosystems by restoring fisheries, curtailing illegal logging and limiting the harm caused by toxic chemicals. In addition to those commitments, many voluntary partnerships were launched in Johannesburg by governments, NGOs and businesses to tackle specific projects."

We need more information and more action on those projects to draw out what can be done, to give us a beacon of hope, rather than simply to say that the scale of the problem is too large.

The article also pointed out that countries had committed themselves to expanding access to those without access to modern energy resources. It emphasised that although countries might not agree on targets for phasing in renewable energy, at least there were commitments to greener energy. We should address the question of subsidies for the sorts of energy that are not consistent with sustainable development. We should examine energy subsidies in the same way in which we will examine agricultural subsidies in the north, Europe and the United States, which damage trade for Africa. The continued burning of fossil fuel must not become the template.

An article in *The Observer* on 8 September 2002 stated that voters believed that the Earth summit had done nothing to help the planet. Many people did believe that. I quote, however, from the journal *Science* of 13 September 2002:

"'There's something to build upon, but it's more like a statement of intentions,' says economist Jeffrey Sachs, head of Columbia University's Earth Institute. Like others, Sachs was disappointed by the dearth of concrete plans that emerged, including the lack of support for the 'coalition of the willing' on renewable energy or his own suggestion to triple the budget of the world's global network of agricultural research. 'But there's at least a fighting chance of making this a real plan of action,' he says."

We must remain focused on some of the particularities that were in the commitments, and look for projects to carry them forward.

One example is renewable energy. There must be an understanding of the stronger links between accelerating what could be called market development

[Mr. John Battle]

of renewable energy projects in the developed world, and in the technology cost reductions that will enable those projects to be carried forward. If wind, water and solar power were suggested as the way forward in renewable energies, most of the world could not afford the technology to introduce or use it. There is not even an order of scale, because it has not been introduced in Britain.

Yet, at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, I saw the equivalent of a freezer box of the sort that is used for picnics, the lid of which had a solar panel on it. That product is cheap to make, and has been sent to Africa. It will be useful for transporting vaccines to help tackle the need for health care drugs and medicines in areas where there is no electricity supply. The focus should be on smaller scale projects that get the technology into an appropriate form to undermine the dependency on fossil fuels.

There is much work to do in Britain. We must examine the export credit guarantee system to see whether it supports renewable energies rather than huge fossil fuel projects.

Mr. Colman: Does my hon. Friend welcome the announcement made in Johannesburg by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that £50 million in cover by the Export Credits Guarantee Department would be available for renewable exports from the UK?

Mr. Battle: Yes, but we must ensure that the market strategies and developments in the UK are complementing that, so that British organisations are in a position to establish that trade link, and their products are exportable and usable at the other end.

We could move in the direction of some proper joined-up government by reviewing the subsidies and policies that act as a support to environmentally harmful energy sources in Britain. We should have the confidence and courage to say that what we are subsidising is undermining the development of sustainable potential for developing countries, as we are saying on questions such as the common agricultural policy. We must shift the debate in that direction, particularly in relation to energy and water.

I have taken more than enough time to make my point. I believe that it was the great environmentalist Schumacher who taught us the slogan, "Think global, act local". At the time, I thought that it meant that if I tried to understand the world better, and got an allotment in Leeds and grew my own potatoes and cabbages, I would be okay and doing my bit to save the planet. I now believe that that slogan does not mean, "think global and act local", but, "think and act locally and globally at the same time." What we do in the UK profoundly affects whether we impoverish those in Africa, rather than them simply being subject to the vicissitudes and changes of climate that are beyond their control.

4.19 pm

Hugh Bayley (City of York): My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) may not know what joined-up government is, but he understands joined-up thinking.

I agree with the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) that some important commitments were made at the Johannesburg summit on sanitation, energy issues and making Africa a greater priority. I welcome those commitments. I am glad that he welcomed my point that we must move beyond adding items to the shopping list and move to an agenda concerned with implementation. We must move from the shopping list to making a few purchases: to buy some condoms for people suffering from HIV/AIDS; to buy some irrigation schemes to pump water back into the two thirds of dry land in Malawi, which surrounds a freshwater lake. We should spend some money in Europe on agricultural imports from Africa, so that its people do not have to come to us cap in hand but can earn their way towards sustainable development.

One of the starkest statistics mentioned during the Select Committee's inquiry was quoted by Professor Martin Parry of the university of East Anglia. His team estimates that, by the middle of this century, hundreds of millions of people will be at risk as a result of climate change, due to water shortages, hunger, coastal flooding and increased disease. Those risks are concentrated almost wholly in the poorest countries of the world. For example, of those several hundred million, 50 million will be newly at risk of hunger as a result of climate change, and almost all of them will be in Africa.

Some people talk about climate change as if it were something that will happen in the future, but it is happening now. It is one of the causes of the flooding that took place in my constituency two years ago, the flooding in Prague earlier this year and the flooding in Mozambique. It is also one of the causes of drought in many parts of Africa. However, there is a difference between its impact on countries in the prosperous northern half of the world and its impact on countries in the south. Erratic rainfall affects many more people in Africa because they are much poorer, more vulnerable and unable to absorb the shock of climate change.

In the run-up to the Johannesburg summit, there was something of a war of words between environmentalists in northern developed countries, who wanted developing countries to commit to changing their lifestyles to make more sustainable use of natural resources, such as carbon fuels, and some leaders in developing countries, who thought that it was a bit of a cheek for people in the north to try to impose limits on their development when we applied no such limits to our industrial revolution.

Sir Sydney Chapman: That is absolutely right. The point was eloquently made by a distinguished South African politician, who said, "We must remember that we are talking about sustainable development. We need to develop. You must help us ensure that we do it in a sustainable way. We are not in this business to agree not to develop our countries."

Hugh Bayley: I agree, and I am glad that that consensus has been built. Before the Johannesburg summit, the Secretary of State for International Development told the Select Committee, in her characteristically forthright way, that she saw the summit as an opportunity for the very northern-dominated green agenda, which is almost anti-development, to evolve into one of concern for the

environment and sustainable development, as the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet suggested was necessary. He and the Secretary of State are right; the two things cannot be separated. The combination of poverty and environmental shocks leads to humanitarian disasters. The poverty means that people cannot cope with those shocks.

As we have heard, 14 million people are at risk of famine in southern Africa. Poor and erratic rain may have been the trigger for that famine, but it is the underlying vulnerability of the people there that has put so many lives at risk. In Malawi, the vulnerability comes about for several reasons, such as population growth, over-utilisation of land, mono-cropping of white maize instead of crop rotation, and lack of irrigation. Another factor is lack of diversification, not only of agriculture but of the economy as a whole. People do not spend some time farming a smallholding and some time working in a local factory, because there is no local factory.

That lack of diversity in the economy comes about because of lack of infrastructure. Also, unfair terms of trade mean that no one with money—us in the rich world—would buy any products that those people could produce. Problems to do with people in government in developing countries and in our countries, as well as the problems of international agencies, play their part. The sale of the strategic grain reserve in Malawi was badly handled by the Government there, but stemmed from poor advice by the World Bank and development specialists here in the north.

Above all, the vulnerability in southern Africa is the result of a population weakened by a range of tropical diseases, especially the HIV/AIDS epidemic. That has cut agricultural output, because people are too weak to till the land. It has cut the productivity of the rest of the economy, because key workers of working age are dying off. It undermines the human capital that Governments have at their disposal to respond to the crisis. When combined with malnourishment, HIV means that more people than would otherwise be the case die from opportunistic infections.

When the Select Committee took evidence for our report, it was clear that there were two contrasting responses to global climate change. In the north, the response was mitigation. The answer was seen as the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that have contributed and continue to contribute to climate change. In the south, that did not seem relevant. That is not surprising, as virtually none of those emissions comes from the poorest countries of the world; they come from the rich north. Instead, the strategy of the south was to adapt. The people there did not want or create global climate change, but they have to live with it. The only way in which they can survive is by adapting, which explains why there was such disagreement—a war of words—between northern environmentalists and some development campaigners.

There is no dichotomy between the two responses. To deal with the problem, we need to act on both of them. Greenhouse gas emissions have come from the north. We need to do whatever we can to reduce them to slow down the rate of increase of climate change. It will carry on increasing whatever we do, but if we reduce the emissions we will slow the rate of increase.

We also need to tackle the changes. Professor Parry warned the Select Committee that hundreds of millions of people were at risk because of climate change. His team estimated that to halve the number of people affected by 2050 would require a 10 times greater reduction of greenhouse gas emissions than envisaged by the Kyoto treaty. To cut the number of victims from hundreds of millions to tens of millions would require twice that reduction in greenhouse gas emissions—20 times the reduction that the Kyoto treaty requires of rich northern countries. I want all rich countries on both sides of the Atlantic to make greater progress but it is clear that they will not make a large enough reduction to reduce the risk to those millions of people. We must therefore address the adaptation agenda, too.

Both the mitigation agenda on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the north, and the adaptation agenda have cost implications for us in the rich world. Only we can address them, and there will be serious consequences if we do not. One consequence will be that millions of people will die over the coming decades.

The link between poverty, disease and famine is not new. The population of our country boomed during the 12th and 13th centuries, and by the end of the 13th century, it was about 6 million. By the end of the 14th century, a mixture of food shortages and disease had devastated it and it had declined to about 2 million. The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet was right that there has been a generally exponential trend in global population growth, but there have been peaks and troughs in particular countries. Those have come about for reasons such as the mass famine that we now face in Africa. The problems remain very similar and are caused by the same inability to move food to populations that are experiencing a food shortage.

Serious famines continued in England until the 17th century, but they were not national famines: they occurred far from the capital, in more isolated areas that were largely in the north and where transport links were poor. Those are exactly the kinds of places where famine is to be found in Africa—isolated areas far from the main urban centres and with poor transport links.

In the 1980s, people throughout the world were shocked by the consequences of the famine in the horn of Africa. It is perhaps not surprising that an Irish rock star, not an English rock star, responded to the situation and galvanised public attention through the Live Aid concert and the activity that flowed from it. Ireland is probably the last country in western Europe to have suffered a devastating famine. Between 1845 and 1850, 1 million people died in the potato famine, and another 1 million emigrated.

Ireland blamed, and still blames, Great Britain for failing to respond. It is right to do so, because the catastrophe of the potato famine was not simply a matter of adverse environmental conditions, although those certainly played a part. The problem was that trading laws made it impossible to get affordable food to those who were suffering a food shortage because their crops had failed. The corn laws, which were introduced at the beginning of the 19th century, artificially inflated the price of corn so that British producers and landowners got a good price. They meant that corn could not be imported into Britain until a shortage had caused the price to rise to 80 shillings a quarter.

[Hugh Bayley]

There is an uncanny parallel between the corn laws and the common agricultural policy, which sets barriers to prevent imports of cheaper grain from outside the Community and artificially inflates prices for the benefit of farmers. The potato famine did persuade the country to change policy and to abolish the corn laws, but we did it too late. We did not do it until 1846, by which time the potato famine had devastated the population.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Order. May I point out that at least two more colleagues want to speak, and the Minister and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson will start winding up at 5 pm. Trying to fit everyone in means that we will have to drift back to the issue rather than stay with the history lesson.

Hugh Bayley: I take your advice, Mr. Hancock.

We need a modern Anti-Corn Law League to work across Europe to secure the change in our current protectionist agriculture and food price policies, and we need to inspire north America to change the US Farm Act. Famine in Africa is not just an aberration, nor it is due to back luck or bad weather. It may be triggered by bad weather, but the underlying reason is a combination of population growth, HIV/AIDS, poverty and underdevelopment. As a result, people in southern Africa are unable to cope with the shock of a bad harvest.

As well as changing the terms of trade to enable Africa to make its way in the world by selling goods, particularly agricultural products, to the rich world, we must increase development spending. That is necessary in order to deal with the causes of that fundamental vulnerability—to tackle HIV/AIDS and other diseases, to provide irrigation, to improve governance, to reform agriculture, and to put in the transport infrastructure and the education that southern Africa needs.

The Zedillo report produced for the financing for development summit estimated that an additional $50 billion a year would be needed if the millennium development goals were to be met in the poorest countries of Africa by 2015. The conference pledged $12 billion. In order to avert the sort of consequences that we are seeing in Africa, especially famine, we need greatly to increase our aid. I would like the Government to continue what they are doing and to increase the proportion of the national wealth spent on aid, moving as quickly as possible towards that 0.7 per cent. goal.

I congratulate the Government on showing the rest of Europe the way, and on getting a commitment that the rest of Europe will move to the European average of 0.39 per cent. However, that alone will not be enough. We need to go further. If we do not, famine—this year's will happen over the next few months—will be a recurring problem. The underlying reasons will not have been dealt with. That will make Africans as angry with Europeans for generations to come as the Irish potato famine made the people of Ireland angry with our country.

4.38 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): My being called now is somewhat unexpected; I thought I had more of a graveyard slot. I thought that the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), the Chairman of the Select Committee, was right to draw attention to the impending famine in southern Africa and Ethiopia—it should be topmost in our minds. Other hon. Members gave a selection of brilliant speeches, and I have enjoyed listening to the debate on the Government's response to an excellent report. I am glad that the Select Committee is still keeping up its standards even though I am no longer a member.

Although we heard some wonderful speeches, sadly they are only speeches. Several hon. Members said that we need action. We concentrate on symptoms and short-term cures instead of looking at the root causes of the scourge of famine. The Chairman of the Select Committee asked whether the Department for International Development was forward-thinking enough. That was a good question. Is anyone in the world forward-thinking enough about the issue?

I share the admiration of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) for Lester Brown and his very good book, "The Earth Policy Reader". The hon. Gentleman managed to read all of it. I read only half—I left mine on a plane—so I was interested to hear the rest of what he had said. In essence, his message is that if we care about our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren, we have to do something about this world. The planet is in a terrible state.

A key statistic for me was that a 1° rise in temperature due to climate change and global warming means a 10 per cent. drop in yield of the world's food harvest. That is terrifying when one thinks of all the other factors. In the long term, it means fewer crops, over-worked land, erosion and a drop in the water tables. Lester Brown puts that very well. Global warming means more precipitation and flooding—water in the wrong place. All those effects take place in the world's ecosystem. We cannot lose the water or the soil. It all goes somewhere. It does not drop off the earth into the solar system; it stays with us. The trouble is that it is moving around; deserts are expanding while other bits of the world are submerged. That will mean—not many hon. Members have mentioned this—huge movements of populations over the next century as people try to escape the desert and the floods and to leave the famine in one area to move to areas where there is more food. It means more instability in the world, more refugees, more economic migrants. The Government are rather dismissive in their response to the report, which was very good on the issue. They spend a lot of time arguing about whether people should be called refugees, while the world faces a serious problem.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) talked about language. His word was "mainstreaming". I cannot resist giving another example. I asked a parliamentary question in May of this year about the progress of national strategies for sustainable development, of which DFID is very fond, and which countries had them in place. The answer came back that it was not easy to quantify how many were in place because they were identified as characteristic of poverty reduction strategy programmes. Therefore, I asked which poverty reduction strategy programmes displayed those characteristics. The reply was—with apologies to the civil servants who are present:

"There is no internationally-agreed system for monitoring the extent to which poverty reduction strategy programmes exhibit characteristics of strategic processes for sustainability. The 'characteristics' of strategic processes for sustainability are broadly the same as the agreed 'principles' of strategic processes of sustainability. The challenge is to ensure that strategies adhere to these principles."—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 542W.]

So that is all right, then. Is that clear? What is the point of trying to work out what it means? It is all words; it is gobbledegook and does not contain much action.

Climate change is the problem and we must look, as some hon. Members have done, to see who the culprits are. Of course, it is us in the north. The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman), who made a fascinating speech, pointed out that, with a population of 287.5 million, the United States has the highest emissions of carbon dioxide in the world. India has the third highest, with a population of slightly more than 1 billion. The United States, however, produces five times as much CO_2 as India does, yet it has only a quarter of the population. That is a frightening statistic.

A few years ago, I went to India with the Select Committee. I remember talking very patronisingly about sustainable development and how we must not pollute the atmosphere. A gentleman to whom I was talking laid into me, saying, "You come here and tell us to engage in sustainable development and not to pollute the atmosphere. All through the 19th century, when your countries in the north were getting rich, you were polluting the atmosphere, bringing about climate change, cutting down forests and sending children down mines and up chimneys. No one came and told you to stop, so how dare you criticise what we do?" We should bear that in mind, because developing countries need energy and development as much as we did in the 19th century. Although we can use export credit guarantees and all sorts of other measures to encourage renewable sources of energy, we in the north must lead. We must cut our energy programmes and start using renewables. We cannot just preach to the developing countries to do so.

Hon. Members mentioned the United States. It really endears itself to the rest of the world, does it not, by pulling out of the Kyoto treaty among a dozen other treaties? We heard from two hon. Members, who were also in Ottawa, about the United States pulling out of the reproductive rights programmes. What that country is doing is astounding. It is pulling out of international treaties all over the place. Does it really believe that that is the way to fight the terror?

We must understand that developing countries need energy as much as we do. The only way for them to get the things that they need so that they can have enough food to feed their population and we can stabilise the world is for us to understand their plight and start using less energy.

In conclusion, the Government responses to the report were encouraging but lacked concrete proposals. This is a huge problem, which can only be tackled globally. I am so disappointed that the Department for International Development—my favourite Department after five years of working alongside it—did not see fit to tackle the problem of the United States' non-compliance with international treaties. That country across the pond is becoming a very greedy monster indeed.

4.47 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): At this late hour, I have discarded some 90 per cent. of my speech, so I hope that my colleagues will forgive me if it sounds somewhat disjointed.

We had our first briefing from the Hadley centre and the Tyndall centre when we discussed the environment and development in January. We were all astounded by the significance of what we were hearing. I hope that Members of both Houses will understand the significance of the matter, which this debate has reflected.

The introduction to the world summit on sustainable development that was given by the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) gave us some insight into how some 60,000 people came together there. Not only Governments and non-governmental organisations, but parliamentarians and businesses attended the summit. I especially congratulate the Government on not giving in to the media campaign to reduce the size of the delegation, and was pleased to be one of the members representing the Select Committee on International Development. The work by parliamentarians, Global Action, the IPU and GLOBE significantly affected outcomes.

I listened to what the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) said, but two of the most impressive people in Johannesburg were Representative Jim Greenwood, who chairs GLOBE World, and Representative Chris Shays, who chairs GLOBE USA. Both are members of the House of Representatives of the US Congress and fight their corner well. It is important to recognise that, last year, the US Senate voted unanimously in favour of re-engaging with the Kyoto protocol, which is often overlooked. It is a great shame that those factors have not yet impinged on presidential decisions. In many respects, the United States is far ahead of us. It was very beneficial to be in Johannesburg to listen to parliamentarians from the United States, as well as from other countries.

Johannesburg was the summit where business came of age. A vast number of partnerships was proposed by multinational corporations from this country and abroad, but particularly from the UK. In that connection, I congratulate Business in the Community, which celebrates its 20th anniversary today, on the tremendous work that it has done on social responsibility. I hope that it would condemn, as I do, an article in today's *Financial Times*, which that says that the London stock exchange hopes to take business from the New York stock exchange on the basis that it has lower listing standards than New York, as the Advisory Committee for Business and Environment has been pointing out since 1993. I hope that the Minister can explain how the Financial Services Authority will approach that, given that it took over responsibility for listing particulars in December 2001 but has so far made no moves on the issue.

The outcome of Johannesburg that I want to emphasise is the Prime Minister's announcement that £50 million a year will be earmarked for facilitating renewable energy exports through the Export Credits Guarantee Department. I particularly commend the hard work of GLOBE UK in lobbying the Government on that leverage mechanism. Although £50 million does

[Mr. Tony Colman]

not seem an enormous sum when one considers that since 1997 the ECGD has spent more than £1 billion underwriting the export of coal-fired power stations, it will act as a leverage mechanism.

Technologies for renewable energy production have to deal with new, and therefore uncertain, markets. The money has great potential to reduce commercial risk for UK companies that are innovative enough to move into the renewables sector and ambitious enough to export to developing countries. Assuming the funds are used, the option will remain open for the ECGD to recommend an increase on the initial £50 million. I understand that that is the view of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I hope that the UK will soon lead the way in the innovation and sale of renewable energy technologies. However, there is a risk that if the £50 million is not taken up in the first year the funding will be cut. Can the Minister tell me whether any funds have been allocated to the DTI or the ECGD specifically to promote and advertise the funds and how smaller companies can apply for them?

Welcome as the additional funding is, it is important that the ECGD now accelerates the implementation of its business principles and applies sustainable development criteria across all the projects that it underwrites. Thus, any further fossil fuel-related projects should centre on high-efficiency technology, or combined heat and power units. Likewise, the feasibility of auditing the efficiency of all the energy projects that are currently running or being set up with ECGD backing should be considered, as proposed by the UK Business Council for Sustainable Development. One of the partnerships involving the UK that emerged from the world summit is the renewable energy and energy efficiency partnership, otherwise known as REEEP. The crux of that initiative is to facilitate the transfer of renewable energy technologies, as well as energy-efficient technologies. One of the Johannesburg initiatives that I welcomed was the agreement that that could go forward with Parliamentarians for Global Action, bringing parliamentarians from other countries to the UK to see what we are doing on renewable energy.

It is too early to say how much of an impact the partnership will have on the rate at which renewable technology is diffused across national borders, given that it is not yet due to go active. I have had problems finding out when that will happen—perhaps the Minister can comment. The partnership is to focus on grid-connected and distributed renewable energy applications and improvements in energy efficiency in developed, middle income and rapidly industrialising countries. I am concerned that Africa may again find itself marginalised from wider global developments, given that it will be worst affected by climate change and large swathes of its population live without access to modern energy, reinforcing the energy-poverty nexus. I emphasise to the Minister the importance of integrating Africa into clean and affordable energy programmes.

I ask the Minister to concentrate on two core issues. First, we must face up to our responsibilities as one of the core contributors to global warming by radically reducing domestic greenhouse gas emissions, which I would have discussed given more time. Secondly, we must concentrate renewable and energy-efficient technologies on improving access to energy for the poorest countries and people.

Sir Crispin Tickell, who advised the previous Prime Minister and who is still, I think, a member of the Sustainable Development Commission, has pointed out that the biggest concern is greenhouse emissions from animals. He is concerned about the growth in meat eating across the world and how we should deal with it. I read in *The New York Times* three weeks ago—it was not an April fool's joke—that researchers have found a bacterium in kangaroos that explains why they produce very low levels of greenhouse emissions. Researchers are now seeking to find out whether that could be used in animal feed across the world. The Minister may want to follow that up. Non-governmental organisations may think that it is a beneficial way forward in dealing with greenhouse gases.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): I am grateful for your co-operation, Mr. Colman.

4.55 pm

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I, too, shall be brief on a problem that, as hon. Members have said, is of truly enormous proportions. I congratulate the Select Committee, of which I am not a member, on producing a report worthy of the proportions of the issue that it tackled. The temptation would be to write: "Paragraph 1: Ah. Paragraph 2: Too difficult. Paragraph 3: Er, that's it." The fact that the issue was tackled in the Select Committee report is admirable.

To tackle climate change and sustainable development is truly ambitious. Climate change is taking place not only because of development in the north but because of development of a particular kind—that driven by mined and stored resources. That is the essential point about climate change. Therefore, I would perhaps think slightly differently about a definition of sustainable development. When I think of how we have carried out development so far, I am reminded of the Marx brothers' film "Go West", in which the brothers are on a train going across a prairie and are running up and down smashing up the carriages to fuel the engine, in order to get the entire passenger train to its destination—a somewhat illogical act.

The point about sustainable development is not to leave finite resources for future generations; increasingly, it is about leaving finite resources where they are. If we used all our finite resources in order to bring about development, the planet simply could not cope with the consequences. Therefore, we must encourage development in future—energy is the key—by riding with what energy the planet produces, that is, the sun, the wind, and the tides, rather than continuing to mine the stored energy that the planet wisely put under the ground for many millions of years.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) mentioned that developing countries might say, "Well, you've despoiled the planet." They might not exactly add, "It's our turn now," but they might ask, understandably, why we are preaching to them. Sustainable development is now imperative across the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said, we have a responsibility to ensure that

sustainable development energy technology is exportable to and usable in the developing world, and to support that strongly in any way that we can.

In that context, I was particularly interested in the emergence of the clean development mechanism at Kyoto and the extent to which progress has been made on that. Having said that, I am concerned about the extent to which the mechanism seems to export technology to assist the almost-developing world at the expense of the developing world. I noted the concerns—they appeared in both the report and the Government's response to it—that certain third world countries, especially African countries, simply would not attract such projects because of the low emissions there. The report suggests that 80 per cent. of the projects will go to India, China, Brazil and a few other countries.

The Government's response to the report suggests that they want to use a fast-track mechanism to lower the transaction costs, which are fairly constant regardless of the size of the particular clean development mechanism project. I urge the Government to fast-track the fast track. It seems essential that those mechanisms go to the countries least able to afford the sustainable energy that has to drive their technology in future. At present, the danger is that those countries are most open to what might be a trend of energy dumping in the third world. Borders might not be closed to companies that offered to develop energy. The countries might be afraid that they would not get such development at all if they placed requirements on it. Then they would develop dirty energy in a way that was unsustainable for us all.

We must support the export of renewable energy in a sustainable way, so as to assist development. Energy is the key to third world countries that at present are least able to afford it.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Thank you very much for your co-operation, Alan Whitehead.

5 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I thank hon. Members who have spoken concisely, especially towards the end of the debate, to make it possible for the Opposition to have a fair crack of the whip on this wide-ranging subject. I welcome the opportunity to debate sustainable development and climate change. That was accurately described as an ambitious combination, but it is the right one. The focus of the debate is the Select Committee's characteristically well researched and informed report on the subject, and I commend all its members for their work. We are lucky to have benefited from it and to be able to use it today.

The Chairman of the Committee pointed out that this is the first opportunity to have a proper debate on sustainable development since the world summit in Johannesburg. Although Parliament was in recess at the time of the summit, many hon. Members would have appreciated a statement when Parliament returned. It is several months since the subject was top of the media agenda and, as parliamentarians, it is now much harder to lever to maximum effect the opportunity that the summit created.

In answer to a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman), the Leader of the House said today that there would be an opportunity to raise the subject of the world summit under Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs business shortly. It is good that there will be an opportunity on the Floor of the House for that important summit to be further debated.

I hope that hon. Members feel, as I did, that the media coverage of the world summit in Johannesburg was deplorable. The focus was on trivia. It detracted completely from the seriousness of the subject, which made it difficult for us as parliamentarians to get any serious points into the media coverage. The coverage showed gross irresponsibility on the part of British journalists, both those who attended and those who commented from afar. It was a missed opportunity.

One of the difficulties of the subject of sustainable development is that it often feels far removed from the lives of ordinary people. Part of our duty is to bring home to the electors of this country how directly relevant it is to their lives, and what a direct and disproportionately negative impact there is on people living in less fortunate countries than our own. The disconnection between the reality of ordinary living and the implications of the subject provide a real challenge.

I want to put on record in the presence of the Minister my view that one of the means that the Government have chosen to adopt—the introduction of a climate change levy—contributes not one iota to the realisation by our constituents as individuals that the lack of sustainable development and climate change will affect them. It has had a dramatic and disproportionate effect on business in this country. In the west midlands, businesses were already suffering from the decline of manufacturing and the levy actually took some companies down. It was the last straw, an ill-chosen tool with which to make the nation aware of the seriousness of climate change and its impact on ordinary lives. I encourage the Government to think of other ways of achieving that. Other countries have made their citizens aware of the seriousness of climate change through completely different means. A particularly high tax regime on non-renewable fuels is one of this country's difficulties, and it has left the Government with little room for manoeuvre to make ordinary citizens aware of this crucial issue. The climate change levy was a poor choice.

We all struggle to produce an easy definition of what we mean by sustainable development. My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet managed to reduce it to eight simple words, but I view the focus on our responsibility for future generations as the most important aspect. Most of us, after all, have children, perhaps even grandchildren, so we should think of the clock speeding up. We gain a sense of it during our own lifetimes: as a child, one's birthdays seem to take for ever to come round and one longs for them; as one gets older, they seem to come round too fast. In microcosm, that is the problem with the lack of sustainability. If we examine the use of finite fossil resources, the peak is only a second in the history of our planet, yet we continue to use non-renewables with apparently little care for the legacy bequeathed to future generations. That is one of the most important issues underlying today's debate.

It is hard to get away from the fact that the Select Committee's deliberations produced some fairly strong criticism of the work of the Department for

[Mrs. Caroline Spelman]

International Development in certain respects, so it is fair to cite some of the report and to ask the Minister to respond. Paragraph 96 states:

"DFID, along with most other donors, has paid too little attention to global climate change. DFID's evidence made it clear that to them climate change was just one of the many environmental issues threatening development. We disagree. By grouping climate change with environmental degradation or mismanagement of natural resources the long-term nature of climate risks will be overlooked as DFID's policies react to short-term concerns."

The force of that comment has been strengthened today by one hon. Member after another saying—sometimes philosophically, but no less forcefully—that the impact of climate change on the developing world is disproportionately hard.

To paraphrase, we in the developed world have generated the problem, and we have landed the developing world with a problem that it is clearly ill placed to tackle. It is the disproportionality that makes it so important for DFID to raise the salience of climate change and sustainable development within its work. When it comes to tackling the consequences of climate change, there is no level playing field. It is disproportionately our responsibility in the developed world to deal with the problem that we have caused and to help those who suffer the consequences. I think that that imperative came out clearly today.

I make no excuse for returning to the example of Ethiopia. I believe that it should be uppermost in our minds, not only because its problems are urgent, but because it is an apt case study for the particular difficulties facing Africa. The Secretary of State said that Africa is not one or two failed states: it is a failing continent. That is a rather depressing description, but one that should shake us all into action.

Mr. Colman: Does the hon. Lady agree that, regrettably, Ethiopia is a good example of a country whose priority has been spending on armaments rather than development?

Mrs. Spelman: There is no question but that the aid agencies that are calling for much more substantial help to be given to Ethiopia now would also point to the decisions of the Ethiopian Government that have perhaps not helped. Nations that supply Ethiopia with things that use up money that could be spent differently also have some responsibility.

The urgency of the matter cannot be understated. Aid agencies with early warning systems on the ground have warned of famine on such a large scale that as many as 14 million people may be affected. Getting food aid from India to the port of Djibouti to tackle that famine takes two months. Bringing the aid from Britain takes three months, and bringing it from America takes four months; yet the famine is due to bite from February onwards. Time is not on our side.

I return to the value of considering Ethiopia in bringing home some practical realities. I flag up a few facts. Ethiopia is not short of water. The blue Nile, for example, crosses its plateau, and other sources of water from rivers are available. However, only 5 per cent. of the irrigable land is irrigated. Ethiopia suffers disproportionately from poor water management, as, I suspect, do many sub-Saharan countries. That problem was recognised at the time of the last major drought in the mid-1980s. One must ask why, while there has been knowledge that, cyclically, Ethiopia was likely to suffer another drought, development assistance since 1984 has not focused on tackling poor water management.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: I will not, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind, because I have only three minutes left.

Do not hon. Members think that there is something seriously wrong about the situation whereby our bilateral aid to Ethiopia has totalled £12.3 million in the past 12 months, yet Ethiopia owes us £15.4 million in debt repayments? Ethiopia is not alone in that respect, its debt being 150 per cent. of its GDP. Malawi is another example of a heavily indebted country. Its world development report shows that Malawi's debt still amounts to 29 per cent. of its GDP. We cannot get away from the fact that sustainability and the question of how money should be spent to deal with climate change problems are inextricably linked with the problem of how to solve the situation of the heavily indebted poor countries. That is notwithstanding the Chancellor's admission in the pre-Budget report that the heavily indebted poor countries initiative is failing.

As other hon. Members have mentioned, we have a responsibility for the failure to reform trade rules that work against the ability of developing nations to put themselves on a sustainable footing. Ethiopia's main export income comes from coffee, the prices of which have slumped by 77 per cent. over the past four years. The European Union's and the United States' unwillingness to overhaul our heavily protectionist agricultural systems damages the capacity of countries such as Ethiopia to achieve some sustainability.

We cannot shy away from the scale of the crisis emerging in Ethiopia. The problems facing that country are directly relevant to the problems of climate change and sustainable development. James Morris told the UN Security Council that the crisis in Africa is part of a worrying new global phenomenon of shifting weather patterns that have led to unparalleled natural disasters. Drought has ravaged not only the horn and huge swathes of southern Africa and the western Sahel, but central America, Afghanistan and Cambodia. If we are to meet the millennium development goals—perhaps more accurately called targets—tackling global climate change must be a priority.

5.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): I pay tribute to the Committee's Chairman and members for their excellent report and for their work to bring together the environment and development agendas. A far-reaching and comprehensive inquiry has come to an end in today's debate. However, I am sure that the interest that it has stimulated will stand us all in good stead as we take matters forward.

I shall deal with some of the general issues in the report before responding to the points made in what has been a wide-ranging debate. If I cannot answer all those points in detail today—time is rather short—I shall write to hon. Members.

As the report shows, scientific proof shows beyond reasonable doubt that climate change has happened. The question is not so much whether we should accept the arguments, but what we should do. That has been repeated this afternoon. It is not simply that climate change will have an impact on us all, but that it will impact particularly hard on the poorest countries. Although we want to avert catastrophe, we must accept that some climate change has already happened and that we must therefore live with the consequences. In particular, we must protect the poor of the world.

DFID wants to deal with the need to mitigate the impact and to assist the poor to adapt to the problems and challenges that they face. We choose to do that particularly through the mainstreaming approach. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) asked whether that means that we do not take it seriously. I argue that it shows that we take it particularly seriously. We are saying that the impact of climate change and the resulting environmental issues should run through all our work; it should not be regarded as a separate issue that gets tacked on every now and again. I hope that that reassures my hon. Friend that we take the matter seriously and are not sidelining it by mainstreaming it. The reverse is the case.

Mr. Battle: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ms Keeble: I will give way this once, but no more, as I have only 12 minutes in which to deal with a huge range of issues.

Mr. Battle: In the light of her answer on mainstreaming, do the Minister or her ministerial colleagues have meetings with the Department of Trade and Industry to discuss the impact of energy on developing countries?

Ms Keeble: We have a wide range of meetings, including with the DTI and DEFRA, on a range of issues, and a number of those will be environmental, so I can give my hon. Friend that reassurance.

The hon. Members for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) raised a number of points. I would not disagree with much of the hon. Gentleman's analysis, and certainly not with the figures. The only reason why I did not read out the same figures on Ethiopia is that he had already done so; there was no point. There is no dispute about the maximum and minimum figures. What we do about it is more important.

Of course, we could always do with more action, more money, more of everything but this Government have put international development, and in particular Africa, at the top of the international agenda; no other Government have. Our job is not only to provide the aid but to lead the world so that it takes the same type of action as us. The whole Government—the Treasury, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for International Development—constantly chivvy the rest of the world to match us on contributions, to change the difficult international institutional arrangements of the EU and the World Trade Organisation, and to get the US on board. There is a need for political coherence, which the Government provide. I challenge the hon. Member for Banbury to speak as strongly and as eloquently about CAP reform and our green taxes, including the climate change levy and the landfill tax, as he does about the starving of Africa, because that is where much of the work must be done.

Tony Baldry: I commend to the Minister my letter on CAP reform in *The Times* a couple of weeks ago.

Ms Keeble: I am delighted to hear about that. There is a real need for reform. As many hon. Members have shown this afternoon, tackling such policies will do a great deal to deal with the issues about which the hon. Gentleman has expressed concern. In respect of direct spending, we have identified £24 million specifically for climate change, although we will spend money in many other sectors.

The hon. Member for Banbury was wrong about the global environment facility. I attended the last annual meeting in Beijing and announced that we are providing £118 million in contributions, which makes us the fourth largest donor.

With regard to the World Food Programme, I, too, met James Morris. Everybody was impressed by the strength of his commitment and concern. The Government have urged the international community to increase donations, and the Department has taken substantial action, which includes re-engaging with long-term assistance and dealing with the type of problems that the hon. Member for Meriden identified.

We must understand the difference between what is happening in Ethiopia and southern Africa. For example, people with HIV/AIDS have different nutritional needs. Different areas have different climates and farming conditions. They also have different political climates, a fact that has been particularly significant in southern Africa. We need to tackle not just the short-term but the long-term needs of Africa, and to ensure that it has food security. DFID has been particularly good at dealing with those issues.

The hon. Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) and for Banbury and my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) mentioned the millennium development goals. We have made no secret of the difficulty of meeting those in sub-Saharan Africa. The goals are not just aspirations; some of them are being met elsewhere. Overall, the poverty and the universal primary education goals will be met, but there are problems with the others. They nevertheless drive our work forward, and we are committed to their achievement.

Several hon. Members, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington), raised the problem of achieving a number of the millennium development goals because of the action taken to row back from international commitments, such as access to reproductive services and rights, and funding the United Nations Population Fund. It is particularly important to reverse that action to achieve maternal and infant mortality goals and to

[Ms Keeble]

stem the tide of HIV/AIDS. With the delegation from DFID, I shall go to next week's conference in Bangkok. Obviously, our aim will be to ensure that we achieve improvements on that to reverse some of the setbacks that we have seen.

There has been some discussion of the lack of an Africa strategy. In addition to putting Africa at the top of the agenda, we have urged Governments around the world to support the new partnership for Africa's development and we have been drivers in the G8 action plan for Africa, recognising the particular difficulties that it faces.

Several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet, asked whether the world summit on sustainable development was good or bad, and whether sufficient commitments were made. One of the greatest achievements of that summit was to bring together the environment and development agendas. That was also achieved by the Select Committee in its excellent report. The commitment on water and sanitation is extremely important and will make a dramatic difference to the lives of many poor people throughout the world. As my hon. Friends the Members for City of York and for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) said, there is a need to focus on delivering targets, rather than merely to think up more of them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty) linked climate change with people's lives, especially with the impact on the lives of the poorest people. She emphasised the difficulties caused by population growth and the need for better reproductive services. She also referred to the Americans' policy. There has recently been some confusion about that, which we hope to clarify at Bangkok.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) raised the issue of mainstreaming, which I hope I have dealt with. He also set out all the big challenges that we must deal with, including water supply, river management, forestry management and fuel policy. I have long notes that I could read out on fuel policy, but there is not time. However, I will ensure that my hon. Friend receives copies of the various relevant documents, as well as information about the excellent work on forestry carried out by DFID officials.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of York and the hon. Member for Meriden highlighted the need to make plain to the public the importance of the environment and climate change. My hon. Friend's constituency has been flooded, as has Northampton, so there is substantial awareness of the flooding issue. Through development education in schools, there is increasing awareness of a range of issues. I encourage hon. Members to support development education programmes in their local schools because it can make an extraordinary contribution to education and to international understanding, as well as to academic standards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), who has played an important role in emphasising the issues of sustainable development and renewable energy, asked some detailed questions. Rather than give off-the-cuff answers, I will make sure that he receives properly joined-up answers in writing. I had to laugh when he mentioned kangaroos. I am, perhaps, the only hon. Member who has kept a kangaroo as a pet. I knew that they had excellent qualities, but I did not realise that their lack of harmful emissions was one of them.

I reiterate some of the main points of the Government's approach to climate change. We recognise that climate change presents a major challenge to eradicating poverty and meeting the agreed millennium development goals. In responding to that challenge, our primary focus must be on increasing the ability of poor countries and poor people to cope with the impact of climate change, recognising that they have more difficulty withstanding the shocks. I congratulate the Select Committee on highlighting the importance of the issue and hope that this debate will act as a spur not only to thoughts and talks but to action.

Mr. Mike Hancock (in the Chair): Thank you all for your co-operation. I am delighted that everyone managed to contribute to the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Five o'clock.

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(HANSARD)

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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
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Malcolm Wicks, Esq, MP
Maria Eagle, MP

Her Majesty's Household—
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LORD STEWARD—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD
MASTER OF THE HORSE—The Lord Vestey
TREASURER—Keith Hill, Esq, MP
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CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Grocott
CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD—The Lord McIntosh of Haringey
LORDS IN WAITING—The Lord Davies of Oldham, The Lord Bassam of Brighton
BARONESS IN WAITING—The Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton, The Baroness Andrews, OBE, The Baroness Crawley

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PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Sir Philip Mawer

25 November 2002

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 25 November 2002

HEALTH

Human Genetics and Embryology

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms. Hazel Blears): The Government's response to the Fourth Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology, on developments in human genetics and embryology, Cm 5693, has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

DEFENCE

Defence Training Review Rationalisation Programme

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Further to my written answer of 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 334–35W scoping studies have confirmed that operational benefits, and significant savings, could be achieved by rationalising a number of specialist training streams along defence, rather than single-service lines. The studies identified benchmark options for providing the different types of training at existing MOD sites to serve as public sector comparators, against which a wider range of options can be considered. These will include partnering with the private sector, where potential private sector providers will be encouraged to propose innovative solutions, which might include proposals to establish training establishments on completely new sites. The selection, therefore, by a study of a benchmark site does not imply that the MOD has taken a firm decision to continue training on that site.

The sites being examined for these benchmarks or public sector comparators are HMS Sultan for electro-mechanical engineering training; RAF Cosford for aeronautical engineering training; the Defence School of Transport at Leconfield for logistic training; the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre at Chicksands for security, intelligence, language and photography training; the Royal School of Signals at Blandford for communications and information systems training; and RAF Halton for joint personnel administration and police training.

There are implications for other MOD sites at which elements of this training are currently being carried out. Sites where training may cease, and for which no alternative military use is currently envisaged, are: Bordon, Arborfield, Deepcut, Lodge Hill & Chattenden, St Omer, Chichester, Worthy Down and Beaconsfield. Sites where some of the current training activity may be relocated are: Chatham, Marchwood, St Athan, RAF Cranwell, Shrivenham, HMS Collingwood (Gosport), RAF Digby, RAF Benson, RAF Brize Norton, Chatham, Grantham, Lympstone, Plymouth (including HMS Raleigh), Stafford, West Moors, Portsmouth and Wethersfield.

The next stage of this work is to engage with industry to explore procurement options and to determine the most appropriate and cost-effective means of delivering this rationalised specialist training. Once this work is completed we will have a clearer picture of the likely locations of the various Defence Schools, and will be able to offer a more detailed assessment of the implications for other sites.

Firm decisions on the future use of the sites will be made in the light of the evaluation of the options that emerge from our engagement with industry, and following the normal consultative process.

I have written to right hon. and hon. Members whose constituencies may be affected by these proposals.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Modernisation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Ian Pearson): I intend to announce modernisation proposals for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development on Monday 25 November. The announcement will provide details of the Government's response to the O'Hare report on the arrangements for the provision of agri-food education and R&D in Northern Ireland. I will also announce management changes which are designed to improve the Department's customer interface. I intend to simultaneously release the vision action plan, containing a long-term strategy for the agri-food industry, developed in response to a report compiled by a steering group containing industry and departmental representatives.

Copies of the Government's response to the O'Hare report and the vision action plan have been placed in the Libraries of the House today.

Policing

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton North and Bellshill (Dr Reid), announced on 30 April this year the arrangements for the review promised in the revised implementation plan of August 2001. (*Official Report, Volume 384, Column 659W*). This statement sets out the progress to date on the review and advises hon. Members of the next steps that the Government intends to take.

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary, Dan Crompton, has conducted his annual inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the focus of which was the impact of the new arrangements on police effectiveness and was therefore an important part of the Review. His report was published on 6 November, and a copy was placed in the House Libraries.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State has been looking at detailed administrative and legislative issues and has completed a preliminary round of meetings with interested parties. The next step is to share draft clauses with the parties and to hold a further round of meetings. My hon. Friend is today writing to the parties and enclosing examples of how we intend to deal with the various commitments made in the implementation plan

of August 2001 and other issues that have arisen during discussions on her strand of the review. In addition to these, she is enclosing, for consultation, text setting out how the Government might deal with two further issues which, in the implementation plan, we undertook to consider further. Her letter—a copy of which will be will be placed in the Library of the House—explains that the Government consider that the time is not yet right to legislate on these matters.

And finally, the Oversight Commissioner, Tom Constantine, has, under his terms of reference, been reviewing the progress made in implementing Patten on the basis of experience during the first year of the board's operation. I expect his report in early December.

It is my intention to introduce legislation to Parliament before the Christmas Recess.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Race Relations Act 1976

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I have today made a new authorisation enabling immigration officers to prioritise arriving passengers for examination on the grounds of nationality. This replaces an interim authorisation made on 18 October this year and extended on 2 November, which has now been revoked.

I undertook a full review of the authorisation following a recent ruling by the High Court that the original authorisation (of 27 March 2001) was unlawful. I am satisfied that the new arrangements fully comply with the Court's findings.

A copy of the new authorisation has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 26 November 2002

FOREIGN OFFICE

Organised Crime

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): A successful ministerial Conference on Organised Crime in south eastern Europe, hosted by the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary, was held on 25 November in Lancaster House.

Fifty-seven delegations including all EU member states and the European Commission attended, as well as the five countries of the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) and other countries from south eastern Europe and beyond.

The conference noted that the serious impact of organised crime in the region is felt far beyond its borders—including the EU. The conference agreed a wide range of actions to tackle the problem effectively. The focus was on meeting European standards, building wide public support for the necessary measures, and improving regional co-operation.

Each of the countries of the region additionally announced a number of areas of priority action in the fight against organised crime. These actions are both specific and measurable.

The UK, in full co-operation with EU, International and regional partners will now work to ensure the implementation of these actions. The incoming Greek EU Presidency set out a series of specific actions against crime to be carried out in the first half of 2003. The Greek Presidency has called a summit meeting next June to review progress.

The conference was an important step forward in the effort to defeat organised crime in south eastern Europe.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Terrorism Act

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I am pleased to say that Lord Carlile of Berriew QC has completed the report on the operation of the Act, which will be laid before the House today.

Immigration Rules

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): The domestic violence concession was introduced on 16 June 1999 in an effort to help foreign spouses or unmarried partners who wish to leave their partner because of domestic violence before completion of the probationary period. It was introduced subject to review after a two-year period.

Under the terms of the concession a person would be allowed to settle in the UK, provided they meet certain criteria, even though they are no longer living with their sponsor. The criteria require that the domestic violence must have occurred while the marriage or relationship was subsisting and the applicant should provide evidence of the violence in the form of:

an injunction, non-molestation order or other protection order made against the sponsor (other than an ex-parte or interim order);

a relevant court conviction against the sponsor;

full details of a relevant police caution issued against the sponsor.

As a result of our review and representations received, the Government have decided that the types of evidence acceptable to meet the terms of the concession should be widened. If evidence in some form of court order or police caution is not available, we will accept more than one form of evidence from the following list:

a medical report from a hospital doctor confirming that the applicant has injuries consistent with being the victim of domestic violence;

a letter from a family practitioner who has examined the applicant and is satisfied that the applicant has injuries consistent with being the victim of domestic violence;

an undertaking given to a court that the perpetrator of the violence will not approach the applicant who is the victim of the violence;

a police report confirming attendance at the home of the applicant as a result of a domestic violence incident;

a letter from a social services department confirming its involvement in connection with domestic violence;

a letter of support or report from a women's refuge.

The domestic violence concession will be incorporated into the Immigration Rules to be laid today. This will ensure that domestic violence cases attract a right of appeal and that the facts of the case leading to the decision can be considered by the Appellate Authorities.

Au Pair Scheme

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): The au pair scheme is an arrangement under which nationals of listed countries aged between 17 and 27, unmarried, and without dependants, may come to the UK for a maximum of two years to learn the English language and live with an English-speaking family. During their stay they may help with domestic tasks for a maximum of 25 hours a week in return for accommodation and pocket money.

The list, which is given in the Immigration Rules, currently includes 16 countries, including six of the 12 EU candidate countries. We have decided to extend the list to include those EU candidate countries which are not presently covered. These are Republic of Bulgaria, Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia, Republic of Lithuania, Republic of Poland and Romania. It is planned to lay the necessary amendments to the Immigration Rules today, coming into force on 18 December.

From that date, young people who are nationals of these additional six countries will have the opportunity to spend some time in the UK to learn English and to gain an insight into our culture and way of life.

Visas

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): The Government are firmly committed to ensuring that visa regimes only apply to those nationalities where there is a clear immigration need.

Having reviewed the regimes on nationals from Maldives, Mauritius and Papua New Guinea it has been decided that these visa regimes are no longer necessary. We have therefore made a change to the Immigration Rules today lifting the requirements for nationals of these three countries to hold a visa before they visit the UK. This change will take effect on 18 December.

CABINET OFFICE

COI Communications

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): I have set COI Communications the following key performance targets for the financial year 2002–2003.

Financial:

To achieve break even on an accruals basis

Efficiency:

To demonstrate continued improvement in efficiency and effectiveness on behalf of their clients

Quality:

To pilot an enhanced customer feedback system.

TREASURY

Aviation Insurance

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): The Government's Troika aviation insurance scheme ceased to write new policies from midnight on 31 October 2002, thus bringing to a close Government involvement in the provision of aviation insurance, which had been prompted by the collapse in the commercial market for third party war and terrorist cover following the terrible events of September 11th 2001.

It was always the Government's stated aim to withdraw from the provision of insurance in this sector once there was a return of a functioning commercial market.

The ending of the scheme was in line with the decision taken by the European Commission to end automatic state aid approval for state backed aviation insurance schemes, from 31 October; a decision which recognised the return of the commercial market in this sector.

All UK air carriers and aviation service providers were able to purchase replacement cover from the commercial market prior to the expiry of the Government scheme.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION & SKILLS

Tameside College

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): The Department for Education and Skills, in co-operation with the Learning and Skills Council, has conducted an investigation into allegations that the Principal and Corporation of Tameside College did wilfully and against legal advice conduct its business in a manner not in accordance with its Instrument and Articles of Government.

The investigation has reported that those allegations are confirmed. In particular that:

insufficient written notice was given of a meeting to discuss the removal of the Clerk to the Corporation and, subsequently, the motion of no confidence in the then Chair of the Corporation;

the appropriate 'Special Committee' process was not carried out in removing the Clerk to the Corporation;

contrary to rules of governance, the Principal remained at, and actively participated in, the meeting removing the Clerk to the Corporation; and

again contrary to rules of governance, the Staff Member of the Corporation was excluded from participation in the motion of no confidence in the then Chair of the Corporation.

As a consequence, I have written to the Chair of the Corporation strongly censuring the Corporation's activities in breach of corporate governance and requiring the Corporation to conduct its future business in strict accordance with its Instrument and Articles of Government. I have also written to the Learning and Skills Council asking it to appoint an additional Member to the Corporation to ensure that it does so. I will review this arrangement after one year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Thirteen foreign nationals have so far been detained using powers in Part IV of the Anti-terrorism Crime and Security (ATCS) Act 2001. Eight were detained in December 2001, one in February 2002, two in April 2002, one in October 2002 and a further one on Saturday 23 November.

Of the total detained, two have voluntarily left the United Kingdom. The other 11 remain in detention.

The persons detained have been detained under a primarily immigration power. They are not being held pending criminal charges.

All of those detained have had access to legal advice throughout the detention period. There is no limit to the number of legal visits the detainees may receive.

My decisions to detain these individuals were made on the basis of detailed and compelling evidence. That evidence will be examined by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission when the individuals' appeals are heard, as provided for under the ATCS Act. The Commission is equivalent to the High Court. It has the power to overturn my decisions.

Where terrorism is concerned our paramount responsibility is to ensure public safety and national security. So long as the public emergency subsists, where a person is suspected of terrorism but cannot currently be removed and for whom a criminal prosecution is not an option, we believe that it is necessary and proportionate to provide for extended detention, pending removal.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Ballistic Missiles

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State For Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The United Kingdom subscribed to the International Code of Conduct (ICOC) against Ballistic Missiles at its launch in The Hague on 25 November. I represented HMG at the launch.

The ICOC is a politically binding agreement designed to tackle the proliferation of ballistic missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction. It does so by promoting transparency and confidence building among States. It consists of principles, commitments and confidence-building measures. It will establish international norms for the first time in the area of ballistic missiles. The Code will complement the existing range of international instruments against WMD.

The non-proliferation commitments in the Code include a commitment not to contribute to, support or assist any ballistic missile programme in countries which might be developing or acquiring weapons of mass destruction in contravention of international obligations. Also to exercise vigilance in assistance to Space Launch Vehicle programmes, given that these can be used to conceal ballistic missile programmes. The Code also calls for maximum possible restraint in the development, testing and deployment of ballistic missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction.

The confidence-building and transparency measures are designed to promote confidence through information sharing, in the form of both pre-launch notifications and annual declarations about ballistic missile and space launch programmes. The aim is to boost confidence for instance that space launch vehicle programmes are not being used as cover for ballistic missile programmes.

The Code represents a significant step forward for the international community in the area of arms control—in this case the control of one of the delivery systems of choice for weapons of mass destruction. The UK has played a leading role in the development of the ICOC since its inception. We are calling on all States to subscribe to the Code.

TREASURY

Customs and Excise

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Healey): As the Minister responsible for HM Customs and Excise, I can confirm that in the light of the circumstances that yesterday led to the prosecution offering no further evidence in a series of linked prosecutions relating to London City Bond which were being heard at Liverpool Crown Court, the Attorney-General (as Minister responsible for Customs and Excise prosecutions) and I will be asking a High Court judge to consider:

The circumstances that led to the termination of those cases and, having regard to changes in relevant procedures and guidelines and to changes in practice within HM Customs and Excise that have taken effect since 1995,

To review the practices of HM Customs and Excise in the recording, retention, revelation and disclosure of material which may be relevant to the prosecution of its criminal cases; and in respect of HM Customs and Excise criminal investigations

To review current compliance with best practice in the use of investigation techniques and the management and control of cases to the extent these are relevant to the discharge of the prosecution's obligations in any subsequent criminal proceedings.

The full terms of reference for the review are attached and a copy of the statement made by prosecuting counsel in court will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

REVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES RELATING TO DISCLOSURE, ASSOCIATED INVESTIGATION TECHNIQUES AND CASE MANAGEMENT IN HM CUSTOMS AND EXCISE'S CRIMINAL CASES

Terms of Reference

To consider the circumstances that led to the termination of the LCB cases heard by Grigson J in Liverpool Crown Court and the lessons to be learnt from those circumstances.

And, having regard to changes in the law or practice as indicated below, changes in relevant procedures and guidelines and to changes in practice within HM Customs and Excise that have taken effect since 1995:

To review the practices of HM Customs and Excise in the recording, retention, revelation and disclosure of material which may be relevant to the prosecution of its criminal cases.

In respect of HM Customs and Excise criminal investigations, to review current compliance with best practice in the use of investigation techniques (e.g. the classification and handling of individuals providing information) and the management and control of cases to the extent these are relevant to the discharge of the prosecution's obligations in any subsequent criminal proceedings.

To make recommendations.

The review will be conducted by a High Court Judge

Scope of the review

The review:

Will have regard to the relevant statutory framework (such as the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000), the Attorney General's Guidelines on disclosure, relevant legal precedent and best practice.

Will focus on current departmental provisions and practice while having regard to the conduct of past cases and lessons to be learnt from them insofar as not already incorporated in current practice; and

Will examine the parts that should be played by officers, solicitors and counsel in the preparation for and the presentation of cases for court [illegible] the disclosure process.

The Review will report to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, as the Minister responsible for HM Customs and Excise and to the Attorney-General.

The Review will have unrestricted access to HM Customs and Excise staff, papers and facilities. It is being asked to report not later than June 2003. A summary of the Report and its recommendations will be laid before Parliament.

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Government

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I am announcing today a significant devolution of power to local government. This includes the steps that the Government intend to take to follow up the results of the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) of county and unitary authorities which the Audit Commission is due to publish in December. This will mark a significant milestone in completing the proposals in the Local Government White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services". I have placed copies of our proposals in the House Libraries.

Our aim is progressive improvement in authorities' performance as measured by the CPA. Our package means that there will be greater freedom for local councils to allow them to meet the needs of their communities, support where it is needed and effective action to tackle failure. The nature of the action will vary between the different CPA categories.

Overall there will be greater devolution of power to local government from central Government control. It means greater freedom for councillors and those on the front line to take decisions locally to shape and improve services and respond to local needs.

All councils will have greater control over how they spend their money with a reduction in the level of ring-fencing in Government revenue grants and an increase in the funding for capital going through the single capital pot. We will also reduce current requirements to produce separate plans by over 75 per cent.

For the best councils there will be a set of more radical changes. These will include even greater flexibility to decide how to spend money received from central government (other than money which has to be passed to schools); no requirement to produce plans for central government; and a three-year holiday from most inspection activity.

The announcement also sets out further details about how we shall work with local government on a package of support for councils, with central Government matching pound for pound the additional funding agreed with the LGA for capacity building.

For the weakest authorities we are confirming the principles for tackling poor performance on which we consulted earlier in the year. The Government will engage directly with all such authorities from an early stage.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 27 November 2002

DEFENCE

Departmental Expenditure Limits

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Ministry of Defence Departmental Expenditure Limits will be increased by £387,844,000 from £24,596,969,000 to £24,984,813,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£1000s

Resources				Capital			
Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
277,224	19,142,668	18,752,958	389,710	110,620	5,842,145	5,765,717	76,428

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

The take up of the Resource end year flexibility of £68,668,000.

An increase in RfR2 of £208,556,000 for military operations.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

The take up of the Capital DEL end year flexibility of £100,000,000.

An increase in RfR2 of £10,620,000 for military operations.

The increases will be funded from the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Departmental Expenditure Limits

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): This Written Statement explains the changes being proposed to the Department for Education and Skills' Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) (including the Office for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (OFSTED) which has a separate Estimate), which subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary Estimate, will be increased by £157,494,000 form £23,342,872,000 to £23,500,366,000 and to the Administration Costs limits which will be changed as follows.

	Original £000	*Change £000*	*Revised £000*
DfES (RfR1)	208,726	-1,185	207,541
Sure Start (RfR2)	4,099	+1,351	5,450
Children's Fund (RfR3)	4,435	-430	4,005

Within the DEL change, the impact on the resources element and the capital element are as set out in the following table:

	Resources				*Capital*			
	Change £000	*New DEL* £000	*Of which: voted* £000	Non-Voted £000	Change £000	New DEL £000	*Of which: voted* £000	Non-voted £000
RfR 1	73,808	19,622,493	7,212,908	12,409,585	84,875	3,082,462	1,764,003	1,318,459
RfR 2	-759	284,633	284,633	0	0	164,008	164,008	0
RfR 3	-430	149,570	149,570	0	0	0	0	0
Total change	72,619	20,056,696	7,647,111	12,409,585	84,875	3,246,470	1,928,011	1,318,459

The £6,911,000 increase in the voted element of the resource DEL for RfR1 arises from the take up of £66,000,000 of End Year Flexibility provision; the transfer from the Department of Health of £8,120,000 for Healthy Schools Partnerships and Drugs Education; the net transfer to the Department for Work and Pensions of £7,658,000 for the Disability Rights Commission, Adult Basic Skills training arranged through Jobcentre Plus, Administration Costs and the transfer of responsibility for Ranmoor Hall, Sheffield; the net transfer from the Home Office of £2,775,000 for Community Champions, Community Finance and Learning Initiative, shared premises, prison education services, the Mentor Point Initiative, the Black Training and Enterprise Group and Foyer Federation; the increase in the Appropriation in Aid by £1,800,000 to recycle rent receipts from the National College for School Leadership; the net transfer to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of £1,250,000 for Community Champions, Government Offices, Youth Work Activity and regional co-ordinators of Adult Basic Skills training; the transfer to the National Assembly for Wales of £557,000 for Higher Education Hardship (Access) Funds; the net transfer from the Department of Trade and Industry of £434,000 for Inward Investments, Community Finance and Learning Initiative and Engineering and Marine Training Authority Marine Skills; the transfer from the Office for National Statistics of £97,000 for the Neighbourhood Statistics programme; the virement of £59,247,000 to non-voted

DEL for the Learning and Skills Council; and the correction of an over allocation of funds through a return to the Invest Save Budget of £3,000.

The £1,185,000 reduction in the Administration Costs limit for RfR1 arises from the transfer of £871,000 to the Department for Work and Pensions for the transfer of responsibility for Ranmoor Hall, Sheffield and support for International Relations; the transfer of £411,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Government Offices and for regional co-ordinators for Adult Basic Skills training; and the transfer of £97,000 from the Office for National Statistics for the Neighbourhood Statistics programme.

The reduction in the voted element of resource DEL for RfR2 arises from the transfer of £759,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to contribute to the accommodation and the provision of central services in the Government Offices.

The £1,351,000 increase in the Administration Costs limit for RfR2 arises from the virement from current grants.

The reduction in the voted element of resource DEL for RfR3 arises from the transfer of £430,000 from administration costs to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to contribute to the accommodation and the provision of central services in the Government Offices.

The £73,375,000 increase in the voted element of the capital DEL for RfR1 arises from the draw down of £77,500,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund for direct grants to schools; the virement of £4,000,000 to non voted DEL to the Learning and Skills Council; the transfer of £100,000 to the Department for Work and Pension for the transfer of responsibility for Ranmoor Hall, Sheffield; and the correction of an over allocation of funds through a return to the Invest Save Budget of £25,000.

The £66,897,000 increase in the non-voted element of the resource DEL for RfR1 arises from the virement of £59,247,000 from voted DEL to the Learning and Skills Council; the transfer from the Department for Work and Pensions of £3,600,000 to the Adult Learning Inspectorate for inspections of New Deal training providers; the transfer from the Home Office to the Higher Education Funding Council for England of £3,250,000 for the Active Community Fund; and the transfer from the Department for Transport of £800,000 for a project to address the training and skills in the Road Haulage Industry .

The £11,500,000 increase in the non-voted element of the capital DEL for RfR1 arises from the draw down of £7,500,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund to the Learning and Skills Council for further education and the virement of £4,000,000 from voted DEL to the Learning and Skills Council.

The increases will be offset by transfers or charges to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of Public expenditure'.

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): I have today announced that subject to Parliamentary approval necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Departmental Expenditure Limits for 2002–03 will change as follows.

(a) the ODPM Main Programmes DEL (previously the DTLR Main Programmes DEL) will be decreased by £8,110,064,000 from £13,542,710,000 to £5,432,646,000 and the ODPM administration costs limit (previously the DTLR administration costs limit) will be decreased by £356,671,000 from £698,802,000 to £342,131,000 and the DTLR HSE administration costs limit will be transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

	Resources Change	*New DEL*	*Capital Change*	*New DEL*
Total DEL	-3,163,065	1,921,595	-4,946,999	3,511,051
Of which				
Voted	-1,876,058	1,487,401	-2,540,456	1,436,553
Non Voted	-1,287,007	434,194	-2,406,543	2,074,498

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) The changes for Request for Resources 1 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £8,516,000 comprising £2,000,000 for Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund, £1, 806,000 for the Rent Service and £4,710,000 for the Planning Inspectorate administration. An increase of £43,658,000 from non-voted provision for Homelessness Strategies (£9,000,000), Bed and Breakfast (16,100,000), Priority Needs Orders (£10,000,000), Housing research and publicity (£150,000), Regeneration publicity (£350,000) and Rough Sleepers (£8,058,000). Take up from the Capital Modernisation Fund of £15,000 for the New Ventures Fund. A technical adjustment of £1,000,000 to correct the treatment of an Ordnance Survey interest payment. A net decrease of £15,919,000 arising from the following inter-departmental transfers: a reduction of £13,683,000 due to the reclassification of pneumoconiosis compensation payments to a provision and which has subsequently transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions, £2,066,000 to the Home Office for grants to the voluntary sector, £2,000,000 to the Home Office for Crime Reduction, £100,000 to the Department for Education and Skills for Community Champions, £300,000 from the Home Office for New Ventures Fund, £130,000 from the Home Office for Special Grants Programme and £1,500,000 from the Home Office for neighbourhood wardens. Take up from Invest To Save Budget of £597,000 for Ordnance Survey (£165,000) and Fire Service Projects (£432,000).

(ii) The changes for Request for Resources 2 are as follows:

Machinery of Government change of £1,726,236,000 to the Department for Transport.

(iii) The changes for Request for Resources 4 are as follows:

A net decrease of £295,618,000 arising from machinery of government transfers to Department for Transport (£108,842,000), to the Department for Work and Pensions (£193,174,000) , from the Home Office (£2,162,000), and from the Cabinet Office (£4,236,000). An increase of £107,925,000 arising from other interdepartmental transfers from the Cabinet office (£98,630,000), the Home Office (£6,104,000), the Department for Education and Skills (£2,539,000) and from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (£652,000). A transfer of £4,000 from Requests for Resource 3 to meet costs of providing administration services.

(iv) Provision within the non-Voted resource element of the DTLR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be decreased by £1,287,007,000 to reflect machinery of government transfer to Department for Transport (£1,243,279,000), a machinery of government transfer to the Department for Work and Pensions (£70,000) and a transferr to voted provision on Request for Resources 1 (£43,658,000).

(v) As a result of the changes to Requests for Resources 1, 2 and 4 the ODPM administration provision has been decreased by £364,510,000 from £707,882,000 to £343,372,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(vi) The changes for Request for Resources 1 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £25,926,000 comprising £11,809,000 for Safer Communities supported Housing Fund, £14,000,000 for Starter Homes Initiative and £117,000 for The Rent Service Invest to Save Budget. A technical adjustment of £1,121,000 for Ordnance Survey loan repayment. An increase following a transfer from Department for Transport of £30,000,000 arising from the repayment of a loan. Take up from the Capital Modernisation Fund of £74, 055,000 for The Rent Service (£1,500,000), New Dimension (£43,000,000), Choice Based lettings (£3,355,000 including take up of End Year Flexibility of £2,355,000), Housing Market Renewal Fund (£25,000,000) and Public Space Improvement (£1,200,000). Take up from Invest to Save Budget of £65,000 for Ordnance Survey (£15,000) and Fire Service Projects (£50,000). A transfer of £14,629,000 from non-voted resources for Private Sector Housing Renewal (£8,000,000), Housing Defect grants (£1,629,000) and Coalfields Regeneration Trust (£5,000,000).

(vii) The changes for Request for Resources 2 are as follows:

Machinery of Government change of £2,653,199,000 to the Department for Transport.

(viii) The changes for Request for Resources 4 are as follows:

A decrease of £33,666,000 arising from machinery of government transfers to the Department for Transport (£23,101,000), and to the Department of Work and Pensions (£10,565,000). An increase of £613,000 arising from a further interdepartmental transfer from the Cabinet Office.

(ix) Provision within the non-Voted capital element of the DTLR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be decreased by £2,406,543,000 in respect of a Machinery of Government transfer to Department for Transport (£2,391,914,000) and a transfer to voted provision on Request for Resources 1 (£14,629,000).

(b) the DTLR Local Government DEL will be increased by £35, 136,000 from £37,649,827,000 to £37, 684,963,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

	Resources Change	*New DEL*	*Capital Change*	*New DEL*
Total DEL	+27,967	37,403,935	+7,169	281,028
Of which				
Voted	+25,767	37,311,082	+7169	273,028
Non Voted	+2,200	92,853	0	8,000

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) The changes for Request for Resources 3 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £23,792,000: VOA rating services (£1,200,000), Best Value Inspectorate (£2,958,000), Local Government research (£600,000), PFI Special Grants (£5,400,000), support for local authorities (Bellwin) (£1,500,000), Local Government On-Line Resource (1,732,000), and take up from the Invest to Save Budget (£10,402,000). £2,000,000 from the DEL Reserve for Special Grants for Foot and Mouth Disease NNDR concessions. A decrease of £21,000 arising from machinery of government changes transfer to the Lord Chancellor's Department and £4,000 transfer to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Request for Resources 4 in respect of costs of providing administration services.

(ii) Provision within the non-Voted resource element of the Local Government DEL will increase by £2,200,000 to reflect the take up of End Year Flexibility for the Standards Board for England.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(iii) The changes for Request for Resources 3 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £4,240,000 for Local Government On-Line. Take up from the Invest to Save Budget End Year Flexibility of £2,929,000.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers or charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Expenditure Limits

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): By convention Suplementary Estimates are published after an announcement on associated changes to the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) and administration cost limit. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary estimate, the Department for Transport departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be £8,928,473,000 and the administration costs limit will be £479,446,000.

The departmental expenditure limit comprises £8,146,571,000 transferred from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, following Machinery of

Government changes, and a subsequent increase of £781,902,000. within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

£'000

	Resources	*Capital*
Transferred from ODPM	3,078,357	5,068,214
Change	174,878	607,024
New DEL	3,253,235	5,675,238,
Of which:		
Voted	1,862,956	3,362,095
Non voted	1,390,279	2,313,143

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) take up of £150,800,000 of resource end year flexibility, comprising:

(a) £139,627,000 for the Strategic Rail Authority (non-voted) to meet extra costs that have arisen on some passenger rail franchises;

(b) £11,173,000 to increase the Road Haulage Modernisation Fund (including £800,000 that has been transferred to the Department for Education and Skills for the Learning and Skills Council's training scheme for the road haulage industry);

(ii) take up of £13,020,000 capital end year flexibility for the Highways Agency to support resource expenditure in line with the Agency's business plan;

(iii) a transfer of £200,000 to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in respect of fishermen's' safety training;

(iv) a transfer of £782,000 from the Home Office for research on dedicated vehicle identity checks;

(v) a transfer of £3,800,000 (administration costs) to the Department for Work and Pensions in respect of contributions to the Health and Safety Commission's work on implementation of the recommendations in Lord Cullen's report on the rail accident at Ladbroke Grove;

(vi) the transfer of £15,141,000 from the capital element of the DEL to the resource element, comprising:

(a) £7,230,000 for aviation services;

(b) £538,000 for London Underground PPP Advisors;

(c) £7,373,000 for the Strategic Rail Authority (non-voted);

(vii) an increase in receipts of £65,000 to offset capital expenditure on maintenance of the International Maritime Organization building. The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(i) a call on the DEL reserve of £643,000,000 and a transfer of £100,000,000 from departmental unallocated provision to ensure continued funding of, and increased investment in, London Underground Limited;

(ii) a draw down of £9,100,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund comprising:

(a) £8,600,000 for Electronic Service Delivery of Abnormal Loads; and

(b) £500,000 for the Vehicle Certification Agency's WIMS project;

(iii) a transfer of £30,000,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to re-imburse a transfer from housing capital programmes made in 2001–02;

(iv) a transfer of £15,141,000 from Trans European networks payments for rail and other transport industries projects to the resource element of the DEL;

(v) a transfer from non-voted credit approvals of £28,078,000 to voted programmes in support of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (£9,517,000), road user charging (£1,941,000), Transport Direct (£1,000,000), water freight grants (£8,247,000), local authorities requesting support for "accepted" road schemes (£6,229,000) and Promoting Sustainable Travel Initiatives1 Cycle Fund (£1,144,000);

(vi) a transfer of £11,307,000 from voted provision for the Highways Agency to non-voted credit approvals for de-trunking programmes;

(vii) a transfer of £38,000,000 from voted provision for the Highways Agency to the Strategic Rail Authority (non-voted) to meet additional project development costs;

(vii) an increase of £65,000 in respect of maintenance of the International Maritime Organization building, offset by resource appropriations in aid.

The administration costs limit comprises £483,246,000 transferred from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, following Machinery of Government changes, and a subsequent reduction of £3,800,000.

All of these changes will be offset by inter-departmental transfers or charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Contingent Liabilities

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The provision for the Government Indemnity Scheme is made by the National Heritage Act 1980. The scheme facilitates public access to loans of works of art and other objects for public display made to museums, galleries and other such institutions by private owners and non-national institutions. It does this by indemnifying lenders against loss or damage to their loan. Loans covered by the scheme must be for public benefit. The scheme also covers loans of such objects for study purposes within borrowing institutions, where this would contribute materially to the public's understanding or appreciation of the loan. Examples of this are: enhancing interpretation or explanation to the public of objects, or bringing into the public domain the conclusions of any study.

In the six month period ended 30 September, the following undertakings to indemnify were given under section 16 by the relevant Departments for objects on loan to national and non-national institutions:

	Numbers
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	608
Scottish Executive Education Department	253
The National Assembly for Wales	184

The value of contingent liabilities in respect of undertakings given at any time under section 16 and which remained outstanding as at 30 September is:

Department for Culture, Media and Sport
£2,571,225,058

Scottish Executive Education Department
£493,725,877

The National Assembly for Wales
£57,572,660

The value of non-statutory Government indemnities to cover loans handled by the Government Art Collection and which remained outstanding as at 30 September is:

Value: £5,000,000

The value of non-statutory Undertakings given to Her Majesty in respect of loans from the Royal Collection and which remained outstanding as at 30 September is:

Value: £ 216,852,270

Winter Supplementary Estimate

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport DEL will be increased by £66,867,000 from £1,263,906,000 to £1,330,773,000 and the Administration Costs limits will be increased by £6,970,000 from £35,196,000 to £42,166,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

Resource				*Capital*			
		Of which:				*Of which:*	
Change	*New DEL*	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*voted*	*Non-voted*
£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
7,240	1,167,397	163,929	1,003,468	59,627	163,376	116,495	46,881

The £7,240,000 increase in the voted element of the resource DEL for RfR1 arises from the transfer of £1,000,000 from the Home Office for the Spend for Sport initiative and £134,000 match funding of the Public Library Volunteer Scheme; the take up of £3,622,000 of discretionary end year flexibility provision for administrative costs; the transfer of £652,000 administration costs expenditure to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister toward the expenses of running the regional Government Offices; and the take up of £3,136,000 of discretionary end year flexibility provision for the further development of Culture Online.

The £4,000,000 reduction in the non-voted element of the resource DEL for RfR1 arises from a transfer £4,000,000 from the Department's unallocated provision into administration costs.

The £6,970,000 increase in the Department's Administration Costs Limit arises from a transfer of £4,000,000 from the Department's unallocated provision into administration costs; the take up of £3,622,000 of discretionary end year flexibility provision for administrative costs; and the transfer of £652,000 administration costs expenditure to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister toward the expenses of running the regional Government Offices.

The £59,627,000 increase in the voted element of the capital DEL for RfR1 arises from the take up of £50,460,000 of discretionary capital DEL end year flexibility provision under the Space for Sport and Art initiative; the draw down of £5,000,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund for the further development of Culture Online; the take up of £3,534,000 of discretionary capital DEL end year flexibility for the Royal Parks; and the take up £633,000 of discretionary capital DEL end year flexibility for Administration and Research.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers or charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the Planned total of Public Expenditure.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): A review of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme (SAWS) was announced on 7 February 2002 in the White Paper on Immigration and Asylum entitled "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain". Officials within the Home Office have since completed a formal consultation in which the views of a wide range of organisations with an interest in the scheme have been sought.

The Government would like to thank all those who responded to this review. The response of those contributing, many of whom were farmers and growers or their representatives, is that the SAWS plays an important role in providing an additional source of seasonal workers. We have listened to the views expressed and concluded that the scheme should be retained and developed where appropriate with the primary purpose of providing farmers and growers access to seasonal labour.

The use of operators in administering the scheme is felt by the industry to be one of the key strengths of the current arrangements. They play a crucial role in recruiting and allocating participants to farms, overseeing their welfare, and monitoring and evaluating the scheme. Operators will therefore continue to be a feature of the revised SAWS. They will be appointed following a tendering exercise and will be in place in preparation for the revised SAWS which will operate from 2004 onwards.

I am aware that many farmers and growers who have an unmet need for seasonal labour are not within the scope of the existing arrangements. Consequently, the period during which the SAWS operates will be extended beyond the current months of May to November to allow participation in the scheme at any time throughout the year so as to meet the demand for

seasonal workers. Additionally the work that SAWS participants are permitted to undertake will be extended, provided it is agricultural work and seasonal in nature. These changes will be fully implemented from January 2004. However, in recognition of the difficulties farmers and growers who are outside the scope of the current arrangements might experience in recruiting seasonal labour next year, I will bring forward these changes for the 2003 SAWS season. This is provided it is within the capacity of the existing operators to handle the additional work, and the employers wishing to benefit are able to meet the welfare needs of participants, in particular the provision of accommodation.

In response to these changes the Government will increase the already agreed quota for SAWS 2003 from 20,200 to 25,000. Future quota levels will be determined annually on the basis of an appraisal of the scheme's performance and estimates of future demand by key stakeholders, in particular through scheme operators on behalf of the employers they represent. Although the review found no evidence to support an immediate increase in the quota to 50,000 as recommended by a recent Policy Commission report into the future of food and farming, the Government accept that subject to economic growth demand for seasonal workers will rise steadily in the coming years. It will continue to be a requirement of a revised SAWS that participants must be full-time students in their home country as the review indicated students have an incentive to return home at the end of their time on the scheme. However, the upper age limit of 25 will be removed altogether to enable mature students to benefit from the scheme and to earn money that they can use to fund their education.

I hope these changes will ensure the scheme can continue to make an important contribution to meeting the seasonal labour needs of the agriculture industry and in doing so provide participants with a valuable experience of working in the UK.

TREASURY

Departmental Expenditure Limits

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, HM Treasury's DEL will decrease by £3,713,000 from £209,227,000 to £205,514,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £1,908,000 from £108,296,000 to £110,204,000. The administration cost limit of £108,296 includes a correction to the figure published in the Main Estimate (£106,508). In order to prevent a negative RFR in the Main Estimate, A in A of £1,788 was switched to CFERs. This switch appeared in part II of the Main Estimate but was not reflected in the notes to the Estimate.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

Resources				Capital			
Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non voted*
-3,746	199,725	137,401	62,324	33	5,789	5489	300

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

the merger, on 1 July 2002, of the National Investment and Loans Office with HM Treasury and the Debt Management Office (£192,000 net, of which administration costs is £1,975,000). NILO's DEL will be reduced from £191,000 to £0 and the administration cost limit will decrease from £2,018,000 to £0 as a result of the merger;

draw down of £485,000 Invest to Save Budget funding;

a transfer of £67,000 administrative costs to HM Customs and Excise for costs incurred by the Penrose Inquiry team;

a transfer of £4,400,000 programme expenditure from the Office of Government Commerce to the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service for properties transferred from the OGC's residual estate portfolio.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the merger of NILO with HM Treasury and the DMO (£33,000). NILO's capital DEL will reduce from £33,000 to £0.

There is also an increase to non-voted DEL of £44,000 as a consequence of the NILO/HMT merger. This is for provision programme expenditure. NILO's non-voted DEL will decrease from £44,000 to £0.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

Winter supplementary Estimate

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I am today announcing some changes to the Privy Council Office DEL and Administration Cost Limits for 2002–03. The Privy Council Office DEL will be increased by £270,000 from £2,798,000 to £3,068,000 and the Administration Costs Limits will be increased by £270,000 from £2,838,000 to £3,108,000. Within the DEL changes there is no impact on capital; the impact on resources is set out in the following table:

Resources

Change	*New DEL*	*Of which:*	
		Voted	*Non-Voted*
+£270,000	£3,068,000	£3,068,000	nil

The changes in the resource element of the DEL arise from unexpected Privy Council Office costs attributed to accommodation and related matters and incurred in modernising the Department.

The increase will be charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

HM Customs and Excise (Winter Supplementary Estimate)

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the H M Customs and Excise DEL will be increased by £50,878,000 from £1,107,850,000 to £1,158,728,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £61,644,000 from £956,323,000 to £1,017,967,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

Resources				Capital			
Change	New DEL	*Of which: Voted*	*Non- voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
50,878,000	1,074,310,000	1,045,571,000	28,739,000	-	84,418,000	61,418,000	23,000,000

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from: the take up of end year flexibility entitlement of £21,177,000 on administration costs and £29,588,000 on programme expenditure as set out in the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper (Cm 5574); a transfer of £67,000 in administration costs from HM Treasury for setting up the Penrose Inquiry team; and a transfer of £46,000 from the Home Office on programme expenditure in respect of Cocaine Market Sizing research.

The total administration costs change is £61,644,000, which includes a switch from non-discretionary programme expenditure to administration costs of £40,400,000. The administration costs increase will primarily provide for additional front-line operational staff and support resources, to tackle fraud in respect of Excise duties (significantly Hydrocarbon Oils).

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers or charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Relief Document

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The Government are today publishing a document containing the estimates of the effects of various illustrative tax changes on tax receipts in 2003–04 and 2004–05 (plus 2005–06 for indirect taxes) and estimates of the costs of the main tax reliefs in 2001–02. Copies are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and are available in the Vote Office.

National Insurance contributions

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I have completed the annual review under section 141 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. I propose the following changes to take effect from 6 April 2003. These rates and limits will also apply to Northern Ireland National Insurance Contributions.

Employers and Employees

In line with the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, the Lower Earnings Limit for primary Class 1 contributions is to be raised to £77 a week. It is set at the level of the basic Retirement Pension for a single person from April 2003 and rounded down to the nearest pound.

The Primary and Secondary Thresholds for Class 1 contributions will continue to be aligned with the weekly amount of the income tax personal allowance, which will be frozen from April 2003. The Primary and Secondary Thresholds will therefore remain at £89 a week. This means that no tax or Class 1 contributions will actually be paid on earnings below this level.

The Upper Earnings Limit for primary Class 1 contributions will be raised to £595.

The self-employed

The rate of Class 2 contributions will be frozen at £2.00 a week.

Self-employed people with earnings below the annual Small Earnings Exception can apply to be exempted from paying Class 2 contributions. This limit will be raised by £70 to £4,095 in line with inflation.

The annual lower profits limit for liability to Class 4 contributions will remain at £4,615 a year (in line with the income tax personal allowance). The Upper Profits Limit will increase by £520 to £30,940, to maintain the link with employees' earnings liable to Class 1 contributions.

Class 3

The rate of Class 3 voluntary contributions will be increased by 10 pence to £6.95 a week.

Share fishermen

The special rate of Class 2 contributions for share fishermen, which allows them to build entitlement to contributory Jobseekers Allowance in addition to the other contributory benefits available to the self-employed, will remain at £2.65 a week.

Volunteer Development Workers

The special rate of Class 2 contributions for volunteer development workers, which entitles them to the full range of contributory benefits, will be increased by 10 pence to £3.85 in line with the statutory formula of 5 per cent of the primary Class 1 Lower Earnings Limit.

Treasury Grant

I need to ensure that the Fund can maintain a prudent working balance throughout the coming year. In accordance with section 2 (2) of the Social Security Act 1993, I propose to do so by prescribing that the maximum Treasury Grant which may be made available to the Fund in 2003–04 shall not exceed 2 per cent of the estimated benefit expenditure for that year. Similar provision will be made in respect of the Northern Ireland National Insurance Fund.

I shall be laying a draft re-rating order before Parliament in due course. This will accompany a report by the Government Actuary to myself and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which we shall jointly present to Parliament.

The following table sets out the rates, earnings limits and thresholds for National Insurance Contributions proposed for 2003–04.

National Insurance Contributions, Proposed re-rating, April 2003 *Item*	2003–04
Lower Earnings Limit, primary Class1	£77
Upper Earnings Limit, primary Class 1	£595
Primary Threshold	£89
Secondary Threshold	£89
Employees' primary Class 1 rate	11 per cent from £89.01 to £595 plus 1 per cent above £595
Employees' contracted-out rebate	1.6 per cent
Married women's reduced rate	4.85 per cent from £89.01 to £595 plus 1 per cent above £595
Employers' secondary Class 1 rate	12.8 per cent on earnings above £89
Employers' contracted-out rebate, Salary-related schemes	3.5 per cent
Employers' contracted-out rebate, money-purchase schemes	1 per cent
Class 2 rate	£2
Class 2 Small Earnings Exception	£4,095
Special Class 2 rate for share fishermen	£2.65
Special Class 2 rate for volunteer development workers	£3.85
Class 3 rate	£6.95
Class 4 rate	8 per cent from £4,615 to £30,940 plus 1 per cent above £30,940
Class 4 Lower Profits Limit	£4,615
Class 4 Upper Profits Limit	£30,940

Inland Revenue
(Departmental Expenditure Limits)

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Inland Revenue Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £77,954,000 from £2,524,032,000 to £2,601,986,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £78,102,000 from £2,566,610,000 to £2,644,712,000. The net administration costs limit is reduced by £218,000 from -£6,347,000 to -£6,565,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non- Voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: Voted*	*Non- Voted*
77,954	2,601,986	*2,252,799*	*349,187*	38,531	168,086	*168,086*	*0*

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the draw down of £78,102,000 administration costs EYF, and additional income for VOA services.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the draw down of capital EYF and non-discretionary EYF, totalling £37,631,000 as set out in the Public expenditure Outturn White Paper (CM5574). It also includes the draw down of £900,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund.

Office for National Statistics
(Departmental Expenditure Limits)

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Office for National Statistics Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £771,000 from £127,465,000 to £128,236,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £771,000 from £126,666,000 to £127,437,000. The Office for National Statistics Capital DEL will decrease by £1,003,000 from £23,066,000 to £22,063,000. The impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

Resources (£)				*Capital (£)*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
771,000	128,236,000	123,876,000	4,360,000	- 1,003,000	22,063,000	22,063,000	0

The net increase in the resource element of the DEL is due to two factors. Firstly, there is an increase in Resource DEL due to the draw down of £1,021,000 in respect of Resource DEL end year flexibility arrangements. This is partially offset by a transfer of £250,000 in total to other Government Departments in relation to work to develop the Neighbourhood Statistics programme. The transfers comprise £97,000 to the Department for Education and Skills, £127,000 to the Department of Health and £26,000 to the Lord Chancellor's Department.

The reduction in the capital element of the DEL arises from a transfer of capital costs of some £1,003,000 in total to other government departments in relation to work to develop the Neighbourhood Statistics programme. The transfers comprise £1,000,000 to the Department for Work and Pensions and £3,000 to the. Department of Health.

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

Departmental Expenditure Limit

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) will be taking a

2002–2003 Winter Supplementary Estimate. The effect this will have is to increase the NIO's DEL by £60,000,000 from £1,151,862,000 to £1,211,862,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £10,000,000 from £144,716,000 to £154,716,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non- Voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
55,000	1,147,309	1,147,309	0	5,000	64,553	64,553	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the draw down of £55,000,000 End Year Flexibility. This amount includes a total of £10,000,000 for administration costs.

The extra resource costs cover a range of areas within the Department such as policing and security, central administration, political, criminal justice and prisons.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the draw down of £5,000,000 End Year Flexibility.

The extra capital costs cover a range of areas within the Department such as policing and security, central administration, political, criminal justice and prisons.

The increases will be offset by transfers charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

SCOTLAND OFFICE

Departmental Expenditure Limits

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Scotland Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £514,577,000 from £17,775,734,000 to £18,290,311,000, and the administration costs limit will be increased by £200,000 from £6,502,000 to £6,702,000.

The DEL increase takes account of the following:

a reclassification from AME into DEL of £5,400,000 for fire service pensions;

an increase of £3,500,000 for safety cameras;

an increase of £3,000,000 for the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund;

the take-up of EYF by the Scotland Office amounting to £200,000; and

the take-up of EYF by the Boundary Commission for Scotland amounting to £65,000.

The DEL increase also includes the following transfers to and from other Government departments, amounting to a net increase of £2,412,000. These are:

transfers of £2,763,000 from the Department for Trade and Industry;

a transfer of £34,000 from the Home Office; and

a transfer of £385,000 to the Department of Health.

All of the increases add to the resource budget, and the capital budget of £100,000 is unchanged.

The increases will be offset by interdepartmental transfers as detailed above, classifications or charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TREASURY

Indirect Tax Revenues

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The Government's latest estimates of the revenue losses affecting VAT, tobacco duty and other indirect taxes, and the supporting methodologies, are set out in documents published today by HM Customs and Excise entitled 'Protecting Indirect Tax Revenues' and 'Measuring Indirect Tax Losses'. Both documents are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Offshore Wind Industry

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): I am pleased to inform hon. Members that I published on 22 November a consultation document proposing a strategic framework for the future of the offshore wind industry.

This country is very rich in wind resources. Harnessing the wind to generate electricity means that we have a sustainable and secure long term supply of energy. An important added benefit is that generating electricity from the wind does not release carbon and other pollutants into the atmosphere. The wind energy industry is well established onshore and single turbines and larger wind farms are already generating electricity for homes and businesses.

The wind resource out at sea is substantial and offers considerable potential for expansion of the wind energy industry. The offshore wind energy industry could make a significant contribution, perhaps as much as 50%, to meeting the Government's target that 10% of electricity supplies should be generated from renewable sources by 2010. Expansion on this scale would bring significant investment and job opportunities.

The first step in realising this potential has already been taken when in December 2000 the Crown Estate invited the industry to apply for site leases for wind farms. The response was most encouraging. 20 wind farms are planned for various locations around the coast The first of these wind farms is expected to be constructed next year.

Winter Supplementary Estimate

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mrs. Patricia Hewitt): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, British Trade International's Resource DEL will be increased by £3,707,000 from £92,131,000 to £95,838,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table.

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of Which: Voted*	*Non- voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of Which: Voted*	*Non- voted*
3,707	95,838	95,838	0	0	248	248	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from a transfer in resources from the Department of Trade and Industry to British Trade International of £2,000,000 in respect of the Global Partnerships programme; £156,000 in respect of the Pacific Rim Electronics Association (PREBA) and the Japan Electronics Business Association (JEBA); and take up of £1,551,000 of End Year Flexibility entitlement which is required to resource increased trade development activity in the English regions, including providing full support to new companies recruited to the Passport programme in 2002/03.

The increase will be offset by transfers or changes to the DEL Reserves and will not therefore add to the planned total of Public expenditure.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Sustainable Development in Government

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I am delighted to announce that the "Sustainable Development in Government 1st Annual Report" has been published today. This replaces the Greening Government Annual reports of the last Parliament. The change in title reflects the Government's commitment to considering economic, environmental and social impacts of the operation of the Government Estate and in policy making processes.

The report is presented in two parts; Part 1 is a summary of the progress and achievements across Government against the commitments and priorities set out in the 3rd Annual Report on Greening Government last year; Part 2 of the report will be in the form of a database giving details of the performance of every department. The database will be available on the Government's Sustainable development website—www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/ar2002/index.htm

There is also an executive summary of the report which highlights major achievements and priorities. The information contained within Part 2 has been transferred to CD-ROM and placed alongside copies of Part 1 and the executive summary in the libraries of both Houses.

Office of Water Services (Winter Supplementary Estimate)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Office of Water Services DEL will be increased by £1,700,000 from £24,000 to £1,676,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £1,100,000 from £11,302,000 to £12,402,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
1,100	541	541	N/A	600	1,135	1,135	N/A

The increase in the resource element of the DEL £1,100,000 arises from the take up of end of year flexibility of administration costs.

The increase in the capital element of the DEL £600,000 arises from an investment in the development of a new financial model. This will be used in the next review of prices and will be shared with the industry and the website development costs.

Department Expenditure Limits

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' DEL will be increased by £323,006,000 from £2,135,714,000 to £2,458,720,000, and the administration costs limit will be increased by £94,091,000 from £392,599,000 to £486,690,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table:

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Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
+245,339	1,842,196	1,475,257	366,939	+77,667	616,524	519,141	97,383

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from: i) a draw down of £136,900,000 from the DEL Reserve for various Departmental priorities including FMD, ii) a take-up of our entitlement to £69,300,000 under End-Year flexibility, iii) a take-up of £2,000,000 programme resources from the November 2000 Flood Defence Package, iv) a switch of £12,100,000 programme resources to administrative resources, as agreed with Treasury, v) a transfer from RfR1 to RfR2 of £128,000,000 in respect of England Rural Development Plan (ERDP), vi) a transfer of £70,000 programme resources to LCD for Countryside Rights of Way Act, vii) a transfer of £105,000 programme resources to DTI for the Farm Business Advice Service (FBAS) and, viii) to take-up transfers from ex DTLR of £37,114,000 held over from last year, ix) to take-up £200,000 programme resources from DfT for fishermen's training.

Our EYF resource entitlement above includes £34,522,000 budget cover (non-Estimate) for the British Waterways Board (BWB), one of our Public Corporations.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from: i) a draw-down of £3,000,000 from the DEL Reserve for Departmental priorities, ii) a take-up of our entitlement to £59,667,000 under End-Year flexibility and, iii) a take-up of £15,000,000 from the November 2000 Flood Defence Package.

Our EYF capital entitlement above includes £8,461,000 budget cover (non-Estimate) for the BWB.

The increase will either be offset by transfers or charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Forestry Commission

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Forestry Commission's DEL will be increased by £3,605,000 from £60,848,000 to £64,453,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*
No change	53,598	50,945	2,653	3,605	10,855	850	10,005

The increase in the capital element of the DEL arises from take up of end of year flexibility on the Capital Modernisation Fund. The increase will be charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

CABINET OFFICE

Winter Supplementary Estimate

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Winter Supplementary Estimate, the Cabinet Office DEL (Departmental Expenditure Limit) will be decreased by £54,720,000 from £315,879,000 to £261,159,000, the gross administration costs limit will be decreased by £75,614,000 from £240,227,000 to £164,613,000 and the net administration costs limit will be decreased by £ 106,000 from £3,028,000 to £2,922,000.

Within the DEL change the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

£ 000

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
-77,107	206,444	206,444	-	22,387	54,715	54,715	-

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from Machinery of Government transfers of £113,301,000 to other departments; a claim on the reserve of £36,300,000 and an increase in the negative DEL of the Government Car and Despatch Agency of £106,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from additions from the Capital Modernisation Fund of £15,000,000, transfers from the Home Office of £8,000,000 and Machinery of Government transfers to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of £613,000.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers and charged to the DEL reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Winter Supplementary Estimate

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Lord Chancellor's Departments (including Northern Ireland Court Service and Public Records Office) DEL will be increased by £67,866,000 from £2,833,287,000 to £2,901,153,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £20,315,000 from £695,799,000 to £716,114,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table.

	Resources				*Capital*			
	Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
TOTAL	46,971	2,777,230	2,543,516	233,714	20,895	123,923	90,431	33,492

The change in the resource element of the DEL is the net effect of: take up of £1,000,000 administration costs from the Policy Innovation Fund; take up of £243,000 resources from the Invest to Save Budget; take up of £34,931,000 in relation to the Criminal Justice System (CIS) Reserve from the Home Office, of which £14,224,000 is administration costs; take up of transfers totalling £210,000 resources from the Home Office, of which £45,000 is administration costs; a transfer of £20,000 resources to the Home Office; a transfer of £4,322,000 resources from the Office of Government Commerce; a transfer of £26,000 resources from the Office for National Statistics; take up of Invest to Save Budget end year flexibility of £268,000 resources, of which £226,000 is administration costs; to take up end year flexibility of £3,820,000 administration costs relating to the Criminal Justice System (CIS) Reserve; and a transfer of £1,171,000 resources from capital grant utilising the 2 ½ per cent. capital to resource allowance.

The change in the Public Records Office resource element of DEL arises from: the take up of £1,000,000 administration costs from end year flexibility.

The change in the capital element of the DEL is the net effect of: take up of £1,100,000 resources from the Capital Modernisation Fund for HM Land Registry; take up of £36,000 resources from the Invest to Save Budget; take up of £8,650,000 Round 1 Capital Modernisation Fund from the Home Office; take up of £8,000,000 in relation to the Criminal Justice System (CJS) Reserve from the Home Office; take up Capital Modernisation Fund end year flexibility of £4,215,000; take up of Invest to Save Budget end year flexibility of £65,000 resources; and a transfer of £1,171,000 to resource grant utilising the 2½ per cent. capital to resource allowance.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers, increases to Appropriations in Aid and take up of End Year Flexibility entitlements and will therefore not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRANSPORT

Airports

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): In October, Kent County Council and Medway Council applied for a judicial review of the Government's decision not to include any options for new runways at Gatwick airport in the consultation on airport capacity. The Government had taken that decision after careful consideration of various factors, including our conclusion that it would be wrong to seek to overturn the legal agreement entered into by West Sussex County Council and BAA (then in government ownership), preventing construction of a further runway at Gatwick before 2019.

Yesterday, Mr Justice Maurice Kay held that the Government were wrong not to have included any options for new runways at Gatwick. However, the Court granted permission for the Government to appeal against this decision. Having considered the matter, I believe it would be wrong to extend the uncertainty that would inevitably result from a lengthy appeal process, and so I have therefore decided to accept the judgment. As a result we will include Gatwick in the consultation. This will regrettably mean that the publication of the White Paper will be delayed.

I will make a further statement setting out how we intend to proceed shortly.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Winter Supplementary Estimate

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the Department for International Development DEL for 2002/2003 will be increased by £37,437,000 from £3,339,521,000 to £3,376,958,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

a transfer of £40,000,000 resource from the Unallocated Subhead (RfR1: E3) to tbc Bilateral Subhead;

to give effect to the transfer of £3,700,000 resource from the Central Reserve as a contribution to the Commonwealth Education Fund;

to give effect to the take up of DEL end year flexibility of £28,757,000 resource on programme expenditure;

a transfer of £20,000 resource to the Home Office representing a contribution to membership of the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO);

a transfer of £5,000,000 resource from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Global Conflict Prevention .

The increase will be met by inter-departmental transfers or from the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

CDC

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The purpose of the public-private partnership for CDC is to maximise the creation and long-term growth of viable businesses in poorer developing countries, by making responsible investments and mobilising private capital alongside public funds. These objectives have remained constant since the 1997 and 2000 White Papers on International Development. CDC has made good progress in implementing the Investment Policy agreed in 1999, raising private finance and co-financing for investments in poorer countries, and introducing private sector

disciplines. This has been achieved in some of the most difficult markets and economic conditions for many years.

In order to support CDC's progress and the mobilisation of increased private investment in poorer developing countries, I have recently approved two further proposals. Firstly, CDC's business will focus more sharply on regions (South Asia and Africa) and on sectors (power, Small and Medium Enterprises, and infrastructure) that are priorities for DFID and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Following a review commissioned by the Board earlier this year, CDC is already implementing a new business plan approved by its Board, focusing on these areas. Secondly, CDC will be reorganised, separating into two corporate entities and a family of Funds:-

an Investment Company (the existing CDC, with some amendments to its Articles), which would continue to own the cash and investment assets of CDC and its subsidiaries. The Investment Company will remain wholly-owned by the Government during the reorganisation, and will be responsible for ensuring that HMG's capital adheres to CDC's Investment Policy.

a new Management Company will be formed during 2003, subject to regulatory and other procedures being completed. The Management Company will raise and invest capital from the Investment Company, other Development Finance Institutions and private investors, following responsible business principles and providing leadership and supervision of a family of Funds.

The initial Funds will include Funds for Africa, South Asia, the power sector and the SME sector. Each Fund will be managed by a dedicated fund management subsidiary of the Management Company. The new Funds will be run on a commercial basis that attracts capital from private investors and Development Finance Institutions, to meet the Governments objective of increasing investment in poorer developing countries.

The structure of a management company and a family of Funds is an accepted norm in the international fund management industry. The advantages of adopting this structure in CDC are as follows.

Each Fund would have its own focus and investment strategy, target rate of return, risk profile and other characteristics. Potential private investors will be able to identify Funds that fit into their own investment strategies. The structure also enables specialised managers to be allocated to each Fund, and for incentives to be directly linked to individual Fund performance.

Under current management arrangements, there is no competition for the management of CDC's capital. In the medium term, the Investment Company will be able to procure investment management services on a competitive basis, and to invest in Funds launched by other companies as well as by the Management Company. The reorganisation will therefore lead to a more competitive market for the management of investments in poorer developing countries.

The Government have concluded that, under current market conditions, we cannot obtain value for money from a sale of shares in CDC Group pic as currently constituted. We are currently exploring with our advisers an appropriate corporate and shareholding structure for the Management Company and its subsidiaries, including the possible participation of private institutions and employees. In the long term, it is possible that equity in the Investment Company could also be offered for sale, when the right conditions obtain.

The Investment Policy will remain broadly unchanged. The CDC Universe will apply to both the Investment Company and the Management Company, as will the responsible business principles. The requirements that 70 per cent. of investments should be for poorer developing countries, and 50 per cent. for sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, will apply to the Investment Company's capital but not to third party capital. The 50 per cent. target for sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia will no longer be an "aim", but will be placed on the same mandatory basis over five-year rolling periods as the 70 per cent. target.

I have informed the Select Committee of these proposals, which I believe will enable CDC to mobilise increased investment in the poorer developing countries, and make a stronger contribution to our goal of eliminating poverty.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 28 November 2002

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Young Runaways

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): In March 2001 my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked the Social Exclusion Unit to lead a project

"to make running away less likely, and to ensure that runaways' long and short-term needs are safely met".

Today we are publishing the final report on young runaways. It sets out a practical package of measures to ensure that young runaways will get the extra help and support to keep them safe and to address their problems.

Running away is a huge problem. Each year more than 77,000 young people run away: one in 14 will end up surviving by begging, stealing or getting involved in prostitution and drug-dealing. 20,000 each year are under 11 years old. Running away is a problem in itself but it can also mean that young people are more likely to suffer from social exclusion later in life with a higher risk of homelessness, crime and drug use.

We are putting the systems in place to make sure no-one falls through the net. This report shows how services must join together to work for the young person at risk. Practical measures will help to prevent young people from running in the first place. If they do run they will have someone to locate and make contact with them, help to negotiate a way home, a safe place to stay and access to longer-term help.

The report highlights how mainstream services need to work more effectively together to address the factors that can lead to running away and other problems. The Green Paper on Children at Risk announced in this House by the Prime Minister on 30 October will develop radical options for improving services for all children and young people at risk.

Later today, I will be visiting Step Forward, a Safe in the City project that provides a range of effective services to this vulnerable group, to launch the publication of the runaways report.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House.

WALES

Departmental Expenditure Limit

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): The Wales departmental expenditure limit will be increased by £62,325,000 from £9,283,912,000 to £9,346,237,000. The increase is a result of:

(i) the take up of end year flexibility of £55,000,000 for the National Assembly for Wales.

(ii) the take up of end year flexibility of £500,000 for the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales in respect of Administration Costs.

(iii) additional provision of

- £2,356,000 consequential from DEFRA's claim on the reserve for local authority assistance in dealing with waste fridges

(iv) net transfers from other government departments of £4,469,000.

These transfers are as follows:

(i) £1,188,000 from the Home Office for the Partnership Development Fund,

(ii) £436,000 from the Home Office for cover administration costs of the Crime Reduction Unit

(iii) £360,000 from the Home Office for Active Community Match Funding—Programme Grant

(iv) £159,000 from the Department of Work and Pensions for New Deal training inspections

(v) £1,335,000 from DTI for the Broadband Fund

(vi) £34,000 from the Home Office for the Golden Jubilee Awards

(vii) £557,000 from the Department for Education and Skills for Access Bursaries

(viii) £400,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry for the Manufacturing Advisory Service

The Wales Office administration costs limit will be increased by £500,000 from £2,330,000 to £2,830,000.

The increase in DEL will be offset by transfers from other Departments, from the reserve or take up of end-year flexibility and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Winter Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the Department of Trade and Industry's DEL will be increased by £406,225,000 from £4,357,019,000 to £4,763,244,000 and the Administration Costs limit will be increased by £17,483,000 from £405,704,000 to £423,187,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table:

Resources (£000)				Capital (£000)			
Change	New DEL	Of which: voted	Non-voted	Change	New DEL	Of which: voted	Non-voted
187,346	3,722,729	1,142,958	2,579,771	218,879	1,040,515	-15,607	1,056,122

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from

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(i) utilisation of £5,892,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for the Small Business Service Invest to Save Local Competitiveness project;

(ii) utilisation of £11,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for Rover Task Force, of which £520,000 is to be transferred to the Department for Education and Skills for MG Rover training;

(iii) utilisation of £40,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund in respect of the Evidence Based Policy Fund project;

(iv) of £40,000 from non-Voted Regional Development Agency expenditure to record increased voted Departmental expenditure on the Evidence Based Policy Fund project;

(v) transfer of £105,000 from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to the Farm Business Advice Scheme;

(vi) transfer of £156,000 to British Trade International in respect of Japan Electronics Business Association and Pacific Rim Electronics Business Association;

(vii) utilisation of £15,000,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision for the Partnership Fund (Partnership at Work with the TUC & CBI);

(viii) transfer of £400,000 to the National Assembly for Wales for Manufacturing Advice Service for Regional Centre for Manufacturing Excellence in Wales;

(ix) transfer of £116,000 from the Department for Education and Science for the Marine Skills Database Project;

(x) an increase of £22,133,000 in non Voted Regional Development Agency expenditure offset by an increase in voted appropriations in aid of an equivalent amount to reflect additional receipts from several other government departments (mainly the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister);

(xi) utilisation of £5,700,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for University Innovation Centres;

(xii) utilisation of £4,600,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for additional funding to Ofcom;

(xiii) transfer of £30,000 to the Home Office for Crimes Against Business;

(xiv) transfer of £30,000 to the Department for Education and Science for Support for Enterprising Communities;

(xv) transfer of £2,538,000 to the Scottish Executive for innovative schemes to extend broadband networks;

(xvi) transfer of £1,335,000 to the National Assembly for Wales for innovative schemes to extend broadband networks;

(xvii) utilisation of £14,400,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for ISERBS;

(xviii) transfer of £ 100,000 in relation to Invest UK DTI Funded Overseas the FCO;

(xix) utilisation of £2,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for development of "Oracle Hi";

(xx) transfer of £225,000 to the Scottish Executive in connection with Stop Now Orders (New Burdens);

(xxi) utilisation of £2,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase the department's subscription to the International Atomic Energy Agency;

(xxii) utilisation of £ 1,100,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund increased expenditure on the Partnership Training Fund manufacturing package;

(xxiii) utilisation of £1,300,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund increased expenditure on the National Minimum Wage;

(xxiv) utilisation of £2,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund increased expenditure on duty to consider flexible working;

(xxv) utilisation of £900,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for legal costs;

(xxvi) utilisation of £348,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement transferred from the Department for Education and Science for the Work-life Balance Invest to Save project;

(xxvii) utilisation of £8,700,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to make an agreed programme to administration virement in support of ACAS, the Insolvency Service, coal health claims and the Office of Civil Nuclear Security);

(xxviii) utilisation of £1,500,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to make an agreed programme to administration virement in support of the establishment of the Liabilities Management Authority;

(xxix) utilisation of £4,500,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in support of the establishment of the Liabilities Management Authority;

(xxx) utilisation of £256,000 in administration costs in respect of the Evidence Based Policy Capital Modernisation Fund Project;

(xxxi) utilisation of £548,000 of Invest to Save funding for Claims Handling in the Redundancy Payments Scheme (CHIRPS);

(xxxii) transfer of £3,230,000 in administration costs, £200,000 in programme and £7,005,000 in non Voted expenditure from the Cabinet Office to reflect Machinery of Government transfers in respect of Women and Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission;

(xxxiii) utilisation of £300,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund National Weights and Measures Laboratory market development;

(xxxiv) transfer of £3,319,000 from capital to administration in connection with British Trade International to fund IT development under the ELGAR PFI contract;

(xxxv) utilisation of £6,700,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase non Voted Coal Authority expenditure for minewater liabilities;

(xxxvi) utilisation of £5,800,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for the Competition Commission;

(xxxvii) utilisation of £300,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase non voted expenditure of SITPRO;

(xxxviii) removal from DEL of £5,000 in voted recoveries of coal health claim overpayments.

RfR2

(i) utilisation of £25,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision to increase Grant to the Royal Society for the foot and mouth enquiry;

(ii) utilisation of £9,076,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for Knowledge Transfer;

(iii) transfer of £75,000 to the Department of Health for Human Genetic Research;

(iv) utilisation of £1,023,000 from the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for increased non voted expenditure by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council;

(v) utilisation of £8,000,000 from the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to make an agreed capital to resource virement for non voted expenditure by the Medical Research Council;

(vi) utilisation of £712,000 from the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase non Voted expenditure by the Medical Research Council;

(vii) utilisation of £4,450,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase non Voted expenditure by the Natural Environment Research Cduncil;

(viii) utilisation of £5,352,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase non Voted expenditure by the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council;

(ix) utilisation of £83,000 of the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to increase non-voted expenditure of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

2. There is also an increase in non-Voted expenditure on liabilities of £27,700,000 (£20,100,000 on the Coal Operating Subsidy, £2,000,000 on Enemy Property Claims, £2,900,000 on coal redundancy packages and £2,700,000 on compensation to trawlermen), and the removal from DEL of £357,400 of non voted expenditure on coal health liabilities and £399,895,000 of CFER receipts related to coal pension fund surpluses.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from

RfRl

(i) utilisation of £1,400,000 capital from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for Rover Task Force;

(ii) utilisation of £3,250,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund project for business.gov;

(iii) utilisation of £4,300,000 capital from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for University Innovation Centres;

(iv) utilisation of £ 10,100,000 from the unused balance of the Department's capital end-year flexibility entitlement to offset a shortfall in launch aid receipts;

(v) utilisation of £48,500,000 from the unused balance of the Department's capital end-year flexibility entitlement for the Rolls Royce Trent 600 and 900 projects;

(vi) provision of £48,500,000 from the reserve for the Rolls Royce Trent 600 and 900 projects;

(vii) utilisation of £2,700,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund increased expenditure on Parental Leave;

(viii) utilisation of £700,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for the Employment Tribunals Service;

(ix) utilisation of £233,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year
flexibility entitlement for the Employment Tribunals Service Capital Modernisation Fund project;

(x) utilisation of £10,000 capital from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement transferred from the Department for Education and Science for the Work-life Balance Invest to Save project;

(xi) transfer of £3,319,000 from capital to administration in connection with British Trade International to fund IT development under the ELGAR PFI contract;

(xii) virement of £5,000,000 from non Voted Regional Development Agency expenditure to departmental capital for accommodation;

(xiii) transfer of £15,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision (capital) to fund a grant to the UK Science Parks Association;

(xiv) utilisation of £8,500,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for the Competition Commission.

RfR2

(i) utilisation of £1,458,000 from the unused balance of the Department's resource end-year flexibility entitlement to make a virement to capital to fund increased non voted expenditure by the Natural Environment Research Council;

(ii) utilisation of £4,358,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund increased non voted expenditure by the Natural Environment Research Council;

(iii) utilisation of £790,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to fund increased non voted expenditure by the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council;

(iv) utilisation of £87,399,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for the Joint Infrastructure Fund.

Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Office of Telecommunications DEL will be increased by £1,000 from -£222,000 to -£221,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £563,000 from £18,015,000 to £18,578,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table:

	Resources (£000)				Capital (£000)		
Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
1	637	-221	858	0	804	766	38

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the partial take up of £713,000 end year flexibility, of which £472,000 is required for additional consultancy, £91,000 for legal costs and £150,000 for an extension to the twinning with Poland programme under the EU's PHARE initiative. The increase will be offset by a corresponding increase in appropriations in aid.

Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Office of Fair Trading resource DEL will be increased by £77,000 from £48,168,000 to £48,245,000, and the administration costs limits will be increased by £77,000 from £48,985,000 to £49,062,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

	Resources (£000)				Capital (£000)		
Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*	Change	New DEL	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
77	48,245	48,245	0	0	2,398	2,398	0

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the following:

(i) the take up of end year flexibility of £77,000 in respect of the ring-fenced Invest to Save Budget approved by Parliament.

(ii) the provision of a decrease of £717k in gross resources and (ii) Appropriations in Aid, resulting from a reduction in expected income from Competition Act notifications and recovered legal fees, the departure of minor occupiers from the building, and the end to the provision of common services to other departments. In addition, the reflection of changes in accounting policy on EC receipts to bring OFT in line with other government departments.

The increases in the above Estimates will be offset by transfers or charges to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of Public expenditure.

Power Station (Marchwood)

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): I have today decided to grant consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to Marchwood Power Ltd for the construction of a 860 gas-fired power station at Marchwood in Hampshire. The station has also today been given clearance as a gas-fired station under section 14 of the Energy Act 1976 and planning permission for the station has been deemed to be granted subject to 50 conditions agreed with the New Forest District Council and the Hampshire County Council.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rights of Way

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I am pleased to announce that on 16 November The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Commencement No.2) Order 2002 (S.I. 2002/2833)(C.89), was made bringing into force the rights of way improvement planning provisions in sections 60 to 62 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 on 21 November 2002. We are now publishing the guidance to local highway authorities on planning improvements to their rights of way network, which takes account of responses to the consultation paper that we issued at the end of last year. The guidance is being sent out to all local authorities in England.

The guidance clarifies the new duty on local authorities to make a strategic and forward-looking assessment of their rights of way network, thinking about how any shortcomings might be overcome by making use of the powers they already have. This new

approach will be of particular use in those areas that are tourist destinations, where the local economy is heavily dependent on the income that visitors bring. However, last year's foot-and-mouth outbreak showed just how important public rights of way are to rural businesses and communities generally.

Access is also important to local people. Expanding our public rights of way network and improving access brings great health benefits. The changes don't have to be major. Sometimes the creation of a short connecting path is all that is necessary to provide a useful local cut through, to provide access to a local beauty spot, or to make the final link in a circular walk.

Nor is it just about walkers. The rights of way network also provides access to the countryside for other types of users, and the planning process should look at how well they are catered for. One major aim is to increase provision for horse riders, carriage drivers and cyclists. We also want to increase access for those who cannot easily use all the current paths, particularly those with mobility problems and the blind or partially sighted.

Some local authorities do an excellent job of maintaining and promoting their local footpaths but I know that there is concern that some local authorities fail to fulfil their existing duties and may be slow to plan for and implement their rights of way improvements. There are a number of ways in which we are trying to address these issues.

First, we have given local authorities extra resources for the new obligations under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2002 and I wrote to every local authority in England to remind them that the resources are there in the local government support grant. It is for local authorities to achieve the intended outcome.

Secondly, we are sponsoring the Countryside Agency to work with eight authorities, one from each region of England, to provide exemplar planning between October 2002 and October 2003. This will help to develop good practice and the lessons learned will be disseminated to other authorities at regular intervals. It is intended that this exemplar planning will demonstrate the value of planning to improve the network for people of all levels of interest, ability and experience.

Finally, we want to achieve the long-term sustainability of the network while reducing the number of separate planning requirements. This is in line with the Government's wish to give local authorities additional freedoms and flexibilities. Rights of way improvement planning will therefore be incorporated into the local transport planning process from 2005 onwards, when the next 5-year Local Transport Plans are due to be produced. In this way we intend to ensure that the full importance of the rights of way is stressed in the light of the contribution it can make to transport, recreation and health. This will encourage a focused and joined up approach by local authorities. It is envisaged that rights of way improvement planning will be a distinct strand within the new Local Transport Plans. The revised *Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans* (planned for 2004) will cover this point.

In the meantime, local highway authorities should use the new guidance, being published tomorrow, to plan effective improvements to their rights of way network in line with their new duty. Under the provisions of section 60 to 62 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, local highway authorities are required by law to prepare the first rights of way improvement plans within five years. We suggest that local highway authorities prepare them earlier than this if possible. Indeed, it is encouraging to know that many authorities have already started on the planning process. This work will make a positive difference and will be every bit as valid after rights of way improvement planning is incorporated into the local transport planning process

A copy of the commencement order and statutory guidance have been placed in the House of Commons Library. . Further information can be found on the Department's website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/index.htm. A copy of the summary of the responses to the consultation exercise earlier this year is also on the website.

Access to Land

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I am pleased to announce that we have decided that the new right for the public to walk on mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land will be rolled out on a region by region basis. We are convinced that the best approach is to give walkers the right to walk in open countryside and on registered common land as early as possible. Rather than wait for the mapping process to be completed for the whole country, I intend to open up land in the first two regions, the South East and Central Southern England, to public access during the summer of 2004.

This is a demanding timetable which requires conclusive maps for those regions to be available, restrictions on access and necessary exclusions to be in place and guidance and codes of practice to be available to walkers and landowners. It is most important that all these mechanisms are in force in each region before any access land is made available to the public to ensure that the interests of both land managers and walkers are safeguarded. We expect all access land to be opened not later than the end of 2005.

Opening some access land more than a year earlier than originally planned shows our commitment to making the provisions of Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 a reality. Because of that Act, people will be able to walk on land in some of the most beautiful areas of the countryside that were previously off-limits and rural businesses in those areas will benefit from new trading opportunities.

In bringing the new right of access into force, we have maintained a careful balance between the rights of walkers and the rights of land managers. It does not affect land managers' discretion to use or develop land as they think best, taking into account other regulations governing changes of land use. In the vast majority of cases it is likely to have very little impact on operational practices. Owners and occupiers will be able to close their land for up to 28 days each year for any reason, and to seek further restrictions or exclusions of access where necessary.

Autumn Performance Report

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' first autumn Performance Report was published on 27 November 2002. This report is a new requirement under the revised framework for Departments to report on progress towards their Public Service Agreement targets. Copies of the report have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

TRANSPORT

SRA Board Appointments

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): I am pleased to inform the House, that I have appointed three new non-executive members to the board of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA).

Urmila Banerjee CBE, Janet Lewis-Jones and David Norgrove will be appointed for four years from 1 December 2002.

These new appointments will greatly strengthen the board by bringing particular skills and understanding of the interface between Government and industry; consumer issues and perspectives, and financial management. My decision to appoint Janet Lewis-Jones was taken after consultation with the National Assembly for Wales in accordance with sections 202 (3) and 202 (5) of the Transport Act 2000. She is Welsh, lives in Wales and is therefore familiar with the special requirements and circumstances of Wales in relation to the railways.

From December 1st, the SRA Board will consist of the following members:

Board Member	*Expiry Date of Current Appointment*
Richard Bowker (Chair & Chief Exec.)	November 2006
David Quarmby (Deputy Chair)	November 2004
Lew Adams OBE	November 2004
Urmila Banerjee CBE	November 2006
David Begg	April 2005
Willie Gallagher	April 2005
David Grayson	April 2005
Pen Kent	November 2004
Janet Lewis-Jones	November 2006
Jeremy Mayhew	April 2005
David Norgrove	November 2006

All non-executive members receive annual remuneration of £14,190, with the exception of the Deputy Chair, David Quarmby and the Chair of the Audit Committee, Pen Kent, who receive £18,919.

HEALTH

Autumn Performance Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The Food Standards Agency's Autumn Performance Report, Cm 5694, was laid before Parliament today.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

NHS Pension Scheme

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I have agreed with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that, from April 2003, the National Health Service pension scheme will assume its full liability for pensions increase costs. The change, which will bring the National Health Service into line with other public service schemes, will mean an increase in employer contributions from 7 to 14 per cent. of pay. Employee contributions will remain unchanged.

The additional costs will be fully covered by a transfer of funds into the Department of Health's departmental expenditure limit (DEL) baseline. This will be extra funding, on top of expenditure plans announced in the last Budget, and is included in the Chancellor's pre-Budget Report made yesterday. This means there will be no reduction in the resources already earmarked for healthcare.

Arrangements for increasing the employer contribution rate will be phased in with costs paid centrally from the Department's DEL in the first year. It is expected that employers will be charged the higher rate from April 2004.

A Departmental working group has been remitted to develop detailed implementation plans for handling the transfer. Alongside the financial arrangements for transferring and allocating resources, it will look at the human resource aspects of the change. This will include improving recognition of the full value of National Health Service pension scheme in recruitment, retention and return to service as well as the full costs of employment.

The new 14 per cent employer contribution rate is based on the Government actuary's emerging findings in his latest valuation of the National Health Service pension scheme. The Government actuary's report is expected to be published in the new year and copies will be placed in the Library.

NHS Learning and Research

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): On 13 June 2002, my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, (Lord Hunt of Kings Heath) announced a joint Ministerial review of education, training and research in the National Health Service in order to ensure that new management structures are working effectively, and committed the Government to announcing the terms of reference for this review before the end of the year.

My noble Friend Lord Hunt, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, Department for Education and Skills (Mrs Hodge), Ms Jane Hutt, Minister for Health and Social Services at the National Assembly for Wales and I have agreed the terms of reference. Prominent among the issues that led to the announcement of the review was that primary care trusts (PCTs) in their effort to deliver improved local patient care also focussed on education and research. The terms of reference directly tackle this concern and are, in the light of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002, to:

review the role of PCTs in ensuring the right balance is struck between care for NHS patients, learning and research;

consider the responsibilities of PCTs in supporting research and learning across all health care professions in the NHS and identify those responsibilities that are proving difficult to achieve;

report to Ministers by December 2003, including any recommendations for action that may be required to enable PCTs to discharge their responsibilities more effectively; and

advise how the findings might inform the process of implementing local health boards in Wales and the Welsh Assembly's strategy on continuing professional development.

In line with commitments already given by my noble Friend Lord Hunt, the review will:

be carried out jointly by the Department of Health, Department for Education and Skills and the National Assembly for Wales;

be overseen by Ministers from each Department;

cover the full range of healthcare professions, including but not limited to doctors;

report by December 2003, and

provide an opportunity to consult widely, including with experts in the fields of health, education, and research.

The review will be overseen, on Ministers' behalf, by the newly formed strategic learning and research advisory group for health and social care which has been set up specifically to improve and oversee joint working at the interface between the health and social care and education sectors at central government level, and which the Permanent Secretaries of the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills jointly chair.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) departmental expenditure limits (DELs) will be increased by £602,164,000 from £55,874,091,000 to £56,476,255,000 and the administration cost limits (ACL) will increase by £8,952,000 from £370,830,000 to £379,782,000. The Department of Health DEL will be increased by £585,214,000 from £55,756,416,000 to £56,341,630,000 and the ACL will increase by £6,136,000 from £318,527,000 to £324,663,000. The Food Standards Agency DEL will be increased by £16,950,000 from £117,675,000 to £134,625,000 and the ACL will increase by £2,816,000 from £52,303,000 to £55,119,000. The impact on resource and capital are set out in the following table.

Resources Change	*New DEL*	*Of which voted*	*Non-voted*	*Capital Change*	New DEL	*Of which voted*	*£'000 Non-voted*
Department of Health DEL 734,761	53,992,685	54,245,237	-252,552	-149,547	2,348,945	109,765	2,239,180
Food Standards Agency DEL 16,950	133,988	133,988	0	0	637	637	0
Total DH/ FSA Group DEL 751,711	54,126,673	54,379,225	-252,552	-149,547	2,349,582	110,402	2,239,180

The change in the resource element of the DEL for the Department of Health arises from: the take up of end year flexibility £404,844,000 for health authority and central allocations as set out in Table 6 of the public expenditure 2001–02 provisional outturn White Paper Cm 5574 published in July 2002; a change in the level of National Health Service trust depreciation £184,000,000; a net transfer from the Home Office of £3,900,000 comprising £1,824,000 for match funded social care projects, £938,000 community projects relating to assessment and treatment of people with severe personality disorder, £673,000 for a contribution towards the Victoria Climbie Inquiry, £450,000 for Broadmoor hospital pilot ward, £30,000 for a survey of smoking, drinking and drug use in young people, offset by £15,000 for a grant to Mediation UK to recruit volunteer service managers; from the Scottish Ex[illegible] £385,000 for a contribution towards th[illegible]rsing Midwives Council; from the Office for National Statistics £130,000 (£127,000 administration costs) for the neighbourhood statistics programme; from the Department of Trade and Industry £75,000 (administration costs) for a contribution towards the costs of the human genetics commission.

These increases are offset by a transfer to the Department for Education and Skills of £8,120,000 for drug prevention and the healthy schools programme.

The Department of Health's administration cost limit has increased by £6.136,000 from £318,527,000 to £324,663,000. In addition to the changes detailed above there is a transfer of £7,500,000 for education and training offset by £1,566,000 for hospital episode [illegible]stics, the disability equipment evaluation programme, the NHS appointments commission and the standing committee for hospitals of the European Union.

The increase in the FSA DEL is the result of take-up of end year flexibility of £16,950,000 (of which £2,816,000 is administration costs). The FSA manages it resource spend over the three year Government spending review period. This end year flexibility is needed to address future FSA and meat hygiene services funding pressures that have already been identified.

As a result of these changes the gross administration cost limit for the FSA has increased by £2,816,000 to £55,119,000.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers and take up of end year flexibility and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Farm Incomes

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I am pleased to report to the House that forecasts for this year suggest an encouraging rise in farm incomes, of 11 per cent (9 per cent in real terms), in comparison to 2001.

We recognise that farmers are experiencing hard times, therefore any increase in incomes is welcome news. This is the second year running that there has been an increase—a reversal of a sharp decline since 1995, although we recognise this remains £2.99 billion below the yearly average for TIFF, for the period 1989 to 1994.

These increases reflect the efforts of farmers to improve business performance. Government is playing its part by investing in the rural economy. There is a lot more to do, but we are working with the industry to create the right conditions for a sustainable and competitive future for farmers.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Autumn Performance Report

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): The Work and Pensions' Autumn Performance Report, which details the Department's progress against its Public Service Agreement objectives since spring 2002, has been published today. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) inspection report on Caerphilly County Borough Council was published today and copies of the report in English and Welsh have been placed in the Library.

The report finds that Caerphilly County Borough Council does not have an up-to-date corporate document that sets out the aims and objectives for the benefit service.

The council placed an emphasis on paying benefit quickly and the achievement of this compromised the aims of getting payments right first time and deterring fraud. From its sample, the report finds that 100 per cent of Rent Rebate and Council Tax Benefit, and 84 per cent of Rent Allowance claims were processed within 14 days of all information being available. The council had no backlogs of work to hinder the claims processing times. However, the council failed to routinely verify information and evidence in support of claims. Security was not an integral part of the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Caerphilly County Borough Council had not implemented the Verification Framework and had no plans to do so. From its sample, the report finds that the quality of verification was poor compared to the Verification Framework benchmark and that the gateway to the benefits system was weak.

The report finds that the council effectively administered renewal claims and ensured continuity of benefit payments to claimants. However, over 1,000 claims were not renewed in 2000/01 and the council took limited action to establish the reasons.

The council dealt with changes of circumstances promptly, pursued overpayments of benefit vigorously and had an effective rate of recovery. The council made use of legal action and debt collection agencies to recover debt where other recovery options had failed.

The council investigated benefit fraud and had completed successful prosecutions. However, there was some scope for improvement in working with other organisations and in the quality and speed of investigations.

Management reporting and risk analysis also needed improvement, as the lack of reliable management information and risk analysis impacted on the council's ability to effectively manage its benefit service and counter fraud activity.

In 2000/01, Caerphilly County Borough Council administered approximately* £39.5 million in housing benefits.

My Rt hon Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Tenancy Deposits

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I am pleased to announce today the publication of a consultation paper on tenancy deposits. The research report on the pilot tenancy deposit scheme is also to be published in the week beginning 16 December. Summaries of both documents are also being published today. Copies of these documents will be placed in the Library of the House. The consultation paper will initiate a debate on what action might be taken to address disputes over tenancy deposits.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Winter Supplementary Estimate

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Attorney General's Departments DEL will be increased by £65,190,000 from £442,414,000 to £507,604,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £61,110,000 from £307,588,000 to £368,698,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table:

Resources Change	*New DEL*	*Of which voted*	*Non-voted*	*Capital Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which voted*	*Non-voted*
£63,490,000	£490,354,000	£479,211,000	£11,143,000	£1,700,000	£17,250,000	£17,250,000	0

The Crown Prosecution Service's DEL will be increased by £60,190,000 from £402,978,000 to £463,168,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £59,990,000 from £282,059,000 to £342,049,000. The increase in the resource element of the DEL arises from a transfer of £58,490,000 resources and £1,700,00 capital from the Criminal Justice System Reserve. The increases will be funded from the Criminal Justice System reserve and therefore do not constitute a claim on the reserve. The increases in the resource and capital elements of the DEL arise from speeding up the reform of the CPS to allow it to contribute fully to criminal justice targets.

The Serious Fraud Office DEL will increase- by £5,000,000 from £21,950,000 to £26,950,000 and the Administration Costs Limit will increase by £1,120,000 from £15,390,000 to £16,510,000

This Supplementary Estimate provides additional resources for the administration costs and operational costs incurred by the Serious Fraud Office to fund higher than expected caseload activity and expenditure.

The increases will be funded directly from the Consolidated Fund Contingency Reserve.

DEFENCE

Royal Artillery Regiment

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): We have been looking at how to optimise the Royal Artillery to meet the demands of the new security environment.

The Army currently has two combined regular Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) Unmanned Air Vehicle (UAV) (Phoenix) Regiments; 32 Regiment Royal Artillery based at Larkhill, Wiltshire and 39 Regiment Royal Artillery at Harlow Hill near Newcastle. Each of these regiments has two batteries of nine MLRS launchers, and one battery of three troops of UAVs (Phoenix).

As a result of past successful deployments the capability of Phoenix has become more widely recognised and valued within the military command structure. It has, therefore, been decided that a revised structure would provide a better focus for UAVs. In line with the direction set in the New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review this new structure will establish UAVs as a valuable asset for surveillance and intelligence gathering in addition to being Royal Artillery target acquisition assets to support the Indirect Fire System. The impact on the Royal Artillery will be the separation of these capabilities and the creation of discrete regiments; UAV (Phoenix) at Larkhill and MLRS at Harlow Hill. The reorganisation will require inter-regimental moves of complete sub-units but will not have any significant impact on the overall numbers of personnel at each site.

The Field Standard B2 variant of the Rapier missile system has reached the end of its useful life and will be withdrawn from service by 31 March 2003. The system is currently operated by 22 Regiment Royal Artillery, based at Kirton-in-Lindsey, Lincolnshire. Following the withdrawal of the Rapier FSB2 equipment, 22 Regiment will undertake a tour in Cyprus, in the infantry role, during the second half of 2003 before it is disbanded in March 2004. Personnel from the regiment will be re-deployed to other Royal Artillery units to support the introduction of planned new "network-centric" capabilities as described in the New Chapter, including the Watchkeeper UAV.

Our future Rapier air defence capability will be based on the more advanced Field Standard C model operated by 16 Regiment Royal Artillery and the Royal Air Force Regiment. The capability of 16 Regiment will be enhanced by the creation of a fourth battery. In addition, we plan to move 16 Regiment from Woolwich to Kirton-in-Lindsey in late 2004. It will then be close to both the Air Warfare Centre at RAF Waddington and the Joint Rapier Training Unit at Honington bringing a number of practical benefits.

TRANSPORT

Streetwork (Halcrow's)

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Regulations under section 74 of the New Road and Street Works Act 1991 came into force in April 2001. These allow highway authorities to charge utility companies for works in the street which overrun an agreed deadline.

Following the implementation of these powers my Department appointed consultants, Halcrow, to monitor their effectiveness in reducing disruption on the highway. Copies of Halcrow's interim report were placed in the libraries of both Houses earlier this year.

Halcrow have now produced their first annual report on these powers: Assessing the Extent of Street Works and Monitoring the Effectiveness of Section 74 in Reducing Disruption. The report consists of two volumes; Volume 1 is the main report and Volume 2 contains accompanying tables and charts. Copies of each have been placed in the libraries of both Houses today.

HOME

In Country Asylum Seekers

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): Following Royal Assent of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 on 7 November 2002 section 55 of that Act will be brought into force on 8 January 2003.

From that date, if an applicant for support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) makes an asylum claim immediately on arrival at the port then support will be granted provided the other criteria for support are fulfilled. If the person fails, without a good reason, to make an asylum claim immediately at the port of arrival then support will be refused unless one of the exceptions applies.

These exceptions cover families with children, those with special needs, those claiming asylum in country following a significant change in circumstances in their country of origin (provided they make their asylum claim at the earliest possible opportunity following that change of circumstances) and those who can show they would otherwise suffer treatment contrary to article 3 European Convention on Human Rights. Persons falling within these exceptions may be granted support (assuming they otherwise qualify for it) even if they have not claimed asylum on arrival at the port.

But apart from these exceptions, we expect all single asylum seekers or couples without children who wish to claim asylum and who want MASS support to make an immediate application for asylum at the port of arrival. It will not be acceptable for an asylum seeker wanting MASS support to postpone making an asylum claim unless there is a very good reason for doing so. And even if there is a good reason for not claiming asylum immediately on arrival at the port, the person must claim asylum as soon as possible thereafter.

The Secretary of State is prohibited by statute from providing support unless he is satisfied that the person claiming support has made the asylum claim as soon as reasonably practicable after arrival in the United Kingdom. In most cases, for those not within the exceptions, that will mean, claiming asylum immediately on arrival at the port.

LORD CHANCELLOR

Freedom of Information Act

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): My right honourable and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has today announced that, in accordance with section 87 (5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, he has laid before Parliament the annual report on the progress made in implementing the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Copies of the Report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. A copy of the Report on the review of legislation prohibiting the disclosure of information will also be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Access to Medicines Working Group

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The report of the UK Working Group on Increasing Access to Essential Medicines in the Developing World was published on Thursday 28 November 2002.

The Working Group was chaired by the Secretary of State for International Development. It's members include representatives from the Department of Health, Department of Trade and Industry and HM Treasury, pharmaceutical industry leaders, representatives of the World Health Organisation, the World Trade Organisation, the European Commission, Charitable Foundations and the Ugandan High Commissioner.

AIDS, TB and Malaria cause six million deaths a year—10% of the world annual death toll. This means the loss of $120 billion value in work and productivity each year mostly in the developing world thus impoverishing families and countries that carry this disease burden. AIDS alone has reduced average national economic growth rates across Africa by 2 to 4 percentage points. Many of these deaths could be prevented with existing treatments—but—just one example—in Africa only one in three people have access to effective malaria treatment.

The report proposes that pharmaceutical companies provide drugs at near to cost price for HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria to the poorest countries, whose governments guarantee that tariffs are removed and reduced cost drugs will not be re-exported. Development agencies commit to working with such governments to develop basic health care systems capable of delivering the drugs to the people in need.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of the House and are also available from the Vote Office and from the Department. It can also be accessed at: www.dfid.gov.uk.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 2 December 2002

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Government Reviews (Consultation)

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I am today launching a soundings exercise on the level of interest in each English region (outside London) in holding a referendum about establishing an elected regional assembly. I will be writing to all Members in the English regions outside London about the soundings exercise to invite their views. Copies of the document haye also been deposited in the Vote Office for convenience.

I am also publishing today, for consultation, a draft of the guidance to the Boundary Committee for England on local government reviews.

Copies of the soundings and consultation papers have been deposited in the House Libraries. They are also available on the ODPM web site. Responses to both the soundings exercise and the consultation on the guidance are requested by 3 March 2003.

The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill currently before Parliament enables the Secretary of State, by order, to specify the region*(s)* to hold a referendum about establishing an elected regional assembly. Before the Secretary of State can order a referendum, the Bill requires that the Boundary Committee for England has been directed to carry out, and has made recommendations arising out of, a local government review of the region. The level of interest in holding a referendum will be a key factor in deciding where a review is to be carried out. So this policy gives people a choice.

Our proposals for elected regional assemblies will increase democracy, not bureaucracy. In regions where people vote to have an elected assembly we intend to streamline government by moving to a wholly unitary local government structure. Before an order causing a referendum to be held in the region can be made, the Boundary Committee will have conducted a review of local government in the region and made its recommendations for the best unitary structure for those parts of the region that currently have both a county and district council.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan (International Security Assistance Force)

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): We welcome the decision by the United Nations' Security Council on 27 November 2002 to adopt Resolution 1444, extending the authority of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to deploy for a further twelve months, from 20 December 2002. The extension comes in recognition of the valuable work undertaken by the ISAF in helping to provide a secure environment in Kabul, allowing the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, headed by President Karzai, to pursue the difficult task of rebuilding the country.

The new Resolution reaffirms the remit of the ISAF as covering Kabul and its immediate environs. The Resolution recognizes that security within Afghanistan is primarily a matter for the Afghans themselves and commends their efforts to establish representative, professional and multi-ethnic security forces.

Germany and the Netherlands have offered to assume jointly the role of ISAF Lead Nation upon the completion of Turkey's tenure in command. The United Kingdom anticipates remaining a significant contributor to the ISAF. At a Force Generation Conference on 27 November, the United Kingdom offered to provide Staff Officers, an Infantry Company and a Bulk Fuel Installation. Together with their associated support forces, these total over three hundred troops, which is consistent in size with our current deployment.

Medical Preparedness

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Smallpox is a deadly and highly contagious disease that could be used as a biological weapon. Currently, we do not assess that there is any immediate threat to our Armed Forces from smallpox. But the consequences of any release of smallpox could be very serious, so we continue to monitor the threat closely, and take precautions.

We continually review the package of defensive measures against chemical and biological attack available to our armed forces, which includes vaccination. We have decided to offer vaccination against smallpox to a small number of specialist military personnel who face a greater risk of exposure to smallpox by virtue of their specialisation. This will include those NBC specialists and specialist medical personnel who would form the spearhead of our defensive response, including vaccination teams, in the event of a confirmed, suspected or threatened release of smallpox. The Department of Health, with whom we are working closely, is planning to vaccinate a similar cohort of healthcare professionals.

As with other vaccines, vaccination against smallpox will be voluntary and on the basis of informed consent.

This work has been taken forward under the cross-Governmental Civil Contingency machinery for which the Home Secretary has overall responsibility.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Council of the European Union

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane):

DECEMBER
2—Brussels—Meeting on Macro Economic Dialogue (Ministerial Troika)
3—Brussels—ECOFIN
2–3—Brussels—Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council

4—Brussels—Meeting of the Presidium
5–6—Brussels—Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
9—Brussels—General Affairs Council
9–10—Brussels—Environment Council
12–13—Copenhagen—European Council
16–19—Brussels—Agricultural & Fisheries Council
19—Brussels—Meeting of the Presidium
20—Brussels—Justice & Home Affairs & Civil Protection Council
20–21—Brussels—Convention Plenary—External Action & Defence Working Group Conclusions

Date	*Location*	*Event*
JANUARY		
9	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
9	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council (to be confirmed)
16	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
20	Brussels	EUROGOUP (evening)
20	Brussels	Convention Plenary
20–21	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
21	Brussels	ECOFIN
24	Nafplion	Employment Council (Ministerial Informal)
27–28	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council
28	Brussels	EU-ASEAN Ministerial
30	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
FEBRUARY		
5	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
6–7	Brussels	Convention Plenary
10–11	Brussels	AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES Council (to be confirmed)
13	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
17	Brussels	EUROGROUP (evening)
18	Brussels	ECOFIN
20	Brussels	EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE Council (to be confirmed)
22	Thessaloniki	Energy Council (Ministerial Informal)
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council Agriculture & Fisheries
26	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
27–28	Brussels	Convention Plenary
27–28	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs Council
28	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
MARCH		
1–2	Ioannina	Informal Education
3	Brussels	Competitiveness Council
4	Brussels	Environment Council
6	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
6	Luxembourg	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
6	Luxembourg	EUROGROUP (evening)
7	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
7	Luxembourg	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
13	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
14–15	Athens	(Informal Defence Meeting)
17–18	Brussels	Convention Plenary
17–18	Luxembourg	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
18–19	Luxembourg	General Affairs & External Relations Council
21	Brussels	**European Council**
27	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
27	Veria	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Ministerial Informal)
27–28	Luxembourg	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
27–28	Athens	EU-Rio Group, EU-MERCOSUR
28–29	Veria	Informal Justice & Home Affairs (Veria)
31	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries council (to be confirmed)
APRIL		
2	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
3–4	Brussels	Convention Plenary
4	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs
4–6	Hania (Crete)	Informal ECOFIN (Ministerial)
5	Lisbon	Europe—Africa Summit
5	Ioannina	Ministerial Meeting on Education (Informal)
10	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
11–13	Chania	ECOFIN (Informal)
14	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
14	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries
16	Athens	European Conference
16	Athens	Signature Of The Accession (Provisional Date)
23	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
24–25	Brussels	Convention Plenary
MAY		
2–4	(Greece)	Gymnich (Informal Foreign Ministers)
5	Athens	Informal Environment (Ministerial)
5–6	Brussels	Education, Youth & Culture Council (to be confirmed)
8	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
12–13	Corfu	Agriculture (Ministerial Informal)
12–13	Brussels	Competitiveness
12	Brussels	EUROGROUP
13	Brussels	ECOFIN
14	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
14	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
15–16	Brussels	Convention Plenary
16	Brussels	EU—ACP Ministerial
16–17	Halkidiki	Informal Regional Policy (Ministerial)
16–18	Cruise off Greece	Informal Transport & Merchant Marine (Ministerial)
17	Brussels	EU—W. Balkans (Zagreb Process)
19	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations (+ Defence)
20	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
22	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
24	Thessaloniki	Informal Culture (Ministerial)
26–27	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
26–27	Athens	EUROMED Conference (Mid Term Ministerial)
27	Brussels	Environment Council
28	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
30–31	Brussels	Convention Plenary
31	St. Petersburg	EU—Russia Summit
JUNE		
2	Brussels	EUROGROUP
2–3	Alexandroupoli	Development Co-operation (Ministerial Informal)
2–3 a	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
3	Brussels	ECOFIN
4	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
5–6	Brussels	Convention Pleanry
5–6	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs Council
5–6	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
11	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
11–12	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
12–13	Brussels	Convention Plenary

Date	*Location*	*Event*
17–18	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
20–21	Thessaloniki	**European Council**
22	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
24	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council

Iraq (Human Rights)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Today I am publishing a report on human rights abuses in Iraq. It is based on intelligence material, first hand accounts of Iraqi victims of torture and oppression, and reports amassed by NGOs over the past decade. The report examines Iraq's record on torture, the treatment of women, prison conditions, arbitrary and summary killings, the persecution of the Kurds and Shia, the harassment of opposition figures outside Iraq and the occupation of Kuwait.

The Iraqi regime's contempt for international law and its attachment to weapons of mass destruction were documented in the government's dossier published on 24 September. Its dreadful human rights record is widely known. But I consider it important that Parliament and the public should have accurate information about the awful reality of Saddam Hussein's policy of regime terror, which sustains his rule inside Iraq.

HEALTH

Contingency Planning

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Since the tragic events of September 11th, the Department of Health has strengthened its plans against any deliberate release of biological agents, including smallpox. We have no evidence of a specific threat of a smallpox attack on the UK. However, it is sensible and prudent to ensure that the NHS can deal effectively with any potential threat.

There are three components to the Department's preparation for response to a possible smallpox emergency: improved vaccine stocks, a plan of action and a cohort of immunised staff who could deal safely with any potential smallpox cases.

We have already taken action to substantially increase our stocks of smallpox vaccine and we have recently begun a second procurement to add to these stocks.

The Department of Health is today publishing an interim plan of action for discussion and comment over the coming month. Under this plan, it is intended to establish 12 Regional Smallpox Response Groups around the UK. They will consist of Infectious disease physicians and paediatricians, public health physicians, microbiologists/ virologists, acute care and communicable disease control nurses and occupational health staff.

This core group of NHS staff will need to be immune to smallpox and therefore able to react quickly and work safely with patients with actual or suspected smallpox. Preparations for the vaccination of these key workers is now underway. I expect these vaccinations to be completed by the end of next month. It is intended to vaccinate around 350 health care staff across the UK. This will be on an entirely voluntary basis with informed consent. The Ministry of Defence, with whom we are working closely, is planning to vaccinate a similar cohort of specialist military personnel.

The Plan also explains how smallpox cases would be handled in various scenarios. The Department of Health's primary strategy would be to contain and 'ring vaccinate' around any outbreak. The teams of vaccinated health care staff are central to delivering this strategy.

These plans are a practical precaution designed to ensure the UK is prepared for any possible smallpox emergency. They are in line with World Health Organisation advice and will be kept under active review.

Similar interim plans are being prepared for publication by the Devolved Administrations. This work has been taken forward under the cross-Governmental Civil Contingency machinery for which the Home Secretary has overall responsibility.

National Health Service Pay Modernisation

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I am pleased to be able to announce that on 28 November negotiators representing the UK Health Departments, NHS employers and NHS trades unions successfully concluded negotiations on a new pay system for NHS staff (with the exception of those within the remit of the Doctors and Dentists Review Body and the most senior managers). It represents the most radical transformation of the NHS pay system since the foundation of the service in 1948. The proposed new system will now go out for consultation with organisations representing NHS staff.

Over the three year period from 2003–04 to 2005–06 the overall package will mean an average increase of 12.5 per cent in basic pay for NHS staff. It will give a 10 per cent pay increase over three years for all staff, plus an average 5.9 per cent in the longer run linked to modernisation.

The proposed new pay system will be based on a new system of job evaluation. This means that the basic pay that NHS staff receive will reflect the knowledge, responsibility, skills and effort required in their job, rather than their historic job title or occupational group. To progress fully in the new pay system, staff will need to demonstrate a level of applied skills and knowledge appropriate to their level of responsibility.

The new system will also introduce clearer rewards for staff who work flexibly outside traditional working hours. It will give extra flexibilities for local NHS employers to create new types of jobs and to make extra payments to reflect recruitment and retention pressures. Instead of almost 650 different staff grades and thousands of different allowances, there will be a simple

set of core terms and conditions based on 8 pay bands, including simple, harmonised arrangements for working hours and annual leave.

The new system is designed to ensure fair pay for staff, based on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, and a clearer system of career progression. It will also directly support modernisation of patient care. It will provide new opportunities for staff to take on new responsibilities, breaking down old-fashioned demarcations and enabling jobs to be re-designed around the needs of the patient. It will produce a more sensible division of labour, with nurses, therapists and health care assistants taking on new roles that improve NHS productivity and free up more of doctors' and other senior clinicians' time for direct patient care.

Clearer rewards for flexible working will help make NHS services more widely available to patients in the evenings and weekends. Improvements in pay, career and training prospects will help recruit an estimated 10,000 more nurses and other health professionals and an estimated 27,000 health care assistants by 2006–07 in England, particularly in high cost areas such as London. A clearer link between pay and development of knowledge and skills will help deliver higher and more consistent standards of NHS patient care.

If the new system is approved following consultation, implementation will start in twelve NHS sites in Spring 2003 with full implementation starting in October 2004.

A summary of the proposed new pay system has been placed in the Library.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 3 December 2002

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Defence

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The aggregate amount of civil defence grants to be made for the financial year 2003–04 is £19,038,000 of which £100,000 will be retained as discretionary grant for special projects and special events deemed of benefit to the wider emergency planning community in England and Wales.

The remaining £18,938,000 will be allocated to individual authorities as set out in the table below.

The grants have been allocated in the same way as last year, but with each authority receiving an equal share of the additional £70,000 available. Every authority thereby receives a slight increase in grant of £386.

Local Authority	*Grant Allocation 2003-04 (£)*
Anglesey/Ynys Mon	61,342
Barking and Dagenham	75,969
Barnet	80,694
Barnsley	76,076
Bath and North East Somerset	90,011
Bedfordshire	136,511
Bexley	78,758
Birmingham	187,380
Blackburn with Darwen	70,658
Blackpool	66,662
Blaenau Gwent	63,083
Bolton	82,674
Bournemouth	70,122
Bracknell Forest	63,899
Bradford	125,756
Brent	86,592
Bridgend	68,323
Brighton and Hove	81,172
Bristol	98,486
Bromley	84,980
Buckinghamshire	200,557
Bury	71,195
Caerphilly	73,088
Calderdale	74,574
Cambridgeshire	163,057
Camden	84,175
Cardiff	87,322
Carmarthenshire	73,858
Ceredigion	64,143
Cheshire	189,969
Conwy	64,811
Cornwall	189,279
Corporation of London	60,145
Coventry	77,776
Croydon	90,666
Cumbria	216,116
Darlington	63,899
Denbighshire	71,434
Derby	76,503
Derbyshire	220,459
Devon	217,294
Doncaster	85,516
Dorset	175,886
Dudley	82,908
Durham	213,601
Ealing	90,344
East Riding of Yorkshire	72,166
East Sussex	208,288
Enfield	88,198
Essex	315,112
Flintshire	77,741
Gateshead	79,140
Gloucestershire	189,960
Greater Manchester FCDA	64,060
Greenwich	86,482
Gwynedd	67,698
Hackney	88,145
Halton	68,137
Hammersmith and Fulham	76,719
Hampshire	298,996
Haringey	85,624
Harrow	65,726
Hartlepool	64,650
Havering	77,685
Herefordshire	70,229
Hertfordshire	310,886
Hillingdon	81,386
Hounslow	80,742
Hull (Kingston upon Hull)	72,265
Isle of Wight	72,230
Isles of Scilly	53,708
Islington	83,424
Kensington and Chelsea	74,788
Kent	339,586
Kingston upon Thames	67,654
Kirklees	95,431
Knowsley	74,359
Lambeth	87,789
Lancashire	315,233
Leeds	172,987
Leicester	88,896
Leicestershire	192,957
Lewisham	83,978
Lincolnshire	212,793
Liverpool	97,648
London FEPA	151,825
Luton	59,894
Manchester	147,667
Medway	81,547
Merseyside FCDA	73,332
Merthyr Tydfil	60,998
Merton	72,053
Middlesbrough	71,355
Milton Keynes	81,404
Monmouthshire	62,154
Neath Port Talbot	70,259
Newcastle Upon Tyne	102,823
Newham	88,226
Newport	68,616
Norfolk	276,813
North East Lincolnshire	71,624
North Lincolnshire	69,532
North Somerset	71,248
North Tyneside	74,091
North Yorkshire	244,523
Northamptonshire	239,260
Northumberland	188,122
Nottingham	86,321
Nottinghamshire	210,927
Oldham	79,294
Oxfordshire	202,459
Pembrokeshire	66,735
Peterborough	72,214
Plymouth	81,708

Local Authority	*Grant Allocation 2003-04 (£)*
Poole	66,635
Portsmouth	74,467
Powys	85,886
Reading	67,386
Redbridge	82,566
Redcar and Cleveland	69,693
Rhondda Cynon Taff	82,319
Richmond upon Thames	69,424
Rochdale	77,310
Rotherham	81,654
Rutland	56,443
Salford	72,386
Sandwell	88,413
Sefton	84,015
Sheffield	96,386
Shropshire	153,834
Slough	68,566
Solihull	73,716
Somerset	164,359
South Gloucestershire	76,183
South Tyneside	71,516
South Yorkshire FCDA	84,356
Southampton	77,470
Southend	71,966
Southwark	77,343
St Helens	73,333
Staffordshire	226,842
Stockport	79,992
Stockton-on-Tees	73,877
Stoke-on-Trent	74,413
Suffolk	221,786
Sunderland	101,107
Surrey	297,388
Sutton	73,126
Swansea	78,933
Swindon	71,355
Tameside	77,310
Telford and Wrekin	72,385
Thurrock	68,666
Torbay	67,440
Torfaen	64,876
Tower Hamlets	93,509
Trafford	75,754
Tyne and Wear FCDA	34,892
Vale of Glamorgan	72,385
Wakefield	86,667
Walsall	83,639
Waltham Forest	83,532
Wandsworth	79,155
Warrington	72,804
Warwickshire	181,722
West Berkshire	67,815
West Midlands FCDA	60,386
West Sussex	225,386
West Yorkshire FCDA	61,593
Westminster	86,804
Wigan	84,497
Wiltshire	194,786
Windsor and Maidenhead	66,796
Wirral	89,861
Wokingham	66,525
Wolverhampton	82,030
Worcestershire	186,835
Wrexham	72,926
York	72,220

DEFENCE

HMS Nottingham

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): When the destroyer HMS NOTTINGHAM grounded in Australian waters on 7 July 2002 she sustained severe damage and flooding in the forward part of the ship. She is now on passage to the UK on a heavy lift ship and is expected to arrive in United Kingdom waters on 7 December. She will then be unloaded and towed into HM Naval Base at Portsmouth where a contract has been placed for her repair with Fleet Support Limited. The repair work—which will cost around £26M, including all materials supplied by the Department—is expected to last up to 18 months. HMS NOTTINGHAM is expected to return to operational service in November 2004.

HMS NOTTINGHAM is a highly capable Type 42 destroyer designed to provide area air defence either independently or as an integral component of larger joint or coalition maritime task groups. Her key weapons, sensors and Command System were significantly upgraded during an extensive refit in 1999–2000. These improvements will enable the ship to keep pace with the increasing demands of maritime air defence during the next 10 years and will aid interoperability with key allies, in particular the USA. HMS NOTTINGHAM's contribution will be crucial to bridging the air defence gap during the drawdown in Sea Harrier air defence aircraft beginning in 2005 and the introduction of the Type 45 Destroyer from 2007.

To ease the short-term programming gap in the fleet created by HMS NOTTINGHAM's unavailability, HMS GLASGOW, an older and less capable Type 42 is being regenerated from a planned state of lower readiness. An alternative solution which would have given HMS GLASGOW a similar capability upgrade to that received by HMS NOTTINGHAM in 1999 was considered, but the repair of HMS NOTTINGHAM was deemed to provide best value for money.

Service Pensions (Taxation)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): On 25 April 2002 *Official Report*, columns 426—27W, I informed the House that the problem of mistaken taxation of some Service invalidity pensions was more extensive than previously understood. I reported that we had set up an internal review, independent of the staffs involved, to establish the extent of the taxation errors and expose any related problems. This review is now complete.

The review has established that the taxation problem is more extensive than I indicated in April. It is now clear that some RAF pensions are affected, and that the RN pensions affected are not limited to the period 1973–99. In addition, the review has found that further work is needed on Army pensions; this is required both to re-examine more thoroughly certain cases adjudged when first reviewed as correctly taxed, and to examine for the first time some other cases previously not thought to be at risk.

The findings of the review mean that the number of files needing examination has proved considerably larger than I stated previously. I now expect it will not be possible to complete a comprehensive check for all three Services before next summer. I regret that this work cannot be done faster, but it is vital that it be done accurately, by suitably cleared staff who are also familiar with the relevant documents. The pace of the work is also affected by the lack of comprehensive computerised information distinguishing invalidity pensions from others. This has made it necessary to handle many tens of thousands of files which are not at risk in order to identify those that are. This difficulty continues to affect progress.

We are very much aware of the importance of giving as much priority as possible to examining the cases of our oldest pensioners. Although over 70 per cent. of errors identified so far affect younger pensioners, discharged in or after 1990, we anticipate that errors still to be found will include some affecting the oldest age-group. I much regret that in several of the cases recently re-examined a pensioner, previously misadvised that his pension was correctly taxed, has died before an error was recognised. In such cases the tax refund is to be paid, with due apology, to the pensioner's widow or estate.

A further problem brought to light by the review is that some of the pensions taxed in error were also affected by an underpayment of Armed Forces Pension Scheme benefits. Over 350 pensioners have so far been identified in this category, most of whom were discharged in the 1990s. The average underpayment in these cases was around £4,500. The cost to date of rectifying tax errors has been some £5M, which happens also to be an average of some £4,500 per pensioner.

The review includes a full analysis of the causes of errors and the necessary remedial action; the latter is already in hand. The procedures used in the conduct of the review have been validated by the National Audit Office. The NAO's letter of validation and the report of the review have been placed in the library of the House.

Army Attributable Pensions

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the mistaken taxation of Army attributable pensions. [53048]

Dr. Moonie: Since my statement to the House on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 891–902, the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency has been conducting a review to establish more clearly the exact extent of the problem with the mistaken taxation of service invaliding and attributable pensions. This work is not complete, but has revealed that some Royal Navy invaliding and attributable pensions awarded between 1973 and 1999 have also been mistakenly taxed. We will be reviewing all the case files of those who might have been affected and arranging for refunds to be made as appropriate. This will be done as quickly as possible but is expected to take some months given the need to review several thousand pension files. We will also be providing appropriate national publicity to allow those who think they might have a claim to apply for a tax refund.

Our research has not so far revealed any cases where Royal Air Force pensions were wrongly taxed and there is evidence that the RAF has had in place checks which would have uncovered cases where attributable pensions should have been exempt from tax. However, we will include the RAF in our continuing work to ensure that no error is left unidentified.

Our further work to date has confirmed that the problem was more extensive than originally understood but has also shown the complexity of the issues involved as, over time, changes have been made to the organisations responsible for administering the pensions and to the rules governing the schemes. We have therefore concluded that we should set up an internal review, completely independent of the staffs involved, to establish the precise extent of the current problems and to expose any other problems that may exist. This independent review will look across all three sevices, be launched as soon as possible and is likely to take a number of months to complete. The review team will be headed up by a senior civil servant and consist of staff drawn from the Defence Internal Audit. In order to provide external confidence, the NAO will be invited to validate the procedures. I will report the findings to the House.

TRANSPORT

Car Sharing/Car Clubs

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I have written to Sir Trevor Chinn, the chairman of the Motorists' Forum, welcoming their report on car sharing and car clubs and enclosing the Government's response. The response outlines further support that the Government will give to work in this field, in particular:

continued funding for an advisory service on car clubs and formal car sharing schemes;

further research to monitor car clubs in circumstances that offer the most potential for success, for example where they may help to achieve higher densities in new residential developments than might otherwise be the case; and

further research on formal car sharing schemes in institutional settings, such as the workplace, with a view to publishing best practice guidance later next year.

Copies of my letter and the Government response have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

TREASURY

Public Service Pensions

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): Legislation governing public service pensions requires public service pensions to be increased annually by the same percentage as State earnings related pensions (additional pensions). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced on 19 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 16WS that benefits such as additional pensions will be increased by 1.7 per cent., in line with the annual increase in the Retail Prices Index up to September 2002. Public service pensions will therefore be increased by 1.7

per cent. from 7 April 2003, except those which have been in payment for less than a year, which will receive a pro-rata increase.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Strategy

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): All controlled drugs are harmful and will remain illegal. Drug misuse is the biggest challenge society faces. It damages the health and life chances of individuals. It undermines family life, turns law-abiding citizens into thieves and erodes communities. It is essential that we educate the young about the dangers of drugs, prevent drug misuse, tackle the dealers to reduce the prevalence of drugs on the streets and reduce the harm drugs cause.

To address this, the Government has published its Updated Drug Strategy developed to take account of new evidence of what works and focus on delivery.

In 1998, the first cross-cutting strategy was introduced to tackle drug trafficking, supply and misuse. This update builds on the foundations laid and the lessons learnt. We must concentrate on the most dangerous drugs, the most damaged communities and the individuals whose addiction and chaotic lifestyles are the most harmful, both to themselves and others. Education, prevention, enforcement, treatment and harm minimisation are our most powerful tools.

Setting out a range of policies and interventions, the Updated Drug Strategy provides:

a tougher focus on Class A drugs;

a stronger focus on education, enforcement and treatment to prevent and tackle problematic drug use;

more resources—direct annual expenditure for tackling drugs will rise from £1,026 million in this financial year to £1,244 million in the next financial year, £1,344 million in the year starting April 2004 to a total annual spend of nearly £1.5 billion in the year starting April 2005—an increase of 44 per cent;

a major new education campaign to be launched in Spring 2003 to drive home the risks of drug misuse. More support for parents, carers and families so they can easily access advice, help, counselling and mutual support;

more help for the young people most at risk of developing drug problems through increased outreach and community treatment and an extension of drug testing and referrals to treatment and care via the youth justice system so that by 2006, we are able to support 40,000–50,000 vulnerable young people a year;

strengthened enforcement- including new cross-regional police teams to tackle middle markets and targeted policing to crack down on crack;

a major expansion of services to refer people into treatment via the criminal justice system. We will use every opportunity from arrest, to court and sentence to identify drug-misusing offenders and engage them in treatment. Starting from next year in the highest crime areas with the worst drug problems we will roll out a comprehensive end to end approach. This will ensure that every drug addicted offender is identified through drug testing at the point of arrest and charge and given the choice at their bail hearing of entering treatment rather than entering custody. All this is backed up by extra resources for arrest referral, drug treatment and testing orders, treatment in prison and Youth Offending Institutes and for post-release treatment and support for those leaving custody;

an expansion of treatment services to ensure access is available when needed and is tailored to individual need, including residential treatment. Improved treatment for crack and cocaine users and heroin prescribing properly supervised for all those who would clinically benefit from it. By 2008, we will have developed the capacity to treat 200,000 problematic drug users each year. Funding for treatment services, including prisons, will increase by £45 million in the next financial year, £54 million for the year starting from April 2004 and £115 million from April 2005. This will be boosted by treatment funding associated with Drug Treatment and Testing Orders of nearly £10 million in the next financial year, £12 million in the year starting from April 2004 and £16 million from April 2005—bringing the total direct annual spend on treatment up to £589 million by 2005;

new aftercare and throughcare services to help those leaving prison or treatment remain free from drugs;

strengthened capacity to deliver first in the areas with the greatest problems and improved services in those areas most affected by crack use; and

revised targets which are challenging but achievable.

Copies of "Updated Drug Strategy 2002 " have been placed in the Library. It is also available on the web at http://www.drugs.gov.uk.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

New Radio Ownership Scheme

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I have today deposited a copy of the draft Order and accompanying Explanatory Memorandum in the Libraries of both Houses. Copies have also been sent to the Radio Authority, the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the Commercial Radio Companies Association. We welcome comments from anyone with an interest.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Fire Service

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): Today I have placed copies of a report produced by the COBR–Joint Assessment Cell report, entitled "Industrial Action by the Fire Brigades Union. Contingency arrangements during the 8-day strike, 22–30 November 2002" in the Vote Office and Libraries of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Chief Surveillance Commissioner

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I am today laying before Parliament the annual report for 2001–2002 of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner on the discharge of his functions under Part III of the Police Act 1997 and Part II of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. As required, under section 107(3A) of the Police Act 1997, after consultation with the Chief Surveillance Commissioner I can confirm that no matter has been excluded from the enclosed report.

I am most grateful to Sir Andrew Leggatt and his colleagues for the work which has gone into preparing it.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 4 December 2002

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

British-Irish Council Summit

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): The British-Irish Council's fourth summit was held in New Lanark on 22 November. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House led the UK delegation on my behalf, as I was unable to attend due to the current fire dispute. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and my right hon. Friends the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office were also members of the UK delegation.

The Council noted with regret the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive and looked forward to the restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, established under the Agreement, as soon as possible in advance of the scheduled elections.

The main issue for discussion was Social Inclusion, with a particular focus on Financial Inclusion, and the Council agreed a programme to take forward joint working in this area. I have placed a copy of the Council's communique in the Libraries of the House.

COMMUNIQUÉ

The British-Irish Council established under the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday 1998 held its fourth Summit meeting today in New Lanark, Scotland. The meeting was chaired by the First Minister the Rt Hon Jack McConnell MSP.

The Irish and British Governments were represented by the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern TD and the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, the Rt Hon Robin Cook MP respectively.

The Welsh Assembly Government was represented by the Rt Hon Rhodri Morgan AM, First Minister.

The Isle of Man was represented by the Hon Richard Corkill MHK, Chief Minister of the Isle of Man Government, Guernsey was represented by Deputy Laurie Morgan, President, States of Guernsey Advisory and Finance Committee and Jersey was represented by Senator Pierre Horsfall OBE, President of the States of Jersey Policy & Resources Committee.

A full list of delegation members is attached.

The British-Irish Council is a forum for its Members to exchange information, discuss, consult and endeavour to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the respective competencies.

The Council noted with regret the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive and looks forward to the restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, established under the Agreement, as soon as possible in advance of the scheduled elections.

Social Inclusion

The main focus of today's meeting was the issue of Social Inclusion and, in particular, Financial Inclusion, on which the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government take the lead within the BIC. The Council recognised that the problems of social and financial exclusion affect communities throughout all BIC Administrations and the meeting highlighted the range of strategies that Members are working on to combat these problems. Members reiterated their commitment to promoting social inclusion across the Member Administrations of the Council.

In order to address the challenges in this important area, the Council agreed that future work on Financial Inclusion will include promoting best practice by creating opportunities for practitioners and policy makers to share ideas and information on aspects of financial inclusion. This work would include the identification and promotion of practical financial inclusion measures at the community level, including, for example, the use of credit unions. Members agreed that there should be greater exchanges on promoting access to appropriate financial products and encouraging savings.

In addition, the Council agreed that the promotion of financial literacy is an essential element in tackling financial exclusion. In order to promote best practice, Members agreed to exchange information on the most effective methods of imparting basic skills and budgetary advice. Given the importance of the role played by intermediary organisations across the BIC, including those based in the community, the Council agreed that considerable benefit could be derived from the exchange of experience among members on how such organisations could best be supported.

The Council also noted that the Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government hosted a conference on Financial Inclusion for practitioners and policy-makers in September of this year in Glasgow as part of preparatory work for this Summit.

Following the discussion on Social inclusion, the Council was updated on work being undertaken in other British-Irish Council areas by relevant Administrations

Drugs

Ireland is the lead Administration within the Council on the Misuse of Drugs. Since the last Summit in June, a number of events have taken place including a seminar on the UK's Positive Futures initiative, which provides sporting programmes for youngsters at risk, and a conference on drug and alcohol strategies which took place in the Isle of Man. Following the successful conference on the exchange of information on Assets Confiscation in Guernsey in May of this year, a second conference on the issue is to take place in the near future. Scotland and Ireland are scheduled to host a seminar on education, training and employment opportunities for recovering drug misusers later this year. A further Ministerial meeting in Dublin is scheduled to take place in February 2003.

Environment

The UK is the lead Administration on the environment. Work has continued on waste management, climate change, Sellafield and radioactive waste. Since the June summit, the Waste Management Working Group has met to discuss a range of issues, share experience, exchange ideas and identify scope for co-operation. The sub-group on Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation met as part of their continuing exchange of information and experience. Technical work on the development of the new climate change scenarios covering all BIC members is underway. A public awareness seminar on the matter is scheduled to take place in November.

The UK Government will host a further meeting of Environment Ministers in the near future.

Transport

Northern Ireland is the lead Administration on Transport. Work on the initial priority areas identified by Ministers in Belfast in December 2000 is continuing. On integrated transport, the group is coordinating work looking at transport links between BIC Administrations, approaches to the development and implementation of environmentally sustainable transport policies and the integration of land use as well as transport policy and practice. The issues of the use of Public Private Partnerships in

relation to transport infrastructure; co-operation on road safety issues and regional air links, of particular concern to a number of Members are also under consideration.

Knowledge Economy

The issue of the Knowledge Economy, on which Jersey is the lead Administration, was the main item on the agenda at the last BIC Summit in June 2002.

Since then, officials have met to continue the development of the work mandated by the Council, focussing on broadband provision, the switchover to Digital TV and a range of internet access issues, including physical access to equipment and services, encouragement of public use of technology, and the skills and learning issues that might inhibit such practice. As proposed at the Jersey summit, a seminar on research issues, which allowed Members the opportunity to exchange information on matters of mutual interest was held earlier this month.

Health: The Application of Telemedicine

The Isle of Man is the lead Administration on the application of Telemedicine and e-health. Officials have met on a number of occasions to share information on telemedicine initiatives in each Administration and discuss some of the issues encountered in getting e-health accepted in routine healthcare. There have also been BIC study visits and presentations on telemedicine facilities in Scotland and Wales.

The focus of the work in this area is on how Telemedicine and e-health projects can be most appropriately implemented, and on identifying successful projects and methodologies which it is hoped would prove of interest within BIC Administrations.

Tourism

Guernsey has taken the lead on tourism within the BIC. Officials have met on a number of occasions to discuss how best to take forward work in this area. The group is focusing on exploring issues of common interest and mutual benefit to all Administrations. Work to date has concentrated on methodologies for data collection within BIC Administrations. The environment and tourism, transport access, and staff training and recruitment issues, including the opportunities for exchange schemes, also form part of the work programme for the Group.

Minority and Lesser-Used Languages

Further to the Council's agreement last BIC Summit meeting in June 2002 that the Welsh Assembly Government should take the lead on Minority and Lesser-Used Languages, a preparatory meeting of officials is due to take place shortly to discuss how to take work forward in this area.

Future Summit Meetings

The Council noted that Northern Ireland and Wales are scheduled to host summits in 2003.

British-Irish Council

22 November 2002

www.British-IrishCouncil.org

List of Delegates

SCOTLAND	
First Minister	The Rt Hon Jack McConnell MSP
Minister for Social Justice	Margaret Curran MSP
Permanent Secretary, Scottish Executive	Sir Muir Russell, KCB
IRISH GOVERNMENT	
Taoiseach	Bertie Ahern TD
Minister for Social and Family Affairs	Mary Coughlan TD
Minister of State at the Department of Finance with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works	Tom Parlon TD
BRITISH GOVERNMENT	
President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons	The Rt Hon Robin Cook MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	The Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP
Financial Secretary to the Treasury	Ruth Kelly MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office	Des Browne MP
WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT	
First Minister	The Rt. Hon Rhodri Morgan AM
Deputy First Minister	Michael German, OBE AM
Minister for Finance, Local Government & Communities	Edwina Hart MBE AM
JERSEY	
President of the Policy and Resources Committee	Senator Pierre Horsfall OBE
Chief Executive, Policy and Resources Department	John Mills
GUERNSEY	
President, Advisory and Finance Committee	Deputy Laurie Morgan
Chief Executive, Advisory and Finance Committee	Mike Brown
ISLE OF MAN	
Chief Minister	Hon Richard Corkill MHK
Minister for Health and Social Security	Hon Clare Christian MLC

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Hazardous Waste

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): As a country we produce a significant amount of hazardous waste each year—some 5 million tonnes in England and Wales alone. Against a background of significant change in the legislation affecting hazardous waste, it is the Government's aim to see that amount reduced, and to ensure that any hazardous waste produced is managed safely.

To achieve our aims we need to work together with waste producers, the waste management industry, regulators and ensure the views of the public and environmental interests are taken on board.

I am today announcing, therefore, the proposed membership and draft terms of reference of a new forum to advise on the reduction and safe management of hazardous waste.

The Forum will have a strategic role of considering the demands on industry of existing and forthcoming legislation, to consider targets for hazardous waste reduction and recovery, and to provide a means for bringing all relevant sectors together to work towards the goals of hazardous waste reduction and managing it safely. It's key objectives will be:

(A) To advise within 6 months on the way ahead over the next 5 years to achieve hazardous waste reduction and environmentally sound management of such wastes, including advice on key decisions to be made, the timing of those decisions and encompassing consideration of targets for hazardous waste reduction.

(B) To identify opportunities to reduce the production of hazardous waste and the recovery of that which is produced.

(C) To consider the impacts of existing and forthcoming legislation, and advise on the content and dissemination of Government and/or Environment Agency advice and guidance to waste producers and waste managers about that legislation; and

(D) To provide a better basis for forward planning by providing up to date and reliable data on hazardous waste production and management, and make any relevant recommendations about how data collection and analysis could be improved.

Membership of the forum is drawn from a wide range of organisations and members are being invited to a first meeting in the next few weeks. Copies of the draft terms of reference of the forum, including a list of the proposed members has been placed in the library of both Houses.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Courts Bill

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): The Courts Bill, which was introduced in the House of Lords last Thursday, includes provisions to enable the government to fulfil the commitment made in the White Paper *Justice for All*, to establish an executive agency with responsibility for the administration of all the courts in England and Wales, except the House of Lords.

The Lord Chancellor has today placed in the Libraries of both Houses a statement about the principles which will form the basis of the agency's Framework Document.

TRANSPORT

London Underground

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): On 8 May 2002 London Regional Transport signed contracts with the two preferred bidders for the London Underground Public Private Partnerships to modernise the Tube.

Completion of the contracts was dependent on the satisfaction of various conditions. These included securing approval by the Health & Safety Executive of London Underground's revised Railways Safety Case and the necessary regulatory clearances from the competition authorities.

With the relevant conditions now satisfied, the two bidding consortia have begun to put in place the necessary finance to enable the contracts to become effective. I expect the Infraco JNP contract (covering the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines) to come into force at the beginning of next year, and those for Infraco BCV and Infraco SSL (covering the Bakerloo, Central and Victoria lines and the Sub-Surface Lines, respectively) in the Spring.

One of the pre-conditions for the PPP contracts related to state aid clearance. This was achieved on 2 October when the European Commission adopted a Decision confirming that the notified PPP arrangements did not constitute state aid.

Commercial agreement between the preferred bidders and London Underground has now been reached.

The Mayor of London told me shortly after the European Commission announced its Decision that he would not be appealing against it. However, subsequently the Mayor sought and secured authority from the Board of Transport for London to launch an appeal of the Commission's Decision in the European Courts. This latest legal action follows two unsuccessful actions for judicial review in the English courts, the latest of which collapsed during the hearing itself.

I am not prepared to see this crucial investment delayed while the Mayor of London engages in further legal challenges. I have therefore agreed that London Regional Transport should offer the preferred bidders and their financial backers an indemnity against the material adverse consequences of any legal challenge in relation to the Commission's state aid Decision. I propose in turn to guarantee London Regional Transport's indemnities in accordance with my powers under the London Regional Transport Act 1984.

I have also agreed against this background that, while the full debt required to fund the bidders1 obligations will be committed at financial close, London Underground will not require it to be drawn down in the early months of the contract. This will mean bringing forward direct payments by London Underground in the early months of the next financial year. It will not increase the sum of those payments next year, or in any subsequent year.

The PPP contracts also envisage a statutory Arbiter whose key role is to decide the fair price for work to be undertaken in future years. I can announce today the appointment of Chris Bolt, formerly a Director of Transco pic and of Lattice Group, and a former Rail Regulator, as the PPP Arbiter. He will take up post upon financial close of the JNP contract.

In the light of recent statements by the Mayor of London which indicate that he may be seeking to challenge the decision of the European Commission that the PPP arrangements do not constitute state aid, it is appropriate for me to set out my intentions regarding the transfer of London Underground to Transport for London under the provisions of the Greater London Authority Act 1999.

I do not consider that the transfer of London Underground Limited to Transport for London could take place against the background of threats of further legal challenge by the Mayor of London and/or Transport for London or while such proceedings were in progress.

When the Mayor withdrew his legal challenge to the PPP arrangements in July this year it was my intention that the transfer of London Underground to Transport for London should take place following the completion of the PPP Agreements. However, I do not think that it would be appropriate for the transfer to take place while the threat of a further legal challenge by the Mayor exists. As I result I do not propose to make any transfer under section 409 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 of London Underground Limited to Transport for London, nor will I direct London Regional Transport to make any such transfer scheme until after the period for lodging any appeal against the Decision of the European Commission has expired without any such appeal being lodged; and if an appeal is lodged, the appeal having been finally determined.

The same position applies in relation to any legal challenge in the English Courts.

The Mayor of London's actions leave me no alternative but to take this course of action. The Tube needs investment—and the PPP means that £6 million a day, £16 billion over 15 years, will go into much needed improvements to the benefit of London.

In accordance with the guidance set out in Government Accounting, I am today notifying Parliament of the contingent liability arising from my decision to guarantee London Regional Transport's indemnity.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 5 December 2002

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

South Cambridgeshire District Council (Bellwin Scheme)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): South Cambridgeshire District Council experienced exceptional flooding and consequential damage in the district on the weekend of 20–21 October 2001. Given these circumstances I am satisfied that financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified. A scheme will therefore be established under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Grant will be paid to the authority to cover 85 per cent of the eligible costs above a threshold, which it has incurred in dealing with the flooding.

TRANSPORT

Private Hire Vehicle Licensing

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Following a consultation exercise, I have decided to agree to the request from Plymouth City Council to make regulations which would enable (i) London licensed private hire operators to sub-contract bookings to Plymouth private hire operators; (ii) a Plymouth licensed private hire operator who accepts in Plymouth a hiring which starts in London, to use a Plymouth licensed private hire vehicle for that hiring; and (iii) a Plymouth licensed private hire operator who accepts in Plymouth a hiring which starts in London, to use a Plymouth licensed private hire driver for that hiring.

This decision will be effected by means of transitional regulations made under section 37 of the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998.

A decision note, containing a summary of responses and setting out my decision, has been placed in the Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

News 24

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I have today placed copies of the independent review of BBC News 24 by Richard Lambert in the Libraries of both Houses, together with a letter to Gavyn Davies setting out my response.

In response to the review, I have attached two further conditions to the approvals of BBC News 24. These require the Governors to publish their response to the Lambert report by the end of March 2003, and to promulgate revised commitments for the service, taking account of Richard Lambert's recommendations, by the end of May 2003.

A website version of the review can be found on the DCMS website at www.culture.gov.uk

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Government Finance

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): On 8 July 2002, the Government published a consultation paper asking for views on options for reforming the formula grant distribution system for local authorities. Responses for this paper were invited from local government and other interested parties by 30 September.

An analysis of responses received to the consultation has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. The Government's response to the consultation will be set out later today in our proposals for the 2003–04 local government finance settlement.

DEFENCE

Eurofighter Typhoon

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Progress towards the entry to service of Typhoon has been reviewed closely since the start, in April 2002, of test flying with the instrumented production aircraft. The process of gathering flight safety and performance data, which is necessary to accept aircraft into service, is taking industry longer than the agreed schedule. The large volume of work to resolve outstanding and arising design issues, although individually minor, has also progressed more slowly than expected. As a result, we have concluded with our international partners and with industry that the evidence required to permit contractual acceptance of the aircraft by the four partner nations will not be complete before the end of March 2003. Allowing for the joint, four-nation acceptance process, aircraft should then be ready for hand-over to the Royal Air Force by the end of June 2003. In any event, following the loss of a development aircraft in Spain on 21 November, it is essential that there is a time allowance for the realignment of test flying tasks. Further delay cannot be ruled out until the causes and implications of the crash are fully understood. This second delay, since the contract was placed with industry, to Typhoon's entry to service is extremely disappointing, but safety remains paramount, and we will only accept aircraft that meet the agreed specification. Every effort will be made to accelerate the entry to service and work-up process to prevent or minimise any delay to the operational employment of Typhoon, scheduled for the second half of the decade. It is this latter date, of course, when the RAF is able to use the aircraft on operations, that is so critical.

QinetiQ

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): On 1 July 2001 the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency was successfully divided into QinetiQ plc, a wholly Government-owned company, and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, which remains part of the Ministry of Defence.

On 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 313–314W I informed the House that we had decided to sell a substantial stake in QinetiQ to a strategic partner who would help to develop the company in preparation for a future flotation on the stock market. Our decision followed a detailed analysis of market conditions, which led us to conclude that this approach offered best value for the taxpayer, and would meet our objectives for a successful public private partnership.

Following the announcement in early September that The Carlyle Group had been chosen as preferred bidder in MOD's selection of a strategic partner, the MOD has now signed a deal with Carlyle. The transaction values QinetiQ at around £500 million. Following adjustments to reflect current assets and liabilities, MOD will receive between £140 million and £150 million from the transaction (the final amount will depend on the company's exact financial position at completion). This will be in addition to £50 million already received from QinetiQ as part of the purchase price for its assets.

The Carlyle Group will acquire a 33.8 per cent. economic interest in QinetiQ with a further 3.7 per cent. of the shares to be available for employees of QinetiQ. Management control and responsibility for setting future commercial strategy will now lie with QinetiQ and Carlyle, allowing them the freedom to make appropriate decisions to grow the business. MOD will retain those rights that are conventional for a major shareholder. QinetiQ's board of directors will be augmented by the appointment of two Carlyle nominees. MOD will also have the right to appoint two non-executive directors. QinetiQ employees will have the opportunity to invest in the future of the business through a staff equity scheme and will each receive a small free allocation of share options.

This is a good deal for the taxpayer, for QinetiQ and for the company's employees. At completion, the taxpayer will have received a total so far of around £200 million from the PPP and MOD's retention of a significant stake in the business will ensure that the taxpayer shares in the anticipated future growth in the value of the company. The company will benefit from the injection of new private sector capital together with The Carlyle Group's track record in assisting companies to grow and develop. As previously announced, our intention remains to sell our entire stake in QinetiQ within three to five years, probably through a flotation on the stock market.

QinetiQ will remain a British company based in the UK. MOD will retain a special share in the company to ensure that the nation's defence and security interests continue to be protected. There will also be robust safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest and to ensure that the integrity of the Government's procurement process is not compromised.

Subject to the satisfactory fulfilment of a number of final conditions, we expect to achieve the formal completion of the sale process early in the new year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Finance

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Home Office's Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) for 2002–03 will change as follows:

(a) the DEL will be increased by £168,713,000 from £10,340,772,000 to £10,509,485,000 and the administration cost limit will be increased by £66,928,000 from £2,681, 618,000 to £2,748,546,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital,are set out in the following table:

(£'000)

	Resources Change	*New DEL*	*Capital Change*	*New DEL*
Total DEL	45,000	9,430,783	123,713	1,078,702
Of which				
Voted	8,085,505		901,307	
Non voted	1,345,278		177,395	

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) Take up of End Year Flexibility including £29,567,000 for anti drugs projects; £6,577,000 for National Probation Directorate's projects and £6,326,000 for anti drugs and crime reduction research projects.

(ii) Take up from the Capital Modernisation Fund of £173,000 for Evidence Based Policy fund.

(iii) Claims on the DEL reserve totalling £77,400,000 comprising £54,000,000 for community safety officers and other policing announced in the budget 2002 and £16,400,000 for juveniles.

(iv) Changes include an increase in the administration costs limit of £66,928,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(i) Take up from the Capital Modernisation Fund of £37,700,000 for additional prison places.

(ii) Take up of End Year Flexibility including £76,641,000 for Police and crime reduction projects; £51,928,000 for Prison Service related projects and 20,324,000 for accommodation centres, scanners and removal projects for the Immigration Service.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers or charged to the DEL Reserve.

Police Grant

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I have today placed in the Library a copy of the Home Secretary's proposals for allocation of police grant for England in 2003–2004. The Home Secretary and I intend to

implement the proposals subject to consideration of any representations we receive about them, and to the approval of the House.

Funding the police service properly is a top priority for this Government. The settlement I am announcing today continues that commitment. The total provision for policing, to be supported by grant in 2003–04 is £9,243 million. This is a cash rise of £543 million or 6.2 per cent. over the provision for 2002–03. This includes principal formula police grant, direct Home Office spending, the standard spending on which revenue support grant is based.

We launched the first National Policing Plan last month. It outlined four policing priorities: tackling anti-social behaviour and disorder; reducing volume, street, drug-related and violent and gun crime; combating serious and organised crime; and, increasing the number of offences brought to justice. This settlement underpins delivery of those priorities and reinforces our commitment to police reform. There is funding to enable English forces to increase police strength and contribute towards the target of 132,500 police officers in 2004. This will be made available through continuation of the highly successful Crime Fighting Fund which we plan to fund for another three years. Better use will be made of those officers. They will benefit from a pay system that rewards the most experienced officers who can demonstrate a high level of professional competence and those in the most difficult and demanding posts. They will be supported by Community Support Officers (CSOs) and civilian custody staff and investigators, reducing bureaucracy and freeing police officers for operational duties. As part of this, resources will be available to recruit further CSOs across the next three years, allowing English forces to employ their share of the 4,000 we believe should be in place by 2005. Better use of technology will help police officers still further. We are investing in IT with further funding for authorities taking up the Airwave radio communication service and for the Metropolitan Police Authority's' Command Control and Communications Information (C3i) System. Funds will be available for roll-out of the custody and case preparation system which will enable data on those in custody to be collated by the police and used across the criminal justice system.

We are taking the opportunity to outline the wider provision for support for the police service in England. This includes police grant and revenue support grant, a range of specific grants to be paid directly to police authorities for particular initiatives, capital grants and borrowing approvals, and operational and central spending in support of policing provided directly by the Home Office.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 25 November 2002

DEFENCE

Accident Inquiries

Mr. Paul Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what internal inquiries have been held into accidents involving Ministry of Defence property or equipment since 1997; what insurance policies the Ministry of Defence has in place to insure against accidents involving Ministry of Defence property or equipment; and if he will make a statement. [82126]

Dr. Moonie: Information concerning numbers of inquiries into accidents involving Ministry of Defence property or equipment is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Current departmental policy requires the relevant operating authority to convene a Board of Inquiry or a Unit, Ship or Station Inquiry in the case of accidents, resulting in significant damage to buildings or equipment, or affecting operational capability. Less significant accidents are likely to be investigated at local level.

Accidents involving MOD property or equipment may also be the subject of Boards of Inquiry convened to investigate serious injuries and fatalities.

Treasury guidelines generally discourage public bodies from insuring risks unless it can be shown that the potential cost of claims paid, together with the cost of handling such claims, will exceed the cost of purchasing insurance. As the cost of premiums compared to the amounts paid in compensation would normally favour insurance companies, the MOD self-insures its core activities, and funds claims for compensation and the repair or replacement of lost or damaged property or equipment from its current expenditure.

Brigade Reorganisation

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many extra deployable troops will result from his reorganisation of *(a)* 52 (Lowland) Brigade and *(b)* Headquarters 2 (South East) Brigade. [25100]

Mr. Ingram: The two light infantry brigade headquarters (52 Lowland) Brigade and 2 (South East) Brigade are being re-roled from regional brigade headquarters to provide better command and control arrangements for the light infantry role battalions, all of which are currently deployable. Thus the reorganisation of the two brigades will not result in an increase in the number of deployable troops. The change will bring greater coherence to the way that these units prepare for operations, through improved co-ordination of training.

Chatham Dockyard

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nuclear laundry facility at the former Chatham Dockyard, with particular reference to *(a)* physical and functional description and *(b)* outflow and drainage functioning. [82501]

Dr. Moonie: The Health Physics Laundry within the nuclear complex at the former Chatham Dockyard was equipped with washing machines and dryers. The floor of the laundry was finished with an epoxy resin to facilitate decontamination if required.

Laundering was restricted to protective clothing with low or zero levels of radioactive contamination to enable its re-use. Clothing with higher levels of contamination was disposed of as radioactive waste.

The laundry effluent was discharged untreated to the ordinary sewer as permitted by the (then) Department of Environment's Radiochemical Inspectorate. It was subject to regular sampling, to demonstrate that the levels of activity discharged to the sewer were insignificant.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* physical and *(b)* functional characteristics of the washdown facility for radiation workers at the former Chatham Dockyard. [82503]

Dr. Moonie: The Washdown Area within the nuclear complex at the former Chatham Dockyard was a purpose-built facility primarily for the decontamination of components from the submarine reactor and any associated tools and equipment that had become radioactively contaminated. Separate washing facilities were provided for personnel leaving radioactively contaminated areas.

The Washdown Facility had a stainless steel floor and stainless steel dividers and barriers. Large components were lowered and raised through roof hatches using an electric crane. Tented enclosures within the facility were used for some decontamination and close inspection work. Smaller equipments and tools were cleaned in stainless steel open vats using a solution of special detergents or demineralised water as required. The vats were positioned in an annexe to the Washdown Area with a continuous stainless steel floor, behind a stainless steel barrier, so enabling the containment and ready cleaning of any spillages. Water from the Washdown Area was directed via specific-to-purpose stainless steel drains into holding tanks in the adjacent Effluent Treatment Plant.

Decontamination facilities for personnel leaving radioactively contaminated areas consisted of hand wash facilities and associated monitoring equipment, to meet the requirements of the Ionising Radiations (Unsealed Radioactive Substances) Regulations 1968. In addition, there were showers for use in the extremely rare occurrences of bodily contamination.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long each of the outstanding claims for former Chatham Dockyard workers seeking compensation under the no fault scheme has been

awaiting decision; how many compensation claims have been awarded in full to former workers or their families; and how many claims are being processed. [82504]

Dr. Moonie: There is one outstanding case involving an ex-Chatham Dockyard radiation worker that has been assessed by the British Nuclear Fuels Compensation Scheme for Radiation Linked Diseases as eligible for compensation. The level of compensation due has been assessed and an offer in full and final settlement was made on 16 September 2002. A formal response to the offer is awaited.

There have been no full (100 per cent.) awards made to former workers or their families by the Scheme. Two claims have been assessed as eligible for compensation at a lower level. One has settled and the other is as detailed above.

There are no other claims currently being processed by the Scheme which relate to Chatham Dockyard workers.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the radiation safety procedures were when workers were performing tasks in the dock at the former Chatham dockyard. [82524]

Dr. Moonie: Safety procedures for work in the dock at the former Chatham Dockyard were governed by the requirements of the Factories Act 1961 and subsequently the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, and subordinate legislation. The type of work being undertaken in the dock would have determined which safety procedures applied.

Civil Contingencies

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Civil Contingency Reaction Forces are operationally ready for service in the event of a *(a)* nuclear, *(b)* biological and *(c)* chemical attack on the United Kingdom. [82156]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The decision to form 14 Civil Contingency Reaction Forces (CCRFs) from existing Volunteer Reserve personnel was announced on 31 October 2002. None of the CCRFs is yet operational.

Civil Contingencies Reaction Force

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the extra men training days that have been granted for the Civil Contingencies Reaction Force will be spent on *(a)* bringing each service man and woman to a common standard of basic training and *(b)* CBRN training. [82209]

Mr. Ingram: The training plans for the Civil Contingency Reaction Forces are still being developed. They will be aligned with existing Volunteer Reserve training and, in due course, with the requirements of specific regional contingency plans as these are developed in conjunction with local authorities and emergency services.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Civil Contingencies Reaction Force will be fully effective. [82211]

Mr. Ingram: We expect that the 14 Civil Contingency Reaction Forces will be fully effective by the end of 2003, once they are fully recruited and have undergone an annual training cycle, and once the new regional liaison, planning, command and control arrangements are in place.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81843]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* All civil servants are responsible for meeting the cost of their travel between home and normal place of work. The introduction of a Central London Road User Charge will not affect this basic condition of service. Accordingly, the Ministry of Defence has no plans for reimbursing the cost of the Road User Charge where it is incurred as part of normal commuting. However, civil servants travelling on detached duty to other establishments are entitled to claim the cost of the resultant travel. Where road user charges—whether these be urban congestion charges or road/bridge tolls—are incurred on such journeys, these costs can be claimed.

Defence Logistics Organisation

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultants have been hired to advise on computer systems for the Defence Logistics Organisation; and how much has been paid in fees to them. [80971]

Mr. Ingram: Since the Defence Logistics Organisation was fully formed in April 2000 a number of consultants have been hired across the organisation to advise on computer systems. These are: Alenia Marconi, Belgravia Consultancy, British Telecom, Capital ASI, Cookie Ltd, Cornwell Affiliates Plc, Cap Gemini and Ernst and Young, Dbi, CTPi Logistics, Digital Think, Eurostep Ltd, EDS Ltd, Exe Technologies Ltd, Hancocks, Hays Personnel Services, IBM, KPMG, LSC Group Ltd, Methods Applications Ltd, Northgate Information Systems, Parity Solutions, Recital Corporation Ltd, Scientific Generics and Systems Consultant Services. These companies have assisted with advice on the support for current logistics systems as well as development work on new systems.

The total amount paid to the above consultants is 52,572,875.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the seven key areas for improvement as identified by the Defence Logistics Organisation and what progress has been made in each. [80974]

Mr. Ingram: Since the launch of the Defence Logistics Organisation on 3 April 2000, the organisation has focused on seven key areas in support of its corporate plan, to enable the delivery of agreed outputs to its customers at greatly reduced costs. The seven areas are people; inventory; industry; capital asset management; engineering support; e-business and convergence. Good progress has been made in all of these areas.

Drug Use (Armed Forces)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Royal Air Force tested positive for the use of controlled substances in the most recent testing programme; and if he will list those personnel discharged, broken down by military rank. [82121]

Dr. Moonie: The armed forces conduct a rolling Compulsory Drugs Testing programme. For the period 1 January and 30 June 2002 the numbers are as follows:

Service	*Number of tests*	*Positive results*	*Discharges*
The Naval Service	7,793	29	Lt Cdr x 1 CPO x 1 PO x 2 Leading Hand x 3 Able Rate x 20
Army	44,625	255	Cpl x 2 L/Cpl x 16 Pte x 165
RAF	5,038	3	Jnr Tech x 1

A number of personnel are awaiting a decision on discharge, therefore the discharge rate is likely to increase.

EU General Affairs Council

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what defence-related issues were decided at the EU General Affairs Council on Tuesday 19 November; and if he will make a statement. [82555]

Mr. Hoon: EU Defence Ministers focused primarily on EU military capabilities and the European Capability Action Plan (ECAP). Ministers welcomed the progress made on ECAP, and agreed how to take the process forward to the second phase, the implementation of the solutions identified by the ECAP panels. Ministers also approved an update of the Helsinki Headline Catalogue and agreed that work should continue on developing the procedures and concepts for the rapid response elements of the Headline Goal. The full conclusions of the meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council relating to the European Security and Defence Policy have been placed in the Library of the House.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces are being trained to operate modern fire engines. [82154]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* I refer the hon Member to the answer I gave on 21 November 2002 *Official Report*, column 220W to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner).

Hawk Advanced Jet Trainer

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make a decision on the Hawk advanced jet trainer project; and what assessment he has made of the Hawk A1T8's potential for fulfilling the AJT criteria. [80497]

Dr. Moonie: We are working closely with BAE SYSTEMS to determine whether Hawk 128 will best meet our need for an advanced jet trainer. We also need to determine whether the aircraft would represent good value for money for the taxpayer. We have made useful progress but our work with the company, including our assessment of the aircraft's capability, is not yet complete. We are seeking to make a decision as soon as practicable.

HMS Nottingham

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much he estimates repairs to HMS Nottingham will cost; and if he will make a statement. [82125]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 143W, to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 62W, to my hon. Friend for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire). While we expect Nottingham's future to be determined before her arrival in the United Kingdom in December, the decision has not yet been taken. In addition, the competition to inform that decision is still under way and it would not therefore be appropriate for me to speculate on the potential cost of any repair work.

Legal Services

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal assistance is available to members of the Armed Forces; and if he will make a statement. [82120]

Mr. Ingram: Members of the Armed Forces are entitled to the same legal assistance as other members of the public. The assistance available through Service procedures is intended to mirror as closely as possible the arrangements in the civil justice system.

In addition the Ministry of Defence will consider paying for the defence of an individual charged with a criminal offence where the offence arose as a result of actions undertaken in the course of employment and where certain strict criteria are met.

Low Frequency Sonar Systems

Mr. Paul Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what recent discussions he has had with the US Navy on low frequency active sonar; and if he will make a statement; [82139]

(2) what *(a)* representations and *(b)* advice his Department has received about the legality of operating low frequency active sonar systems; and if he will make a statement. [82117]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence and its Agencies regularly engage in discussion with the United States on a range of issues. Low frequency active sonar is such an issue. We have received no formal representations as to the legality of operating low frequency sonar. A global Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been prepared for the United Kingdom's low frequency sonar (Sonar 2087) which is currently under development and an EIA will also be undertaken for each development trial that is specific to the area concerned. Legal advice is part of each EIA. In addition, the global EIA was

subject to independent legal review. We remain committed to meeting the requirements of UK law and of conventions to which the UK is signatory.

Lynx

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the new Lynx entering service with the Royal Navy. [80701]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 458W to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr Jones).

Medical Care

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts exist between his Department and *(a)* national health service bodies and *(b)* private medical bodies to provide fast-track medical care for members of Her Majesty's forces. [80795]

Dr. Moonie: Currently, the Ministry of Defence has two contracts for fast-track medical care for Service personnel. These are between the Royal Navy and two private health care companies.

Military Documents

Mr. Paul Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many documents personnel from *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Naval Service and *(c)* the Royal Air Force would normally be asked to sign *(i)* during the first year of service, (ii) during each subsequent year and (iii) before being sent on a deployment; and what the figures were in each of the past 15 years. [82127]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available shows for example that some 1.35 million applications for leave were made by Service Personnel during 2000–01 and that some 102,000 Personnel were posted to new appointments which were acknowledged by written signature. Work is underway within the Ministry of Defence to examine the scope for streamlining such administrative procedures.

MOD Contracts

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to ensure that smaller firms are not deterred from applying for Ministry of Defence contracts. [81693]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence recognises the importance of smaller firms in driving innovation and contributing to the delivery of defence capability. The Defence Industry Policy paper published in October 2002 recognised the need to invest in early technology de-risking to stimulate continued improvement and innovation across the defence supply chain.

Defence contract opportunities are advertised through publications such as the MOD Defence Contracts Bulletin and the official journal of the European Community (OJEC). MOD's Defence Suppliers Service (DSS) and Defence Diversification Agency (DDA) provide information and assistance to smaller firms interested in becoming defence suppliers.

The MOD also works with the Department of Trade and Industry and its Small Business Service (SBS) to maintain awareness of initiatives aimed at harnessing innovation. In autumn 2001 a joint MOD/Industry Code of Best Practice was published covering relationships at all levels within the supply chain including those with smaller firms.

NATO Summit (Prague)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what issues will be discussed at the NATO Summit on 21 and 22 November 2002. [82558]

Mr. Hoon: Against the backdrop of the rapidly changing strategic setting, the NATO Summit in Prague on 21 and 22 November 2002 discussed the transformation of the Alliance, including: enlargement, with invitations to seven countries to commence accession negotiations; a new capabilities initiative (the 'Prague Capabilities Commitment'); reform of NATO's command structure; the new NATO Response Force; reinvigorated Partnership programmes, including building on the success of the NATO-Russia Council; and modernisation of NATO's internal structures and processes.

Private Stuart McMaster

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the recorded time of death of Private Stuart James McMaster of the 1st Royal Irish regiment on 15th June on Beiseker in Calgary, Canada; what action was taken to secure evidence at the scene of the death; at what time the Canadian police were notified of the death and what the conclusions were of their investigation; what the conclusions were of military police investigators; at what time the family of the deceased were notified; and what arrangements he has made for *(a)* the return of the deceased to the UK, *(b)* an inquest and *(c)* a Board of Inquiry. [80646]

Mr. Ingram: Ranger (Rgr) Stuart James McMaster died at 15.25 hours Saturday 15 June 2002 during a privately paid for parachute jump at the Skydive Ranch, Beiseker, Alberta. He was deployed to Canada for adventure training, which had recently concluded. Within minutes of the accident, civilian paramedics attended the scene (the STARS (Calgary heli-born medics) and EMF Airdrie (Canadian civilian paramedics)) and pronounced Rgr McMaster dead. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police were called to the scene at 15.35 hours and retained primacy of the investigation for the first 48 hours following the death; they concluded that there was nothing suspicious about the death. Jurisdiction was subsequently passed to the Royal Military Police (RMP) detachment at the British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS). An investigator from the Land Accident Investigation Team, working for the RMP, concluded that the accident occurred as a result of Rgr McMaster being unstable after exiting the aircraft.

The casualty visiting officer informed Rgr McMaster's next of kin and additional next of kin of his death at 00.45 hours Sunday 16 June. The deceased was returned to the United Kingdom at public expense from Canada to Ireland via London departing on 19 June and arriving in Northern Ireland on 20 June. A coroner's inquest was not held since the deceased did not die in Northern Ireland; however, Rgr McMaster's family were entitled to request an inquest be held.

A determination on whether to hold a board of inquiry is yet to be made.

Puma Helicopters (South Africa)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those companies who were consulted during the evaluation of options for refurbishment of the six ex-Republic of South Africa Puma helicopters, when he expects the *(a)* first aircraft to be available for service and *(b)* the final aircraft to be available for service; and if the evaluation included assessment of the costs of awarding the contract to Eurocopter compared with UK-based companies. [81663]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* During the evaluation of options, we consulted Eurocopter, the prime Design Authority (DA) for the main structural conversion, and Westland Helicopters Ltd., Yeovil, the designated DA for the United Kingdom-specific equipment fits and installation of United Kingdom-specific modifications.

The timescale for the delivery of the aircraft into service is the subject of contractual negotiations with Eurocopter and Westland Helicopters Ltd. and is commercially sensitive. I am therefore withholding this information under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

I can confirm that during the evaluation process, full consideration was given to a wide range of issues including cost.

Rapid Reaction Light Infantry Brigades

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has plans to re-designate 2 and 52 Infantry Brigades as Rapid Reaction Light Infantry Brigades. [82123]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to re-designate 2 and 52 Infantry Brigades as Rapid Reaction Light Infantry Brigades.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 567W, to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), the two brigades have been re-roled from regional brigade headquarters to provide better command and control arrangements for light infantry role battalions, all of which are currently deployable. The change will bring greater coherence to the way that these units prepare for operations through improved co-ordination of training.

Reserve Forces

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what emergency powers are available to enable the mobilisation of reserve forces in the event of terrorist attack on the United Kingdom. [82909]

Dr. Moonie: If it was deemed necessary to call-out Reservists in the event of a terrorist attack on the United Kingdom, they would be brought into permanent service using the powers of call-out contained in the Reserve Forces Act 1996 (RFA 96).

Retired Officer Scheme

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many retired officer billets are empty. [82813]

Dr. Moonie: There are presently 237 retired officer posts unfilled. Individuals have been appointed into 36 of these, but are yet to take up post.

Secondments

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the staff seconded to his Department from the private sector since April 2000, stating in each case the secondee's name, company, position within his Department and the duration of placement. [82345]

Dr. Moonie: It is our practice to respect the privacy of our personnel, including those on secondment, and to withhold the names of individuals in accordance with Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, except where the seniority of the individual or the nature of the post warrants a formal announcement.

Alan Garwood's appointment as Head of Defence Export Services (Serial 26) was announced on 16 September 2002.

Company	*Role*	*Duration*[1]
BAE Systems	Business Development	6
Addleshaw, Booth & Co.	Legal Adviser	12
BAE Systems	Acquisition Training	12
BAE Systems	Avionics	8
AXA plc	Claims Manager	8
QinetiQ	Director of Marketing	36
BAE Systems	Air Systems Technology Manager	24
BAE Systems	Commercial Support	6
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Commercial Adviser	12
Babtie Group	Commercial Support	9
BAE Systems	Warship Support	36
URS Ltd.	Risk Manager	5
BAE Systems	Support Chain Adviser	31
Ernst & Young	Commercial Adviser	12
Rolls Royce	Propulsion Project Engineer	24
QinetiQ	Future Business Group	32

Company	Role	Duration[1]
QinetiQ	Customer Support Manager	24
Burges Salmon	Legal Adviser	8
BAE Systems	Support Chain Adviser	24
MASS Consultants	Electronic Warfare Technical Support	48
Hagglunds Vehicle AB	Engineering Advice and Support	22
Wragg & Co.	Legal Adviser	10
BAE Systems	Logistics Capability Development	24
Rolls Royce	Maritime Team Leader	36
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Public Private Partnering Adviser	12
BAE Systems	Head Defence Export Services	36
BAE Systems	Air Logistics Support	12
BAE Systems	Ship Systems Project Leader	24
BAE Systems	Graduate Trainee (acquisition assessment)	6

[1] Month

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the senior staff from his Department who have been seconded to the defence industry since April 2000, stating in each case the secondee's name, position, company and duration of placement and whether the person concerned is still employed by his Department. [82388]

Dr. Moonie: It is our practice to respect the privacy of our personnel, including those on secondment, and to withhold the names of individuals in accordance with Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information except where the seniority of the individual or the nature of the post warrants a formal announcement.

The secondment of John Howe as a Director at Thomson-CSF/Thales Defence Ltd. was announced in May 2000; the secondment was for two years. Mr Howe is no longer a Ministry of Defence employee.

Position	Company	Duration	Current MOD Employee
Director	Thomson-CSF/Thales Defence Ltd.	24 months	No
Strategy Director	Electronic Data Systems	24 months	Yes
Senior Project Manager	Rolls Royce plc	24 months	Yes
Manager Operational Development	BAE SYSTEMS	24 months	Yes
Deputy Technical Director	Thales Defence Ltd.	24 months	Yes
Research & Technology Liaison Officer	BAE SYSTEMS	6 months	Yes

Submarines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much it has cost to make the submarines sold to Canada fit to put to sea; and if he will make a statement. [82143]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of the refurbishment of the Upholder Class submarines is commercially sensitive and I am withholding the details in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Tomahawk Missiles

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the modifications of the next generation of Tactical Tomahawk missiles. [80700]

Dr. Moonie: An equally funded United Kingdom-United States programme is in progress to develop and test a version of the Tactical Tomahawk Block IV missile capable of being fired from submarine torpedo tubes. The first test firing is expected to take place next year.

VX Nerve Agent

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received from the US Government about Iraq's possession of the dusty form of VX nerve agent; and if he will make a statement. [82566]

Mr. Hoon: Intelligence communications between the United Kingdom and foreign governments are confidential and I am therefore withholding the information in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The Government's assessment of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was published on 24 September.

Whittington Barracks

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the investigation of allegations of *(a)* rape and *(b)* bullying at the Army Training Regiment in Whittington Barracks near Lichfield; and what steps he is taking to reassure relations of soldiers at the barracks of their safety. [81166]

Dr. Moonie: The allegations made recently refer to events that are said to have occurred in 1997 and earlier. In respect of the rape allegation, no formal complaint has been made to the Ministry of Defence and there is no specific investigation ongoing. Naturally, should the allegation be made formally, then the department will instigate a full and proper investigation. I can confirm that claims have been brought against the Ministry of Defence in respect of bullying which took place at

Whittington Barracks in 1991–92. As the claims are the subject of litigation I cannot comment further. Bullying and harassment of any kind will not be tolerated in the Army and any such allegations will always be thoroughly investigated. If such allegations are proven, appropriate action will be taken against the perpetrators.

WALES

Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the grants funded by his Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if he will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82188]

Peter Hain: My Department does not fund any grants for individual members of the public and organisations.

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the remit of his spokesperson on the Welsh language. [83010]

Peter Hain: Wales Office policy on the Welsh language is a matter for Wales Office Ministers; I have not appointed anyone else to speak for us on these matters.

As part of my strong commitment to it, I regard it as important that Government policy is presented in the Welsh language. The hon. Member for Ynys Mon, (Albert Owen), has kindly agreed to assist in this.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensioners

15. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the need for pension reform. [81283]

Mr. McCartney: We have come a long way in our ambition to combat poverty and promote security and independence in retirement. State Second Pension and the groundbreaking Pension Credit, which is being introduced in October 2003, will mainly benefit women and those, on low incomes. But we still have further to go.

The Government's proposals will be published in a Green Paper shortly.

New Deal

22. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact the New Deal for 25 plus has had on levels of unemployment. [81291]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1997, long-term unemployment has been cut by around three quarters, to its lowest level for more than 25 years. New Deal 25 plus has played an important part in this success, so far helping over 112,000 people into work (90 in my hon. Friend's constituency).

In April 2001 New Deal 25 plus was re-engineered, to provide a flexible, more individually-tailored service to help more people get jobs and remain in them. The enhanced programme is performing well, increasing the rate at which participants enter jobs.

We are building on this success and enhancing and extending New Deal 25 plus even further. Next April we will be piloting more intensive help during the Gateway period and extending eligibility to all jobseekers who have been unemployed for 18 months out of the previous three years.

Benefit Fraud

24. **Dr. Stoate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his targets are for the reduction of benefit fraud. [81293]

Malcolm Wicks: We have recently announced a target of a 25 per cent. reduction in fraud and error in Housing Benefit for working age customers by 2006. This is in addition to the targets we have already set to reduce fraud and error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance for working age customers, which aim for a 33 per cent. reduction by 2004 and a 50 per cent. reduction by 2006. Latest figures show that we are on course to achieve more than double our March 2002 target of a 10 per cent. reduction.

Poverty

27. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to reduce household poverty. [81296]

35. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he is taking to reduce the number of households in poverty. [81305]

Malcolm Wicks: We recently published Opportunity for all—Fourth Annual Report 2002 (Cm 5598), which provides a detailed account of our strategy, measurement indicators and what more we need to do. The report shows that we have achieved a great deal and that our approach is working and we will continue to deliver on this challenge over the years to come.

Incapacity Benefit

28. **Mr. McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact on passported benefits the move from severe disablement allowance to incapacity benefit has had on the standard of living of young disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [81297]

Maria Eagle: : We have reformed Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance in order to provide more support to young people disabled early in life who have never had the opportunity to work. We estimate that around 175,000 young people will benefit from the change over time.

Depending on their circumstances, young disabled people receiving incapacity benefit will still be able to qualify for help with NHS charges or other passported benefits on the grounds of low income.

We recognise that some young people will no longer have automatic entitlement to this help. But many of them will already be considerably better off as a result of the changes we have introduced. It would be unfair to treat these people differently to other incapacity benefit recipients.

Air Base Job Losses

29. **Mr. Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with the Ministry of Defence to discuss the loss of jobs following the announcement in July of the proposed closure of several experimental air bases; and if he will make a statement. [81298]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have not had any discussions with the Ministry of Defence about possible job losses resulting from the proposed closure of experimental air bases. Officials from Jobcentre Plus have contacted Qineteq Ltd, the company in my hon. Friend's constituency affected by these proposals, to offer advice and assistance with any redundancies. Although their help is not needed at this time, Jobcentre Plus will maintain contact with the company in case any help is needed in the future.

Jobcentre Staff (IT)

30. **Dr. Palmer** : To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will take steps to enhance IT expertise for Jobcentre staff. [81299]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus managers identify individual training needs with their members of staff. Each member of staff has a personal development plan that includes training to ensure they have the IT expertise required for their job. National training plans are developed side by side with the development of new IT systems to ensure that staff are equipped to use the new systems when they come online. Jobcentre Plus is also carrying out a study into the practicalities of using computer-based learning to ensure that best practice is followed in IT training across such a large organisation.

Through the timely identification of learning needs and provision of suitable training, Jobcentre Plus are enhancing the IT skills, knowledge and confidence of staff so that they can deliver a high quality service to the public.

Unemployment (Workington)

31. **Tony Cunningham**: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the change in the level of unemployment in the Workington constituency has been since 1997. [81300]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Economic stability and active labour market programmes have helped people move from welfare to work in all parts of the country. In my hon. Friend's constituency, claimant unemployment has halved since 1997 and long-term unemployment has fallen by nearly 80 per cent.

Final Salary Pension Scheme

32. **Dr. Cable**: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the protection awarded to final salary scheme pensioners when companies are wound up. [81301]

Mr. McCartney: When a company and its final salary pension scheme are wound up, pensioners are protected by the 1995 Pensions Act and regulations. A statutory priority order ensures that, after additional voluntary contributions, pensions in payment are secured ahead of other benefits, so that those already in retirement continue to receive a pension.

The employer debt provisions place a debt on an insolvent company's estate that is calculated, in part, to bring a wound up scheme's assets up to a level sufficient to meet the notional costs of buying annuities for pensioners.

The independent trustee provisions require insolvency practitioners to make sure that schemes that are winding up have one trustee who is independent. Trustees are required to report their progress regularly to Opra.

Universal Bank Account

33. **Angus Robertson**: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of the universal bank account scheme on pensioners living in rural communities. [81303]

Malcolm Wicks: The introduction of universal banking services (which consists of two elements: access to basic bank accounts and the Post Office card account) will help ensure that all customers, including pensioners living in rural areas, can continue to access their benefits in cash at the Post Office. It will also provide customers with a wider range of accounts that they can choose to have their benefit or pension paid into. Universal banking services is an innovative idea that will also help to broaden the Post Office's customer base and open up new sources of income.

Action for Jobs

36. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the Action for Jobs programme. [81306]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The 63 Action Teams for Jobs are having a positive impact on the lives of disadvantaged people in the most economically deprived areas of the country.

By the end of September this year they had helped over 50,000 jobless people into work. An evaluation study of the first year of the initiative found that 80 per cent. of people who found jobs through Action Teams moved into sustained jobs.

The Action Team which operates in my hon. Friend's constituency has been very successful, helping almost 1,000 people move into jobs.

We are building on Action Teams' success. Earlier this year we introduced the Employment Projects and Transport Projects Funds, worth £2 million and

£5 million a year respectively. Teams can bid for additional money from these funds to support initiatives that will benefit their local communities.

Construction Industry (Fatalities)

37. **Mr. Chope**: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement about the number of fatalities in the construction industry in the last year for which figures are available. [81307]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of fatal injuries to construction workers dropped to 79 in the period from April 2001 to March 2002 from 105 in the previous year, a 25 per cent. reduction.

Ageism

38. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to end age discrimination in employers' recruitment practices. [81308]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have made a pledge to tackle age discrimination and we are committed to introducing age legislation covering employment, vocational training and guidance by 2006.

We are already encouraging employers to adopt non-ageist employment practices through our Age Positive Campaign. The campaign raises employers' awareness of the business benefits of an age diverse workforce and encourages a flexible approach to retirement to open up choice and opportunity for individuals to stay in work longer.

In 1999 we published the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment which sets out the standards for non-ageist approaches to recruitment, training, promotion, redundancy and retirement. The code was developed with leading organisations including the CBI, TUC, the Employers Forum on Age and Age Concern. Evaluation shows that from 1999 to 2001 the number of companies using age in recruitment had already fallen from 27 per cent. to 13 per cent. and the number of companies having a policy against employing older workers had dropped from 14 per cent. to 7 per cent.

Older workers have a wealth of skills and experience that can benefit individual businesses and the economy as a whole. Our policies will help to improve further the employment rate of people over 50, which has risen considerably since 1997.

Pension Plans

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps the Government are taking to encourage each individual to plan for independence in retirement. [81273]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government are providing pension information and advice, including the pension guide and pension forecasts, to help people make informed choices in planning for their retirement.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets the Government have set for increasing the proportion of pensioners' incomes that come from the state. [81278]

Maria Eagle: The Government are committed to combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement and we have a range of targets to support these objectives. As a result of our policies no pensioner need live on less than £98.15 a week, and for couples £149.80.

Travel-to-Work Costs

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help unemployed people with travel-to-work arrangements. [81284]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We recognise that the lack of affordable transport can be a significant barrier to work for jobless people, and have a number of measures in place to help them overcome these difficulties.

Earlier this month we announced the extension of half price rail fares to 125,000 more people on the New Deal programme, making it easier for them to get to job interviews and easier to get to work in the first few months of employment.

Unemployment (Kettering)

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the change has been in the level of unemployment in the Kettering constituency since May 1997. [81290]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our policies have created a strong economy geared to delivering stability, low inflation and sound public finances. Alongside this, our labour market policies promote attachment to the job market, whatever the stage of the business cycle. In my hon. Friend's constituency, claimant unemployment has fallen by 40 per cent. since 1997 and long term unemployment has fallen by over 80 per cent.

Unemployment Figures

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of recent unemployment statistics for the United Kingdom in comparison with other EU countries. [81292]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Government's policies have created a strong economy geared to delivering stability, low inflation and sound public finances. Alongside this, our labour market policies promote attachment to the jobs market, whatever the stage of the business cycle.

As a result the number of people in work is at record levels and unemployment has fallen to levels not seen since the 1970s and has remained at these low levels for over a year.

We have the lowest unemployment rate of the G7 major industrialised countries and UK unemployment is below the average level in the EU and lower than the other major EU economies.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of user reaction to Jobcentre Plus. [81295]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The first 66 integrated Jobcentre Plus offices are now open and we will extend that network to cover the whole of Great Britain over the next four years. First reactions from both individual customers and employers have been overwhelmingly positive.

Jobcentre Plus will also be undertaking a National Customer Satisfaction Survey at the end of this year and will be publishing the findings in the spring of 2003.

Unemployment (Anniesland)

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the change is in the level of unemployment in the Glasgow, Anniesland constituency since May 1997. [81304]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Government's active labour market programmes, building on the foundation of a stable economy, are helping more and more people move from a life of benefits into work. In my hon. Friend's constituency, claimant unemployment has fallen by a third since 1997, and long-term unemployment has fallen by 55 per cent.

As well as the New Deals, we have Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones operating in areas with persistently high levels of unemployment. The Glasgow Employment Zone, which includes my hon. Friend's constituency, has already helped over 3,000 people find work.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted, and what the average sentence was from that conviction, for the criminal offence of non-co-operation with the Child Support Agency. [82572]

Malcolm Wicks: 24 cases have been referred to the courts. Of these, 10 have been dealt with and have resulted in the average sentence being a six month conditional discharge. The remaining 14 cases suitable for court action are at various stages such as awaiting a court date, awaiting the laying of information or awaiting service of a summons.

Civil Service Pensioners

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review pensions given to civil service employees who started their employment prior to 1949 and who receive half pensions for that period. [82048]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans to change the basis upon which service before 1949 is taken into account for the purposes of a civil service pension.

Housing Benefit Fraud and Error

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will announce the baseline figure for assessing progress in meeting his target of reducing fraud and error in housing benefit by 25 per cent. by 2006, as set out on page 119 of the 2002 Spending Review. [83209]

Malcolm Wicks: The Housing Benefit Review, which is under way, will enable us to establish a baseline level of fraud and error for the financial year 2002–03. The results of this review should be available in autumn 2003.

Pension Schemes

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how Article 8 of the European Directive on Insolvency Rights SO/987/EEC has been enacted in the UK. [82914]

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will implement the obligation in EC Insolvency Directive 8 as it affects pensions schemes. [82973]

Mr. McCartney: The Government meet their obligations under Article 8 of the Insolvency Directive. For example, the Pension Schemes Act 1993 in GB (which consolidated provisions originally in the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978) provides that certain unpaid pension scheme contributions can be claimed from the National Insurance Fund, through the Redundancy Payments Service, if an employer becomes insolvent. If a claim is successful funds are paid to the trustees of the scheme being wound up. In addition, the Pensions Act 1995 requires salary-related schemes to meet the Minimum Funding Requirement, and provides for a statutory priority order for the distribution of a scheme's assets if a scheme that is required to meet the MFR winds up.

Unemployment (Wirral, South)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the levels of unemployment in Wirral, South since May 1997. [81285]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Economic stability and active labour market programmes have helped people move from welfare to work in all parts of the country. In my hon. Friend's constituency, claimant unemployment has halved since 1997 and long-term unemployment has fallen by over 75 per cent.

As well as the New Deals, we have Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones operating in areas with persistently high levels of unemployment. Up to October this year, the Wirral Action Team had engaged with 1,344 jobless people and found work for 676 of them.

PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he has had a reply to the letter he sent to Chancellor Schröder concerning Catherine Meyer. [81499]

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, this case is an on-going matter between the British and German Governments.

Interception of Communications

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the undertakings given by successive Prime Ministers on surveillance of hon. Members with special reference to Mr. David Nellist. [82594]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 367W.

Lord Levy

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the countries visited by Lord Levy since the last General Election, giving in each case the dates and purposes of the visits. [80847]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 30 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 856W and on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 143W. Lord Levy made other visits between 23 October 2001 and 11 March 2002. These were:

Israel/Palestinian Authority—31 October 2001, 17–19 December 2001, 5–7 February 2002

Germany—29 January 2002

France—30 January 2002

Egypt—4–5 February 2002

Jordan—stopover on 5 February 2002

Lord Levy undertook all these visits in his capacity as the Prime Minister's envoy, to exchange views on the middle east peace process.

Mexico

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with President Fox of Mexico regarding British support for Plan Puebla Panama. [82233]

The Prime Minister: President Fox briefed me on Plan Puebla Panama during my visit to Mexico in August 2001. Other Government Ministers have discussed the plan with the Mexican Government, and Central American Governments, on a number of occasions since then.

Ministerial Code

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on the evidential basis for Lord Macdonald's statement of 12 February, *Official Report*, column 1995, in respect of paragraph 27 of the Ministerial Code; [83394]

(2) what recent amendments have been made to paragraph 27 of the Ministerial Code. [82891]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 November 2002, *Official Report*, column18W.

NATO Summit

Mr. Soames: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the objectives of Her Majesty's Government at the NATO summit in Prague. [82467]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I gave in the House today.

Turkey (EU Accession)

Tony Baldry: To ask the Prime Minister what his stance will be on Turkey's accession to the European Union at the EU summit at Copenhagen. [83024]

The Prime Minister: We believe Turkish membership of the European Union would be a good thing for Turkey, for Europe and for the wider world. We would like to see Turkey start negotiations as soon as possible, by meeting the conditions which apply to all candidates. We want the Copenhagen European Council to signal a decisive step forward in Turkey's candidature.

Turkish Leaders

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister whether he intends to meet the Turkish leaders on their present tour to European capitals. [82342]

The Prime Minister: I met Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the Justice and Development Party, and Foreign Minister Yasar Yakis, on 20 November.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Disabled People (Home Adaptations)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the waiting time is for the processing of applications for adaptations to homes for disabled people; and what is being done to speed up the process. [82026]

Mr. Browne: The time scale for having applications completed varies depending on the nature and scale of the work required. For Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties 50 per cent. of urgent heating cases are completed within 17 weeks while in non urgent cases 96 per cent. are completed in 52 weeks. In private sector cases it issues schedules of work in 82 per cent. of cases within 12 weeks of inspection and approves 97 per cent. of cases within six months of receipt of a completed formal application form. The times scales are influenced by factors such as having plans drawn up and approved as well as the need to have an assessment carried out to determine the needs of the disabled person.

For its own properties the Housing Executive and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety have jointly carried out a review of the adaptation service. Significant progress has been made in reducing the requirement for assessment by the occupational therapy service through increased use of fast tracking and waiting times are expected to be reduced by the recruitment of additional Occupational Therapists (17 have been recruited). For private sector cases, the Housing Executive is setting up a working group to examine ways of improving the applications process and in the longer term, the new housing legislation will allow for fast tracking on agreement with the Occupational Therapy Service.

Households Below Average Income

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to produce *(a)* statistics on households below average income and *(b)* estimates of take-up of income-related benefits comparable with those produced in Great Britain. [82834]

Mr. Browne: The family resources survey was extended from Great Britain to Northern Ireland in April 2002. It is intended that from 2002–03, statistics on households below average income and estimates of take-up of income-related benefits will be produced for Northern Ireland in a form exactly comparable to those available for Great Britain, and to a similar timescale.

Housing

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will bring forward legislation on housing matters which had been subject to the legislative process in the Northern Ireland Assembly prior to suspension of devolution; and if he will make a statement. [82820]

Mr. Browne: The Housing Support Services Order was laid before Parliament on 15 November 2002 and it is proposed that the provisions included in the Northern Ireland Housing Bill will be laid before Parliament early in the new year.

The housing support services provisions need to be in place by April 2003 to cover a new method for funding the costs associated with providing housing support services for vulnerable people in supported accommodation. The provisions contained in the Northern Ireland Housing Bill, which will also become an Order in Council, cover a wide range of measures including provision for a discretionary grants scheme, caravan sites for travellers, a registration scheme for houses in multiple occupation; anti-social behaviour, and a variety of miscellaneous matters.

Knowledge-based Economy

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Government's long term spending plans for creating a knowledge-based economy in Northern Ireland. [82029]

Mr. Pearson: The Executive's Draft Budget for 2003–04 to 2005–06 was announced in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 24 September 2002. We are currently considering the responses to the Draft Budget consultation exercise which ended on 15 November 2002 and will be announcing Revised Budget spending plans for the Northern Ireland departments in December.

These plans will set out the allocations which are to be provided to promote the development of a knowledge-based economy in Northern Ireland.

Larne to Whitehead Railway Line

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to *(a)* decommission and *(b)* preserve the Larne to Whitehead railway line. [82681]

Angela Smith: There are no plans to decommission or mothball the railway line from Whitehead to Larne. As specified in the regional transportation strategy for Northern Ireland 2002–12, the railways services north of Whitehead, and those north and north-west of Ballymena will be considered once the results from the introduction of new trains and improved infrastructure in the rest of the network are assessed in the early stage of implementing the ten year strategy.

Lung Cancer

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of people diagnosed with lung cancer have been treated by surgery in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available. [82070]

Mr. Browne: Information is not available in the form requested.

The Northern Ireland Cancer Registry estimate that the number of persons diagnosed with lung cancer in Northern Ireland every year is approximately 875. The total number of persons in Northern Ireland with lung cancer is estimated to be around 3,400.

The number of admissions to hospital in Northern Ireland with a primary diagnosis of lung cancer who received treatment by surgery is detailed in the following table.

Admissions to hospital in Northern Ireland with a primary diagnosis of lung cancer

	Number of admissions	*Number of admissions which had surgery*	*Percentage of admissions which had surgery*
2001–02	2,403	1,712	71
2000–01	2,605	1,746	67
1999–2000	2,097	1,284	61

Pension Provision

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what plans he has to make pension provision for part-time members of the police reserved in Northern Ireland. [80673]

Jane Kennedy: In September 2001 a contract was agreed with Standard Life to provide a stakeholder pension facility from 8 October 2001 for the police service of Northern Ireland reserve (part-time).

This ensured that the employer's obligation, under the Welfare Reform and Pensions (NI) Order 1999, was met, offering employees access to a stakeholder pension scheme by designating a scheme that employees can join if they wish.

Pensioners (Personal Care)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce free personal care for pensioners in Northern Ireland. [83120]

Mr. Browne: The Inter-Departmental Group's Report on Free Personal Care was forwarded to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on Thursday 8 August 2002. Following discussion at the Executive on 12 August 2002, Ministers asked for further work to be undertaken. That work has not yet been completed. In any event, it is not possible at this stage to give any indication about plans to introduce free personal care here, since this is a matter that should be determined by the Executive.

Pre-School Funding

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of children in their immediate pre-school year places in Northern Ireland have not received departmental funding. [82678]

Jane Kennedy: The Pre-school Education Expansion Programme aims to provide a place for every child whose parents wish it by March 2003. This school year we are providing places for more than 90 per cent. of the total estimated cohort of children in their pre-school year. Given that participation in pre-school education is voluntary rather than compulsory, we expect this level of provision to be adequate to meet demand across the region as a whole. At present my Department is working closely with each Education and Library Board's Pre-School Education Advisory Group in order to ensure that the most effective allocation of funded places has been achieved.

Social Security Appeals Service

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional resources will be available to the Social Security Appeals Service to address the backlog in cases awaiting tribunal hearings. [82763]

Mr. Browne: Funding of almost £600,000 was made available to the appeals service during 2002–03 to fund the cost of 20 additional staff, overtime working and the payment of fees to 25 newly appointed Tribunal members. As a result of this the number of hearings was increased by 17 per cent and the number of appeals outstanding has reduced by 33 per cent.

Universities (Research and Development)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much and what percentage of the total budget for Northern Ireland will be directly allocated to research and development in universities in Northern Ireland. [82028]

Mr. Pearson: The Executive's Draft Budget for 2003–04 to 2005–06 was presented to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 24 September 2002. We are currently considering the responses to the Draft Budget consultation exercise which ended on 15 Novermber 2002 and will be announcing revised Budget spending plans for the Northern Ireland departments for 2003–04 to 2005–06 in early December.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPENT

Access to Medicines

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the remit is of the UK's Working Group on Access to Medicines; who the members of the group are; who it has consulted; and when it expects to report its conclusions to Parliament. [71008]

Clare Short: The High Level Working Group on Access to Medicines has been focusing on improving access to medicines through encouraging appropriate donations, facilitating differential pricing arrangements, and increasing research and development into medicines and vaccines for the three main diseases prevalent in developing countries: HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria. The third and final meeting this Thursday will be focusing on tiered (differential) pricing of drugs. I will send a report and recommendations to the Prime Minister in early September and report to Parliament at the start of the new session. We are looking to take the recommendations forward with some urgency within international fora over the coming year.

The Working Group comprises:

Department for International Development
Department of Health
Department of Trade and Industry
H M Treasury
Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry
AstraZeneca
GlaxoSmithKline
World Health Organisation
World Trade Organisation
European Commission
Rockefeller Foundation
Wellcome Trust
Uganda High Commission London
University of Cambridge.

The Working Group has also consulted with Non-Govermental Organisations (NGOs) and the generic-based pharmaceutical industry.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the Government are doing to equip hospitals in Afghanistan. [80560]

Clare Short: We are directing the majority of our funds through UN agencies, major NGOs and the World Bank Trust Fund. We have provided £2 million to the World Health Organisation; in addition to this some of the funds directed through NGOs have been specifically for the area of healthcare, including the provision of primary healthcare, and the emergency restoration of healthcare facilities.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance is being provided to hospitals in Afghanistan to ensure they have regular supplies of electricity. [80570]

Clare Short: A number of major donors, including the World Bank and the EC are providing support for urban infrastructure. The German Government are also supporting power supply rehabilitation. In order to avoid replication of work we are not working in this sector although we have provided over £2 million for healthcare needs through the World Health Organisation and NGOs.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department has given to the Government of Afghanistan to pay the salaries of public servants. [80571]

Clare Short: We have contributed £10 million ($15 million) into the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), out of an estimated total for 2002–03 of $140 million; of this, some 90 per cent. will help meet Afghanistan's recurrent costs. The Afghanistan budget is $460 million, of which an estimated 80 per cent. will be for salaries. The UK funding for the ARTF is untied and unearmarked.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the money her Department pledged to Afghanistan for this year has been disbursed; and when she expects to disburse the remainder 100 per cent. of the money. [80573]

Clare Short: At Tokyo in January we pledged £200 million to Afghanistan over five years, of this we have allocated £65 million for the current financial year. So far this year we have disbursed just over £37 million (57 per cent.). We expect to disburse a further £12.5 million to address Afghanistan's arrears with International Financial Institutions by the end of November. The remainder of the £65 million will be disbursed by the end of the financial year.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what Britain's contribution is to international funding for the reconstruction of Afghanistan; how much Britain has agreed to contribute in each of the next three years; and how much has already been committed. [80719]

Clare Short *[holding answer 18 November]:* At the meeting on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, held in Tokyo in January this year the UK pledged 200 million to Afghanistan over the next five years. For the current financial year we have allocated 65 million for both reconstruction and humanitarian needs. In addition to this there is 1.8 million available from the mine action programme for specific work to address the problem of land mines in Afghanistan and a further 18 million in the Global Conflict Prevention Pool. We are currently considering resources for future financial years in our Resource Allocation Round process.

African Action Plan

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how the African Action Plan highlighted in the Queen's Speech will be implemented; and whether this will result in her Department increasing the amount of aid from the UK recently announced for NEPAD. [82075]

Clare Short: We have published an Implementation Plan setting out how we will take forward the G8 Africa Action Plan. This sets out key milestones and objectives to be achieved in the run up to the next G8 Summit in Evian. My Department is responsible for coordinating UK implementation of the G8 Africa Action Plan in close co-operation with other Government Departments. Baroness Amos is continuing to pursue the UK agenda within the G8 in her role as the Prime Minister's Africa Personal Representative. A progress report on the Africa Action Plan will be presented by Africa Personal Representatives at the next Summit. The Prime Minister has committed the UK to a £1 billion bilateral programme in Africa by 2006.

Arms Sales

Dr. Jenny Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what military equipment has been purchased with funds from the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool in each year since the programme's inception, indicating in each case the amount spent and the end uses. [82240]

Clare Short: The Africa Conflict Prevention Pool became operational in FY 2001–02. The aim of the Pool is to improve the effectiveness of the UK's contribution to conflict prevention, reduction and peacekeeping in sub-Saharan Africa. The Pool covers the direct conflict prevention activities of the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, where a joint approach adds value.

Details of military equipment purchased with Pool funding, since the inception of the Pool, are as follows:

Recipient	*Financial Year*	*Cost*	*Description*
Sierra Leone	2001–02	£5.27 million	Personal equipment, light weapons, ammunition, communications equipment and vehicles for the Sierra Leone armed forces
Kenya	2001–02	£14,000	Thirty-five (35) mine detectors for Kenyan armed forces deploying as part of the UN Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea

All of the above equipment was provided by the Ministry of Defence. The equipment for Sierra Leone was provided as part of the UK programme of support for the Sierra Leone Government. The purpose was to assist in training and equipping the armed forces and was announced in Parliament at the time.

The equipment to Kenya was provided in March 2002 along with demining training for the Kenyan armed forces prior to their deployment to UNMEE.

Developing Countries

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what initiatives are being

pursued by her Department to provide targeted support and protection for local producers of developing countries in order for them to benefit from international trade; and if she will make a statement; [82521]

(2) what initiatives are being pursued by her Department to provide targeted support and protection for local producers in developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [82522]

Clare Short: Poor country producers can best be helped through a combination of supportive policies and programmes in country and significant trade liberalisation in areas of importance to them. Through the Doha Development Agenda agreed at the fourth WTO ministerial in November 2001, the UK is arguing for significant reductions in trade distorting policies and greater access for developing country products to OECD markets, particularly for agricultural goods and light manufactures.

Specifically, the UK Government support the Integrated Framework, which aims to mainstream trade issues into a country's growth and poverty reduction strategies. This ensures that the right sort of complementary policies i.e. rural roads, access to credit or skill training, can be developed to reduce the impact on poor people of changes in their livelihoods and enable small producers to take advantage of new trading opportunities.

My Department provides support designed to meet the different circumstances and needs of a broad range of producers throughout the developing world. These include interventions designed to improve food security as well as to support the delivery of improved rural services. We also provide support to international agencies and works to enhance the impact of interventions made by these institutions. Details of our initiatives can be found in the 2002 Departmental Report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* the European Union's and *(b)* her Department's response has been to the drought and food shortages in Ethiopia. [80576]

Clare Short: So far we have made food and non-food humanitarian commitments of some £12.3 million in calendar year 2002. The EC has committed euro 23 million for 97,000 metric tonnes of food aid to cover food needs until the end of 2002. In addition to the food aid provision the EC has approved a euro 4 million programme of humanitarian aid for the victims of drought, which includes providing water and sanitation, supporting health services and providing targeted supplementary and therapeutic feeding. DFID provides funding for nearly 20 per cent. of EC assistance.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how *(a)* the UK Government and *(b)* the European Union is responding to the most recent appeal from the World Food Programme for food for Ethiopia. [80602]

Clare Short: The World Food Programme considers current pledges of food aid to be sufficient to meet needs until mid-January 2003, but they remain concerned about prospects for February and March, when needs are expected to be high. In terms of physical stocks the Ethiopian Food Security Reserve is expected on current estimates to have sufficient food available until April. The European Commission has informed us that they have made available euro 23 million, of which the DFID share is nearly euro 4.6 million, which is equivalent to 97,000 metric tonnes of food aid, to cover food needs until the end of 2002. This total includes euro 5 million, which is equivalent to 13,000 metric tonnes of food aid, to be provided through the World Food Programme. The Commission is also looking at the best ways to provide timely and effective assistance to address the emerging food crisis in 2003.

We are taking careful note of the WFP and Government of Ethiopia reports and appeals and keeping the situation under continuous review. As always we remain committed to playing our part in the international response to humanitarian need.

HIV/AIDS

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment her Department has made of the rate of spread of HIV/AIDS in *(a)* India, *(b)* Bangladesh, *(c)* Thailand and *(d)* Indonesia. [82239]

Clare Short: DFID is working closely with the Governments of both India and Bangladesh to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. India has a significant HIV epidemic, with prevalence in some states at around 2 per cent. The number of people with HIV/AIDS is estimated at 3.9 million. In Bangladesh, although HIV prevalence is less than 1 per cent., even in high risk groups, we recognise as a priority the prevention of its further spread.

We are currently considering what role there may be for DFID in working on HIV/AIDS in Indonesia, where evidence suggests that prevalence in certain places and in certain groups has risen quickly. Thailand is often held up as one of the world's success stories in combating HIV/AIDS, having reduced the number of new infections from 143,000 in 1991 to 29,000 in 2001. DFID has no bilateral programme there, but we do continue to monitor carefully the status of the epidemic.

Overseas Aid

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to announce the timetable for the UK meeting the UN on 0.7 GNI aid commitment following the announced aid increase to its ODA in the Queen's Speech; and whether aid increase is additional to that announced during the Comprehensive Spending Review. [82074]

Clare Short: It was announced at the recent Comprehensive Spending Review that UK ODA/GNI will be 0.4 per cent. in FY 2006–07. Subsequent changes will be decided infuture spending reviews. The UK remains firmly committed to the 0.7 per cent. target.

The Queen's Speech referred to the increase already announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Plan Puebla Panama

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with *(a)* her counterparts within the EU and *(b)* the World bank regarding the Plan Puebla Panama in Mexico. [82229]

Clare Short: None.

Sierra Leone

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made in improving the judicial system in Sierra Leone. [82658]

Clare Short: The Sierra Leone judiciary has been in a state of decline for at least the last 30 years. Its operational independence has been deeply undermined. Low pay is a cause of poor morale and contributes to all round ineffectiveness. Investment in training and infrastructure has been minimal. The perception in Sierra Leone is that it is unresponsive, unaccountable, corrupt and inaccessible. It is neither trusted nor respected.

Starting from this very low base my Department has been working with the Sierra Leone judiciary to support reform. Assistance to date has concentrated on the restoration of infrastructure, the provision of equipment, court recording systems and procedures and legal drafting.

We are considering a further programme of assistance that would take an integrated approach to the justice system (police, legal and judicial and penal systems). This will be a joint project with the World Bank. We expect the UN agencies active in Sierra Leone and the Commonwealth Secretariat to take part. We intend the programme to take place over at least five years.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made towards the alleviation of poverty in Sierra Leone. [82661]

Clare Short: Sierra Leone agreed an interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) with the international financial institutions in September 2001. It outlines a post-conflict transitional phase focused on restoration of security, re-launching the economy, and provision of basic services to the most vulnerable groups. Longer term programmes for poverty reduction will be contained in a full PRSP that the Government of Sierra Leone intend to prepare by late 2003. Agreement of a full PRSP will be the key step for an agreed agenda between the Government of Sierra Leone and the donor community for poverty reduction.

Peace was declared in Sierra Leone in January this year. Inevitably, the Government's initial focus has been on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants, and measures to assist the millions of internally displaced persons and returning refugees. After 10 years of conflict, Sierra Leone faces a huge task in developing and implementing policies to address poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals. There are some encouraging developments, for example, in improving primary school enrolment and immunisation rates, but much remains to be done in a country severely damaged by conflict.

We are supporting a major programme of support to reform and poverty reduction in Sierra Leone, including direct assistance with the preparation of a full PRSP. Under the Poverty Reduction Framework Arrangement signed with the Government of Sierra Leone this month, we have committed £120 million over the next three years, as part of a 10-year commitment of support. This complements the US$172 million poverty reduction and growth facility agreed by Sierra Leone with the IMF in September 2001, and the US$950 million of debt relief available through the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, both of which will assist Sierra Leone to address recovery and poverty reduction.

Sudan

Dr. Jenny Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department has taken since the seminar on education in Sudan on 29 July held by her Department; and if she will make a statement. [82234]

Clare Short: Since the seminar, my Department has given £316,000 to UNICEF for education in the Nuba Mountains cease-fire area. This is proceeding well: 600 school kits have already been delivered and more are on the way; rehabilitation of school buildings has also started. We are also supporting a range of scholarship programmes particularly targeting women and students from conflict-affected areas. My Senior Education Adviser visited north and south Sudan in October to review this work and to discuss plans to rehabilitate the education system in Sudan. We continue to plan for what we hope will be a comprehensive peace in the New Year.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to combat the epidemics of kala azar and guinea worm in southern Sudan. [82238]

Clare Short: So far in 2002 we have provided a total of 743,048 to Medecins sans Frontieres for three urgent health care projects in southern Sudan, which include the treatment of people suffering from the recent outbreak of Kala Azar (also known as visceral leishmanaisis).

We are not presently funding any projects dealing with Guinea Worm in Sudan as this need is being met by other organisations, such as the Carter Centre. However, should the situation worsen, we would consider providing support.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

LPG Stations

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what strategies her Department has adopted to promote the supply of liquefied petroleum gas. [80504]

Mr. Wilson: This Department is actively working with colleagues in DTLR and HMT, and with the energy and transport industries to promote wider uptake of alternative fuels in particular liquid petroleum gas (LPG).

At the opening of the 1000th LPG filling station in February this year, I announced LPG Boost, a £1 million DTI funded programme over two years to boost the uptake of LPG, as a vehicle fuel. I recently announced further details of this scheme which will introduce grants for converters and seek to raise awareness of LPG, particularly in four targeted rural areas of the country—Highlands and Islands, Mid and North Wales, Cornwall and East Ayrshire.

University Research (Government Funding)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Government funding for investment in university research and development each part of the United Kingdom receives *(a)* in absolute terms and *(b)* in proportion to its population [82030]

Ms Hewitt: Government funding for investment in university research and development through the Research Councils and Funding Councils (and, in Northern Ireland, the Department for Education and Learning) in the UK is as follows:

	Absolute terms (£ million)	*Per head of population (£)*
England	1,313	27
Northern Ireland	24	14
Scotland	176	35
Wales	62	21

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to take *(a)* legal and *(b)* other action against British-based companies and their subsidiaries which carry out cosmetic testing on animals outside of the EU where such testing is illegal within the EU. [80838]

(2) what recent assessment she has made of *(a)* UK and *(b)* European legislation in relation to cosmetic testing on animals; and if she will make a statement. [80839]

(3) what legal advice she has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* received to establish whether an EU ban on the marketing of cosmetics tested on animals would be acceptable under the WTO regime. [80851]

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidance her Department offers to British companies in respect of the use of animals for cosmetic testing purposes. [81597]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answers 20 November 2002]:* A ban on animal testing finished cosmetic products was introduced in the UK in 1997 and a subsequent ban on animal testing cosmetic of ingredients was introduced in the UK in 1998. These bans are to be made Europe-wide following the recently agreed 7th amendment to the Cosmetics Directive.

This Amendment will introduce a ban on the testing of finished cosmetic products on animals. It will also introduce a ban on the sale in the EU of cosmetic products or their ingredients which have been tested on animals, once alternative tests are in place. It will also, within 10 years, prohibit the marketing in the EU of cosmetic products which have been tested on animals wherever in the world that testing might have been carried out.

BAE Systems Contract

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what inquiries were made of ECGD by the Jersey authorities regarding the contract which it backed between BAE Systems and the Government of Qatar in 1996. [82351]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD discussed this matter with the Serious Fraud Office which was giving assistance to the Jersey authorities. The nature of this assistance is a matter for the SFO

Corruption

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures ECGD operates for investigating allegations of corruption made regarding projects it has covered. [82349]

Ms Hewitt: Where there are allegations or suspicions of corrupt practice, ECGD will carry out initial inquiries to seek further information. But ECGD has no investigatory powers and thus passes any substantive information it receives when relevant to the appropriate authorities, for example the police or the serious fraud office.

ECGD Staff

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff from ECGD have gone on to work for companies which have received ECGD support; which companies they went to work for in the last 10 years; and what precautions ECGD takes to prevent conflict of interest. [82347]

Ms Hewitt: Since November 1992 13 civil servants have left ECGD to work for companies which have received support from the Department. In all cases to ensure there was no cause for any suspicion of impropriety, they sought and obtained the required prior approval under the Civil Service rules governing the acceptance of outside business appointments and where appropriate were approved subject to conditions. The details are as follows:

Date left	*Company*
January 1993	GEC Alsthom Ltd.
June 1994	ANZ Grindlays Bank
June 1994	Trafalgar House Construction
February 1995	Bank of America
December 1995	British Aerospace
September 1997	Royal Bank of Scotland
December 1997	Barclays Bank plc
July 1999	Natwest
March 2000	Halifax Bank PLC
September 1999	Motherwell Bridge Holdings Ltd.
July 2001	Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi
June 2001	Barclays Bank plc
October 2001	Royal Bank of Scotland

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff have been seconded from the private sector to ECGD and from which companies they have been seconded in the last 10 years. [82348]

Ms Hewitt: Four people have been seconded to ECGD from the private sector in the last 10 years and details are as follows:

An Economist from Barclays Bank plc between October 1989 and January 1993;

British Aerospace for 15 working days over the period June to September 1993;

HSBC between January 1996 and December 1997; and

Nat West Bank between July 1997 and February 1999.

Fireworks Sales

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will take steps *(a)* to ban over-the-counter sale of fireworks, *(b)* to introduce a local licensing system for applications to use fireworks for party and community events and *(c)* to regulate the sale of fireworks through order-only companies; and if she will make a statement. [81483]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government do not believe the case has been made for banning the sale of fireworks to the public. Primary legislation would be required to do this as well as regulating the sale and use of fireworks. The Consumer Protection Act 1987 only allows the making of regulations to control the safety of fireworks as a product.

Also, I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 17 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 889–90, announcing a package of measures to address problems caused by fireworks.

Insolvency Service

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Insolvency Service about this year's pay negotiations; and if she will make a statement. [82103]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 722W.

Israel

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the export licences which have been approved for arms sales to Israel in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [80901]

Nigel Griffiths: Details of all export licences issued between 2 May 1997 and 31 December 2001 are published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 Annual Reports are available from the Libraries of the House.

Between 1 January 2002 and 7 November 2002, 64 Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and four Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) were issued, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in Israel. Individual export licences might cover a range of items with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the totals for all of the relevant ratings. Details are set out in the following table:

Rating	*Number of SIELs issued*	*Number of OIELs issued*
ML3	1	—
ML4	9	—
ML5	13	—
ML6	2	—
ML7	1	—
ML9	6	—
ML10	12	—
ML11	5	2
ML14	2	—
ML15	3	—
ML16	2	—
ML18	1	—
ML21	3	—
ML22	1	—
PL5017	2	—
PL5021	1	—
PL5031	4	2

In addition, items on the Military List might have been exported under certain Open General Export Licences. Copies of all Open General Export Licences are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Newsagents

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the National Federation of Newsagents; and if she will make a statement. [82104]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* My right hon. Friend and I have not had any recent discussions with the National Federation of Retail Newsagents.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) is currently reviewing the 1994 Code of Practice on the supply of national newspapers, introduced following the 1993 monopoly report on newspaper distribution in England and Wales, and is expected to report by the end of the year.

Parliamentary Question

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her holding answer of 19 November 2002, Ref: 81866, if she will explain the meaning and purpose of the words "Round Robin-guidance Expected", added to the question. [83029]

Ms Hewitt: The wording was provided for drafting officials. Because of an administrative error, it was not removed from the text of the holding reply, for which I apologise.

Plan Puebla Panama

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if export credit guarantees have been granted to companies wishing to take part in the Plan Puebla Panama in Mexico. [82230]

Ms Hewitt: No export credit guarantees have been granted for the Plan Puebla Panama.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the UK companies who have expressed an interest in taking part in the Plan Puebla Panama in Mexico. [82232]

Ms Hewitt: Though some UK companies will be aware of Plan Puebla Panama because information is publicly available, we do not know of any who have registered interest in it. The Plan is still being developed in Mexico with the details of specific projects and financing yet to be finalised.

Post Office Card Accounts

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the take-up rate of the post card account needed to ensure the financial viability of the urban sub post office network once the Urban Reinvention Programme has been completed. [82164]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* Urban reinvention is a modernisation and restructuring programme designed to ensure that urban sub post offices can operate as viable businesses for their owners and offer improved services from the right locations to serve their communities.

As identified in the PIU report on the future of the network, the future viability of the restructured urban network will depend on the ability of the business to maximise commercial opportunities, improve efficiency and improve the quality of individual offices. It is anticipated that banking services will make a major contribution towards ensuring a viable future for many urban post offices.

Universal banking services (both the card account and the banks own basic bank accounts), together with the Post Office's plans for an expansion of network banking (commercial arrangements between the Post Office and individual banks providing access to standard bank accounts over post office counters), should lead to a substantial increase in the number of people using post offices to do banking transactions. Wider access to bank accounts at post offices opens up a very much larger market than benefit recipients alone, and this should benefit sub-postmasters both directly and through increased footfall.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what commitments have been made to banks concerning the number of *(a)* basic bank account and *(b)* post office card accounts that will be opened. [82167]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* No commitments have been made to banks concerning the numbers of Post Office card accounts or basic bank accounts that will be opened.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there is an upper limit for the number of post card accounts that can be opened. [82168]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The aim of the benefit payment migration to ACT and marketing strategy will be to ensure that each customer has the best account for his or her circumstances. There are no eligibility criteria and no cap on numbers for the card account at the Post Office. Customers will choose the account they want.

Post Offices

Mr Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* Post Offices and *(b)* sub-Post Offices there were in Dundee East and Dundee West in *(i)* 1972, (ii) 1975, (iii) 1980, (iv) 1985, *(v)* 1990, (vi) 1995 and (vii) 2000. [82416]

Mr. Timms: I am informed by Post Office Limited that historic data in the form requested is not available as the company does not require this data for operational reasons.

However, in 1999, the Post Office undertook a special exercise to determine the number of post offices in each parliamentary constituency in response to the then hon Member for Birmingham Erdington (Mr. Robin Corbett) on 29 November 1999 (*Official Report*, column 22W). I further understand from Post Office Limited that it compiled a list of post offices by parliamentary constituency as of 20 April 2002 showing their classification as urban or rural offices. A copy of this list is held in the Library of the House.

Rural Post Offices

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the funding for the rural post office network, announced by the Royal Mail Chairman on 13 November. [82809]

Mr. Timms: Following my announcement in the House on 13 June, agreement has been reached in principle on the overall financing package for the Royal Mail. I will shortly be announcing details of the assistance to be made available to the rural post office network, which will be subject to state aids clearance.

Sub-Post Offices

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether a full-time sub-post office can increase its hours of business for each working day and cease to be regarded as fulfilling its commitment to core hours; [82436]

(2) how many sub-post offices in *(a)* Dumfries and Galloway, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK are open for less than full-time hours; [82437]

(3) what plans she has to review the system of core hours for the sub-post office network; and if she will make a statement. [82438]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Arts Council Funding

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Arts Council on the funding of sexually explicit material. [82596]

Dr. Howells: None.

BBC News 24 Report

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the BBC News 24 report will be placed in the Library. [82534]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently considering her response to Richard Lambert's review of BBC News 24 and will place the review in the Libraries of both Houses as soon as possible.

Community Radio Station Licences

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under what circumstances deposits required for applications for community radio station licences will be returnable; what levels of deposit are required for individuals applying for licences for community radio stations; and what assessment she has made of the types of organisations and individuals who are likely to apply for licences to run new community radio stations. [83301]

Dr. Howells: The Radio Authority are currently undertaking a pilot study of a number of access radio stations. The purpose of the study is to establish whether access radio is viable and how it might be licensed, regulated, funded, promoted and organised. The completed evaluation is expected to be published next spring. No charge is made for licensing the pilot experiment access radio stations.

Clause 254 of the Communications Bill would allow the Secretary of State, by Order, to modify the legislation regulating radio services to make special provision for access radio. Any such Order could make provision about the application arrangements.

No assessment has been undertaken about the types of organisations that might apply, but I would expect there to be a broad range of applicants.

Elgin Marbles

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received on the future of the Elgin Marbles. [82224]

Tessa Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Andrew Dismore) on 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 172W.

Library Investment

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the amount spent by each local authority per head of population on library services in 2002. [82488]

Dr. Howells: This information is contained within column 20 (population per service point) of the CIPFA Public Library Statistics, copies of which are lodged in the House of Commons Library. The latest actual figures available are for 2000–01. Estimates are available for 2001–02.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the average annual investment in new book stock in libraries was for each shire authority in England in the last 12 months. [82490]

Dr. Howells: This information can be obtained from column 163 (total material acquisitions) of the CIPFA Public Library Statistics, copies of which are lodged in the House of Commons Library. The latest actual figures available are for 2000–01. Estimates are available for 2001–02.

Library Staffing

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people there were per static library in each shire authority in England in 2002. [82489]

Dr. Howells: This information is contained within column 180 (net expenditure per 1,000 population, excluding capital charges) of the CIPFA Public Library Statistics, copies of which are lodged in the House of Commons Library. The latest actual figures available are for 2000–01. Estimates are available for 2001–02.

National Arts Council of England

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the *(a)* median, *(b)* youngest and *(c)* oldest age of the National Arts Council of England members are; and if she will make a statement. [82771]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is in the following table:

National Arts Council of England Members	*Years old*
Median age	54
Youngest age	38
Oldest age	71

Policing Costs

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress with the review of policing costs incurred through stadium events, major sporting events and late night city centre entertainment. [80731]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

We have set up a working group, comprising representatives of the Home Office, Department of Culture Media and Sport, the Association of Chief police officers (ACPO) and the football authorities, to consider a range of strategic policing football issues, including police charging policy in connection with matches, and the investment of football clubs in the wider community. Supporter groups and other interested parties will be consulted. The group will commence its deliberations shortly.

The Government is also concerned at the costs incurred in policing entertainment venues, particularly pubs and clubs which operate late into the night and major events such as sporting and outdoor entertainment. We welcome schedules where entertainment outlets contribute to the additional policing costs associated with alcohol-related disturbance.

Radiocommunications Agency

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the recommendations made by the Radiocommunications Agency, in their report, 'Introducing recognised spectrum access'. [82723]

Dr. Howells: General provisions for recognised spectrum access are included in the Communications Bill. The Government is currently considering responses to the consultation document, 'Introducing recognised spectrum access', about the implementation of this system and there will be further opportunity for interested parties to comment on detailed proposals for specific frequency bands in due course.

Regional Arts Council Members

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the *(a)* median age, *(b)* youngest age and *(c)* oldest age is of the Regional Arts Council members; and if she will make a statement. [82445]

Dr. Howells: Regional Arts Council members ages are as follows:

	Years old
Median age	50
Youngest age	29
Oldest age	73

Regional Museums

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions and representations she has received from regional museums *(a)* individually and *(b)* collectively, regarding *(i)* free admission, (ii) funding by her Department, (iii) funding from other sources and (iv) other issues. [82446]

Dr. Howells: My Department received a number of representations from Resource (The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries), national and regional museums and museums' bodies. These were taken into account prior to our announcement of £70 million funding for regional museums from this year to 2005–06.

Restrictive Service Licence (Taunton)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received about the Restrictive Service Licence for Television in Taunton. [82604]

Dr. Howells: I have received no representations. The licensing and regulation of Restricted Service Licences is a matter for the Independent Television Commission.

Sporting Engagements

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what sporting engagements she has attended by category in her official capacity since 7th June 2001. [81573]

Tessa Jowell: I have attended:

Commonwealth Games

5 July 2001 City of Manchester Stadium Topping Out Ceremony

4 December 2001 Spirit of Friendship Festival

5 December 2001 Commonwealth Games Reception

12 February 2002 Visit to Sportcity Manchester

25 July 2002 Commonwealth Games—opening ceremony

30 July 2002 Commonwealth Games—various events

4 August 2002 Commonwealth Games—closing ceremony

Athletics

31 January 2002 Athletics forum

Olympics

27 October 2002 Olympic sites in Barcelona

5 November 2002 Olympic sites in Beijing

Football

14 August 2001 BTA/Premier League Partnership launch at Leeds United's Training Ground.

15 August 2001 Speech at the Club and Talent Development Forum at Bisham Abbey

National Sports Centre

12 December 2001 Groundbreaking ceremony at Bharat Football Club, Leicester

31 January 2001 Launch of Playing for Success initiative at Arsenal FC.

21 April 2002 Norwich City v Stockport County at Carrow Road

12 September 2002 Supporters Direct Annual Conference

29 September 2002 Visit to National Football Museum

School Sport

19 November 2001 Launch for New Opportunities for PE and Sport programme in Newham

2 October 2002 Launch Schools Sport Programme Collegiate High School Blackpool

27 June 2002 Launch of Sport England Toolkit for Primary Schools

28 June 2002 Launch of Space for Sport and Arts Grafton Primary School

Cricket

10 December 2001 Launch of the 'Karrot1 youth project at The Oval, Kennington July 2002 England v India at Lords

Horse Racing

14 March 2002 Cheltenham Gold Cup

20 June 2002 Royal Ascot Ladies Day

Rugby

3 March 2002 Six Nations England vs Scotland at Twickenham

8 May 2002 England Women's Rugby Football Union Team Reception

Golf

28 September 2002 Ryder Cup

General

25 March 2002 Opening of Holmes Place Fulham Pools (public/private partnership) 17 May 2002 Blaneu Gwent sport Personality of the Year Awards Ceremony.

Television Reception (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on television reception in rural Lancashire, with particular reference to the villages of Whalley, Billington and Langho. [82374]

Dr. Howells: I understand from the Independent Television Commission (ITC) that terrestrial analogue television services are broadcast across Lancashire from the Winter Hill main transmitter and around twenty relay stations. The ITC advise that a relay station was built in 1975 specifically to provide analogue television coverage to Whalley, Billington and Langho, although a small area of South Whalley remains unserved. Digital terrestrial television (DTT) services are provided from the Winter Hill, Lancaster and Pendle Forest transmitters. Details on DTT availability can be found on the Freeview website at: www.freeview.co.uk. Television services may also be accessed via digital satellite.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Coffee Imports

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made to implement the International Coffee Organisation quality scheme of coffee imports. [80942]

Mr. Morley: The International Coffee Organisation's (ICO) Quality Improvement programme was approved by ICO Council Resolution 416 on 1 February 2002. The programme commenced on 1 October 2002. It applies to ICO members and requires that exports of coffee, accompanied by Certificates of Origin, shall comply with minimum standards specified in the Resolution. Exporting members are also required to develop and implement national measures to ensure that no exports of green coffee fail to meet the exportable standards. Discussions are currently on-going about how the exports of processed coffee should be dealt with.Exporting members are currently in the process of implementing the Council's Resolution within their countries. Members will report to the ICO Council on the measures they have taken to do so and of any difficulties encountered. This will feed into an ICO review of the programme planned for September 2003.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to remove lowest grade coffee from importing country stocks. [80943]

Mr. Morley: The international coffee organisation is looking at how importing member countries can become more directly involved in implementing its quality improvement programme. The organisation has not proposed the removal of the lowest grade coffee from importing country stocks and has no action in train to do so.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the US Government regarding membership of the International Coffee Organisation. [80944]

Mr. Morley: The UK supports the proposal for the USA to join the new International Coffee Agreement 2001. We believe this is necessary for the ICO to be fully effective. As members of the International Coffee Organisation (ICO) the UK supported ICO Council Resolution 413, approved on 27 September 2002, inviting the USA to join.

"Don't Bring Back More Than You Bargained For" Campaign

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the circumstances are that prevent Mr. Howlett of Dartmouth from qualifying for the suckler cow premium. [82842]

Alun Michael: The only apparent circumstance which may prevent Mr. Howlett from receiving Suckler Cow Premium Scheme (SCPS) payments is the availability of SCPS quota for the 2002 Scheme year. A producer who does not hold SCPS quota may acquire quota for his 2002 SCPS claim by transfer or lease during the 2002 trading period. This opened in June and will close on 6 December 2002.

Administration Costs

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the annual administration costs are of *(a)* the Environment Agency and *(b)* the Food Safety Agency. [81026]

Mr. Meacher: *(a)* The Environment Agency is subject to a control limit on its total administration costs. For the current financial year (2002–03), the control limit is £113 million.

(b) The Food Standards Agency reports to Parliament through Department of Health Ministers

Animal Imports

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to change the law in respect of the powers available to enforcement agencies responsible for port control on the import of animal and vegetable products. [80467]

Margaret Beckett: The powers for enforcement officers to search baggage were extended in May 2002.

We are now reviewing powers further in the light of my announcement on 6 November, that responsibility for detecting illegal imports of animals, fish, plants and the products, and foodstuffs (including meat) would be transferred to Her Majesty's customs and excise as soon as practicable.

Arable Crops

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to encourage the establishment of new markets for non-food uses of arable crops. [80480]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are considering its response to the first report from the Government-Industry Forum on Non-Food Uses of Crops which identifies opportunities for non-food uses of arable crops. Defra and DTI are consulting stakeholders on

establishing a new centre which will bring together industry, academia and the research community to drive forward the commercial development of non-food uses of crops. Defra and DTI are also considering a joint initiative to provide grant support to promote technology transfer through demonstration projects. A cut in the duty rate for biodiesel came into effect in July this year to encourage the biofuel market.

British Cattle Movement Service

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the accuracy of the British Cattle Movement Service database. [80453]

Margaret Beckett: The accuracy of the Cattle Tracing Scheme database, which is kept by the British Cattle Movement Service, depends on the accuracy of the data supplied to it by cattle keepers. Currently, around one in five birth registrations and more than one in five movement notifications have some sort of error or anomaly within them.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many representations have been received regarding the loss of cattle passport tear-off slips by the Cattle Movement Service; and if she will make a statement. [80884]

Alun Michael: Some 22,000 representations have been made to the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) since May this year about notifications which were alleged to have been sent to the BCMS but have not been received there and entered on the cattle tracing system (CTS) database.

In addition the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has received an estimated 45,000 representations (telephone calls, e-mails and letters) about bovine scheme and CTS database issues.

Regulations governing the payment of bovine subsidies require that payments should be withheld and penalties applied where the claimants have not fulfilled their legal obligations to make appropriate notifications to the BCMS.

Butterflies

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated population was of each species of butterfly in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 2001. [80873]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* Information in the form requested is not currently available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, administered by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, provides data on changes in the abundance of butterflies at selected sites throughout the United Kingdom. Information on the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme can be found at http://bms.ceh.ac.uk/.

Data from the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme formed part of the basis for "The Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland" published in 2001 by the Oxford United Press. Produced by Butterfly Conservation, the national Biological Recording Centre and the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club, the Atlas contains detailed accounts of the resident or regularly migrant butterfly species in Britain and Ireland, including information on their distribution and trends. A report "The State of Britain's Butterflies", which draws out the key results and conclusions from the Millennium Atlas is available on the Butterfly Conservation website http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/.

CAP Subsidies

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average payment per hectare from the Common Agricultural Policy's production subsidies is for *(a)* organic and *(b)* non-organic farmers in the UK. [81831]

Mr. Meacher: Organic farmers are eligible for support from the CAP on the same basis as conventional farmers. This means that organic producers in England receive the same rates of payment as conventional producers. Producers converting to organic farming are also eligible for support under the Organic Farming Scheme. The payment rates for England, other rates apply in other parts of the UK, can be found on the Department's website at http://defraweb/farm/schemes/aap—new.htm (arable crops), http://defraweb/farm/schemes/livstck.htm (cattle and sheep), http://defraweb/erdp/schemes/landbased/ofs/ofsindex.htm£aid (organic conversion).

Climate Change Policy

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often she has met the head of the agricultural departments of retail banks in the last 12 months; and how often her predecessor met the head of the agricultual departments of the retail banks. [81709]

Margaret Beckett: I met the heads of the agricultural departments of the retail banks in November 2001. I do not have information on when my predecessor met them.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she issues to Government Departments to ensure that their purchasing decisions do not contravene the Government's Climate Change Policy. [81775]

Mr. Meacher: Guidance issued to procurement officials on minimising the purchase of substances with a high global warming potential includes:

(i) "Towards More Sustainable Construction: Green Guide for Managers on the Government Estate" (published April 1999). URL: development.gov.uk/sdig/improving/partg/suscon/index.htm.

(ii) The "Green Guide for Buyers" (revised February 2001) URL: development.gov.uk/sdig/improving/partf/greenbuy/index.htm.

(iii) "Green Public Private Partnerships", July 2002. A copy of this publication is on ODPM's web site. URL: www.odpm.qov.uk/about/ppp/greenppp/index.htm.

CO_2 Emissions

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to reduce CO_2 emissions; and what targets she has set in this regard. [80533]

Mr. Meacher: The Government has set itself a domestic goal to reduce the UK's carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. This is in addition to the UK's target under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce emissions of a basket of six greenhouse gases to 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008 to 2012.

In November 2000, the Government published the UK climate change programme, which sets out a range of integrated policies and measures to reduce emissions in six broad sectors: the energy supply industry; business; transport; the residential sector, agriculture, forestry and land use; and, the public sector. Key policies in the programme include: the target under the Renewables Obligation that 10 per cent. of licensed electricity supplies will be generated from renewable sources by 2010; climate change levy and climate change agreements; the worlds first economy-wide emissions trading scheme; the voluntary agreements between the European Commission and the European, Japanese and Korean car manufacturers to reduce average carbon dioxide emissions from new cars, supported by changes to vehicle excise duty and company car taxation; and the Energy Efficiency Commitment on energy suppliers to encourage consumers to take up energy saving opportunities.

We estimate that the quantified policies in the programme could help reduce the UK's carbon dioxide emissions by 19 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. Carbon savings, which have not been quantified, from additional policies could help us achieve our domestic goal.

Composting

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps her Department plans to take to encourage and enable local authorities to *(a)* promote composting and *(b)* provide low cost compost bins; [80513]

(2) what steps her Department is taking to implement new composting initiatives. [80514]

Mr. Meacher: The Government has set local authorities a target to recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005. This national target has been underpinned by local authority specific statutory performance standards. These standards set levels of recycling and composting that all waste authorities must achieve by 2003–04 and 2005–06. £140 million was provided by the Government under its Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund to help local authorities achieve these targets. The Strategy Unit Report on Sustainable Waste Management, due to be published shortly, will also be considering recycling and composting targets and the help required to meet them.

The Department commissioned a risk assessment that looked at the animal and public health risks posed by the composting/biogas treatment of catering waste and spreading it on land. This work concluded that, provided satisfactory controls are in place, composting/biogas treatment can be done safely.

We are therefore developing processes that will allow catering waste to be composted safely, based on the results of the risk assessment (without the risk assessment, we would be obliged to follow the EU standard, which would be more restrictive). The aim is to get a draft SI out for public consultation by end November, and to amend the legislation early in the new year. The overall objective is to develop a set of rules that will allow composting of catering waste to take place economically while fully protecting animal and public health.

Crop Spraying

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce new requirements for the training of people employed to spray crops. [80449]

Margaret Beckett: I have no plans at present to introduce any new requirements. However, my officials are working closely with the National Proficiency Test Council to improve operator training and certification. This is an activity contributing to the industry-led voluntary initiative aimed at reducing the environmental impacts of pesticides.

Diversification

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many funding schemes are available through her Department for farmers who wish to adopt environmentally friendly farming practices; and how much is available per scheme. [81150]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The three main agri-environment schemes run by this Department are the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and the Organic Farming Scheme. Their budgets in the current financial year are £48 million, £66 million and £20 million respectively. In addition, organisations such as English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the National Park Authorities which receive funding from this Department also operate some schemes.

Elephant Products

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is in respect of the trade in elephant products where these can be authenticated as having come from properly managed stock. [81598]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* Where there are clear safeguards, the Government would in principle support a limited trade in ivory that is authenticated as being derived from a properly managed source, i.e. where the elephants are managed in a sustainable manner that is not detrimental to the conservation of the species. However, we could only agree to such trade if we were satisfied that the intended market for this ivory was itself properly managed in accordance with the principles set out under the appropriate CITES Conference Resolution, and would

not provide a cover for trade in illegally acquired ivory. We do not believe that the conditions to permit this are yet in place.

Environment Agency Travel

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the budget is of the Environment Agency for 2002–03 for cars and car travel by hon. Members and staff of the agency. [81014]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency's budget for car provision and car mileage in 2002–03 is as follows:

Agency's budget	*£ million*
Lease car costs	12.9
Less employees contribution	2.9
Net cost	10.0
Lease car mileage costs	2.5
Casual and essential mileage costs	4.2
Members mileage costs	0.2
Total	16.9

Fallen Stock

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she intends to publish details of the National Collection Scheme for fallen stock; [80450]

(2) what estimate she has made of how many fallen *(a)* cattle, *(b)* sheep and *(c)* pigs were disposed of last year by hunt kennels. [80451]

Margaret Beckett: Since April 2002, officials have been holding discussions with livestock and disposal industry stakeholders with the aim of developing a national fallen stock disposal scheme. However, it is for the industries concerned to work out how best to deal with their waste problems and to publish details of their proposal.

We do not have figures for the amount of fallen stock that hunt kennels have collected in the last year.

Fertilisers

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what restrictions are placed on the use of home-made fertilisers by individuals in their own gardens; and if she will make a statement. [80881]

Mr. Meacher: The Fertilisers Regulations 1991 (UK Statutory Instrument 1991/2197) apply only to fertilisers that are marketed.

The Animal By-Products Order 1999 (as amended) prevents the use on land of catering waste which may contain meat. This effectively bans the use of catering waste in commercial composting enterprises. The aim was to prevent livestock and poultry from having access to material which might introduce or spread animal diseases such as foot and mouth disease. It was not intended to prevent householders composting kitchen scraps for their own gardens. A proposed amendment to the Order to permit the composting of catering waste in approved premises will exempt domestic householders provided that they do not keep pigs or ruminants on the premises.

Section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act requires a person who deposits, recovers or disposes of waste (including compost) to obtain a waste management licence or to register an exemption from licensing. Current general guidance is that composting facilities should be at least 250 metres from residential areas. However householders who compost their own garden waste are not required to have a licence or a permit under waste management or pollution control legislation.

Foot and Mouth (Contingency Planning)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the foot and mouth contingency planning exercises in *(a)* Preston, *(b)* Carlisle, *(c)* Taunton and *(d)* Leeds in November. [82421]

Mr. Morley: These exercises are a part of the ongoing process of maintaining the readiness of the Department to deal with an outbreak of disease. Feedback from exercises and from investigations of suspected cases of disease is used to inform the further development of instructions and contingency plans. The lessons learned will be used as a foundation for future exercises.

IACS

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with which internet service providers her Department's system for online IACS registration is compatible. [80454]

Margaret Beckett: The Department's facility for the electronic submission of claims under the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) is managed by the Rural Payments Agency, and is a legacy system taken on by the Agency. This system requires an internet-enabled PC, and works with a range of internet browser options, but the choice of internet service provider used is for claimants to decide.

RPA has a major IT Change Programme, which is planned to come on stream in 2004. This programme will include electronic submission of a wide range of scheme claim forms, and integration with the RPA back-office processing systems.

Meat Imports

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many spot checks have been carried out on illegal meat imports at each designated port of entry into the United Kingdom since 31 March. [80463]

Margaret Beckett: Details of spot checks carried out for illegal meat imports are not collected centrally. It should be noted that during the course of checks for other illegal products (such as drugs), illegal meat imports may also be found and reported.

We do hold information on reported seizures. Since 31 March 2002, there have been 970 seizures of illegal animal product imports reported to the centralised Illegal Animal Products Seizures database.

It should also be noted that the checks required at each designated port of entry vary depending on whether trade and passengers come from within the EU or from third countries.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the adequacy of warning signs against meat imports at each designated port of entry into the United Kingdom. [80465]

Margaret Beckett: We continue to learn lessons about how to improve the impact of our message at ports and airports where there is strong competition for the attention of travellers. Defra is promoting a joint initiative with other Government Departments to review how the impact of the Government's message can be improved at ports and airports.

Posters are one element of the Government's work to raise public awareness of the rules for importing meat into the country.

The information displayed at ports of entry into the United Kingdom varies depending on whether trade and passengers come from within the European Union or from third countries. The Department has concentrated its efforts on increasing awareness of the rules for meat imports at ports of entry for passengers from outside the European Union.

Penalty posters and information leaflets are currently being redesigned to reflect the new EU rules on personal imports of meat and dairy products from outside the EU that will come into effect in January 2003.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions for the illegal import of *(i)* meat and (ii) meat products have been initiated since 31 March. [80469]

Margaret Beckett: Responsibility for prosecutions under the Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports) (England) Regulations lies with local authorities, and under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, with HM Customs.

We are aware of one successful prosecution brought by Crawley Borough Council in July, and six cautions issued by the London Port Health Authority in October. All were brought under the Products of Animal Origin regulations.

Defra is working with local authorities and with the Magistrates Association to raise awareness of the wider consequences of this offence and to encourage more prosecutions and the imposition of higher penalties.

National Parks (Housing)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to amend legislation to enable National Park authorities to restrict entitlement to own domestic dwellings in their area; and if she will make a statement. [82716]

Alun Michael: None.

Organic Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she has collated on which EU member states exclude kitchen waste from the composting of municipal organic waste; and if she will make a statement. [80512]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has no specific information on the practices followed by other member states in relation to the composting of kitchen waste, although visits have been made to look at composting operations in Italy and the Netherlands. However, the new EU Animal By-products Regulation (expected to come into force in 2003) permits the use in composting/biogas operations of catering waste containing meat and low-risk animal by-products. For plants processing only catering waste, the Regulation allows national standards to be set, provided they guarantee an equivalent effect in pathogen reduction to the treatment standard in the Regulation (70°C for one hour in a closed system).

The Department commissioned a risk assessment that looked at the animal and public health risks posed by the composting/biogas treatment of catering waste and spreading it on land. This work concluded that, provided satisfactory controls are in place, composting/biogas treatment can be done safely.

We are therefore developing processes that will allow catering waste to be composted safely, based on the results of the risk assessment (without the risk assessment, we would be obliged to follow the EU standard, which would be more restrictive and, possibly, counter-productive). The aim is to get a draft statutory instrument out for public consultation by the end of November, and to amend the legislation early in the new year. The overall objective is to develop a set of rules that will allow composting of catering waste to take place economically, while fully protecting animal and public health.

Planning Applications

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many occasions this year the Environment Agency has submitted formal objections to planning applications. [81019]

Mr. Meacher: The Agency has submitted 6,002 formal objections to planning applications this year.

Rights of Way

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total amount of financial support allocated to local authorities for rights of way duties, excluding Countryside and Right of Way Act 2000 responsibilities, was in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03, broken down by local authority. [82365]

Alun Michael: Funding for rights of way is included in the unhypothecated environmental protective and cultural services block. That is the means by which such support is provided to local authorities and is the procedure favoured by the Local Government Association. This block also includes services such as waste, libraries and museums.

Rural Payment Schemes

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what delays there have been in paying applicants under the rural payment schemes; and if she will make a statement. [82516]

Alun Michael: The current position with paying applicants under rural payment schemes is as follows:

Arable Area Payments Scheme 2002

The payment window opened on 16 November 2002 and closes on 31 January 2003. Over 40 per cent. of payments for over £700m have already been dispatched to producers, and the expectation is that most producers should receive their payments significantly before the deadline.

Bovine Schemes

Under European Community legislation the Rural Payments Agency is obliged to cross-check all animals claimed under the various bovine subsidy schemes against the British Cattle Movement Service Cattle Tracing System (CTS).

Cross-checks must be carried out to verify that all scheme rules are met and to ensure payments are only made on those animals that are correctly identified in accordance with the council regulations governing cattle identification.

When the cross-check of data was carried out a large number of discrepancies was identified between the information submitted on claim forms and that recorded on the CTS. The sheer scale of these discrepancies and the time taken to resolve them has resulted in around 19 per cent of unpenalised claims being paid after the statutory deadline of 30 June.

Producers who have experienced delays in receiving their 2001 scheme year bovine balance payments beyond 30 June as a result of a failure by the Agency or the British Cattle Movement Service will be compensated. The Agency is still finalising how the arrangement will be implemented. However, compensation will not be paid in any other circumstances. This would include for example, payment delayed because the Cattle Tracing System database had not been notified of changes prior to cross-checks being undertaken.

The Sheep Annual Premium Scheme

The payment window for the Sheep Annual Premium Scheme opened on 16 October 2002 and closes on 31 March 2003. 97per cent of the premium and national envelope top up payments were issued in the first few days of the opening of the payment window. In addition, 8,044 producers (95per cent. of those qualifying for the less favoured area supplement) have now received the supplementary payment amounting to £13 million.

England Rural Development Programme

The majority of ERDP scheme claims are currently being paid within published targets.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding has been allocated by the Rural Payments Agency to Lancashire farmers in each of the last three years. [82204]

Alun Michael: The amount paid to Lancashire farmers in the three years 1999 to 2001 detailed by scheme is as follows:

Scheme	*1999 (£)*	*2000(£)*	*2001(£)*
Arable area payment scheme	[1,2]5,166,282.081	[1,2]4,219,183.53	[1]4,078,743.37
Sheep annual premium scheme	[2]6,212,782.54	[2]4,572,845.27	[2]2,766,345.84
Beef special premium scheme	3,783,700.41	3,356,220.48	3,294,163.28
Extensification payment scheme	Scheme commenced 2000	[2]1,245,908.10	[1,2]1,142,670.00
Slaughter premium scheme	Scheme commenced 2000	[1]851,843.59	[1]1,095,057.88
Suckler cow premium scheme	[1,2]2,046,856.13	[1,2]1,573,154.87	[1,2]1,464,574.29
Hill farming allowance	HFA applications are made in one year and paid in the spring of the following year. Therefore the figure for 2001 is for applications made in 2000		2,495,519
Hill livestock compensatory allowance	[2]8,866.86	[2]24,581.05	

[1] Figures after modulation
[2] Figures include agrimonetary compensation

Sheep Exports

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on 11 November 2002; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(a)* during inspection for health certification purposes and *(b)* at Dover docks, and to where those sheep were taken; and what was the address of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments; [80764]

(2) how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on *(a)* 1 November, *(b)* 2 November, *(c)* 5 November, *(d)* 6 November and *(e)* 10 November; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(i)* during inspection for health certification purposes and (ii) at Dover docks; and to where those sheep were taken; and what the address was of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [80405]

(3) how many live sheep were exported from Dover on *(a)* the Caroline and *(b)* the Omega Livestock to continental Europe on 7 November; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the

sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(i)* during inspection for health certification purposes and (ii) at Dover docks; and to where those sheep were taken; and what address was of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [80404]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Total animals*	*Where consignments were certified*	*Animals rejected at certification*	*Animals rejected at Dover docks*	*Destination*
1 November	2,291	England and Wales	29	0	Italy and France
2 November	2,129	England and Wales	34	0	France
5 November	2,298	Wales	32	0	France
6 November	2,910	England, Scotland and Wales	17	0	France
7 November	[1]2,531	England and Wales	35	2	France
7 November	[2]867	Wales	9	0	Germany
10 November	2,514	England and Wales	40	0	France
10 November	49	England	0	1	Belgium
11 November	2,279	Wales	36	0	France

[1] 1,834 on the Caroline and 697 on the Omega Express
[2] 459 on the Caroline and 408 on the Omega Express

The sheep for the consignments listed above were certified within 48 hours prior to export. These consignments went to approved slaughterhouses apart from the sailing on 6 November which were fattening animals transported to holdings. The animals which were rejected at certification and Dover docks remained in Great Britain.

Sniffer Dogs

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the pilot scheme for sniffer dogs at Heathrow will *(a)* start and *(b)* finish. [80462]

Margaret Beckett: A pilot using two detector dogs to trace products of animal origin began at Heathrow on 16 September 2002 and will last for six months.

Social Exclusion Projects

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent by her Department and agencies on social exclusion projects in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 to date; and if she will break down the spending by *(i)* category and (ii) region in each year. [81143]

Alun Michael: This Department is not directly responsible for spending on social exclusion. However, various programmes administered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its agencies make a significant contribution.

The Market Town Initiative is being taken forward on Defra's behalf by the regional development agencies, working with the Countryside Agency and local partners, and using £37 million of Government funding announced in the Rural White Paper in November 2000 plus such match funding as can be secured from other public and private sources. Expenditure on the initiative in 2001–02 is estimated at some £2.9 million by the regional development agencies and some £2.5 million by the Countryside Agency. Information for the current financial year is not yet available but as most towns have now completed their action plans this should result in a substantial increase in project expenditure by rural development agencies and other partners.

The following table shows amounts (in £) spent on vital villages projects which address social exclusion. The Countryside Agency does not have a "social exclusion" label for its projects. The table picks up projects which target groups which can be social excluded (youth, unemployed, ethnic minorities, elderly).

£

Location	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*[1]2002–03*
Parish transport grant			
North east	0	12,044.21	13,552.50
North west	0	7,882.50	7,687.50
Yorkshire and Humber	0	8,447.50	40,125.00
East Midlands	0	10,048.55	12,128.22
West Midlands	0	34,359.89	27,234.06
East of England	0	15,172.81	72,295.00
South east	0	16,722.13	5,172.50
South west	0	10,384.78	59,009.28
Unknown	0	0	0
Total	0	115,062.40	237,204.10
Parish plans grant			
North east	0	18,359.55	17,144.75
North west	0	35,056.92	40,268.72
Yorkshire and Humber	0	41,709.05	10,428.00
East Midlands	0	15,154.00	22,723.02
West Midlands	0	73,521.56	63,282.48
East of England	0	67,779.66	53,367.56
South east	0	68,400.00	33,435.37
South west	0	72,331.10	63,803.98
Unknown	0	0	4,500.00
Total	0	392,313.30	308,953.90
Community service grants			
North east	0	141,495.00	167,714.90
North west	0	174,842.40	138,371.70
Yorkshire and Humber	0	126,605.40	71,385.59
East Midlands	0	278,272.20	55,686.99
West Midlands	0	269,418.70	169,568.70
East of England	0	460,042.40	338,675.80
South east	0	238,094.80	160,791.60
South west	2,990.90	360,381.50	315,091.10
Unknown	0	0	6,448.69
Total	2990.90	392,313.30	1,423,735.00
Regional transport partnership grants			
North east	158,123.53	408,026.90	167,714.90
North west	225,173.34	619,335.50	138,371.70
Yorkshire and Humber	355,350.80	404,558.80	71,385.59
East Midlands	270,180.92	524,587.50	55,686.99
West Midlands	405,339.67	1,207,526.00	169,568.70
East of England	13,182,309.48	612,624.30	338,675.80

Location	2000–01	2001–02	[1]2002–03
South east	719,663.51	1,138,787.00	160,791.60
South west	502,164.97	503,172.20	315,091.10
Unknown	767,688.14	696,444.70	6,448.69
Total	16,585,994.00	6,115,602.00	1,423,735.00
Overall total	770,678.10	1,596,134.00	1,976,342.00

[1] Please note 2002–03 figures are incomplete. Figures only reflect the grants awarded before 15 November 2002.

The English Rural Development Programme's Rural Enterprise Scheme provides, among other measures, support towards basic services for the rural economy and population and support towards the renovation and development of villages.

The basic services measure can include assistance towards setting up costs and initial operating costs for the provision of small scale transport e.g. mini-bus links, voluntary carer schemes, "out of school" child care schemes and projects that provide information and communication technology links as well as other infrastructure provision benefiting rural communities and businesses. The renovation and development of villages measure can include assistance towards the renovation of dilapidated buildings for commercial or community use or multi-functional village halls which combine both social and economic facilities.

Committed[1] expenditure under the Rural Enterprise Scheme through measures that can contribute to the alleviation of social exclusion:

[1] These figures represent committed (not actual) expenditure over the lifetime of all the approved projects under RES's basic services and renovation and development of villages measures. There is no guarantee that all the funding displayed specifically relates to expenditure on social exclusion projects.

£

Region	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Eastern	0	169,933.00	0
East Midlands	0	305,164.00	170,870.00
London	0	0	0
North east	0	0	37,157.00
North west	0	81,578.00	23,825.00
South east	0	81,312.00	4,808.00
South west	0	142,236.00	504,131
West Midlands	0	349,340.00	82,647.00
Yorks and Humber	0	35,522.00	189,191.00
Total	0	1,165,085.00	1,012,629.00

Staff Numbers

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff the Environment Agency employs; and how many it employed in 1997–98. [81018]

Mr. Meacher: On 31 October 2002, the Environment Agency employed 10,949 staff (10,683 full-time equivalents). On 1 April 1997, the Agency employed 9,123 staff (circa 8,904 full-time equivalents).

Sudden Oak Death

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of Sudden Oak Death have so far been reported to her Department; what *(a)* preventative and *(b)* remedial action she *(i)* has taken and (ii) will take in regard to Sudden Oak Death; and what treatments are available for Sudden Oak Death. [83033]

Mr. Meacher: There have been no reported cases of Sudden Oak Death in Europe.

A strain of Phytophthora ramorum, the pathogen which has caused Sudden Oak Death in parts of California, has been found on rhododendron and viburnum plants in a number of European countries in recent years. There have been 122 findings in England and Wales since the first one in April this year. In each case infected plants and those adjacent have been destroyed. Plants in a surrounding cordon sanitaire have been held for further monitoring. In response to a UK initiative, EU measures came into force on 1 November. These require member states to survey for the disease and apply precautionary measures through the plant passport system to prevent spread on nursery stock. Defra inspectors will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these measures.

Defra and the Forestry Commission are funding research to address uncertainties in the risk assessment for the European strain of the pathogen, in particular to determine whether native European trees are susceptible. No effective eradicatory fungicides are known at present, but Defra and Forestry Commission scientists are closely following research into treatments in the affected areas of the USA. Further information is available on the Defra website at defraweb/planth/what.htm.

Toxic Ash

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what controls exist on the use of toxic ash from incinerators as an ingredient in breeze block manufacture; and if she will make a statement on the steps taken by her Department on the construction of such breeze blocks by Ballast Phoenix, using material from the London waste incinerator at Edmonton. [81582]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 November 2002]*: It is considered by this department and the Environment Agency that the controls for the management of waste, under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994, extend to the use of incinerator ash until it has been incorporated into a manufactured product (such as breeze blocks). These controls include a duty of care to manage waste safely through the prevention of harm to human health and the environment and through the prevention of the escape of waste. Furthermore, waste disposal and recovery operations are only permitted to take place under the terms of a waste management licence or an exemption from licensing.

Until August 2000, the Edmonton incinerator was mixing bottom ash with fly ash. Following concerns about the levels of dioxins in this material, the Environment Agency launched an investigation into the destination and use of incinerator ash. The investigation found, among other details, that about 15,000 tonnes of mixed ash from Edmonton was supplied by Ballast Phoenix for the manufacture of construction blocks between 1998 and 2000. The investigation included

research into the release of dioxins from construction blocks made using mixed ash from the Edmonton incinerator. The Agency found that mixed ash construction blocks do not release measurable levels of dioxins into the air, and that any dust from drilling the blocks is likely to contribute very little to typical overall exposures to dioxins.

The Agency also recommended that subject to guidance and appropriate specifications, bottom ash could be a valuable secondary aggregate. Air Pollution Control residues and fly ash, on the other hand, are hazardous wastes and as such are subject to special controls and should be consigned to sites licensed or permitted to dispose of hazardous wastes.

The Government commissioned the independent environmental consultants AEA Technology to produce a report on the use of incinerator bottom ash in road construction, and this is expected to be published shortly. The Agency's investigation is summarised in their report "Solid Residues from Municipal Waste Incinerators in England and Wales". Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of the House, and it can also be found at: http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/commondata/105385/ash pdf4.pdf

Vocational Training

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the total was of receipts from modulation that was budgeted to be spent on vocational training in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03; [80444]

(2) what amount of the revenue from modulation was spent on vocational training in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03 to date. [80445]

Margaret Beckett: Modulated funds may be spent only on a limited range of the measures provided for under the EU Rural Development Regulation-the so-called "accompanying measures". Training is not one of them. Modulated funds in England are being used to support agri-environment schemes.

TREASURY

Advance Corporation Tax Credit

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the abolition of the advance corporation tax credit on private pension schemes. [81302]

Dawn Primarolo: The withdrawal of payable tax credits on dividends was part of a package of reforms that included cuts in corporation tax and the abolition of advanced corporation tax. These changes were designed to improve the climate for long-term investment in the UK. In the long run, this should benefit all investors—including pension funds and those saving for retirement.

Age Statistics

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in each local authority area not expected to live to the age of 70. [83000]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 25 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question asking for an estimate of the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in each local authority area not expected to live to the age of 70. (83000)

The figures requested have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The numbers provided are an estimate of the number of people currently living in each area who would die before age 70 if they were to experience current death rates for the area until their 70th birthday.

These estimates were obtained by using the most recently available life table estimate for each local authority to calculate the probability of dying before age 70 for each age group. The expected numbers dying by age 70 were then calculated by applying these probabilities to the 2001 mid-year population estimates in each group in the area. The life table estimates used are for 1999–2001, based on 2001 population estimates. All the mid-year population estimates used in the calculation are based on the 2001 Census.

An estimate of people dying by age 70 as a percentage of the total population aged under 70 is also presented in the table. The figures reflect mortality among those living in each local authority in 1999 to 2001. They do not reflect what is likely to happen to individuals currently alive in each area, because the death rates are likely to change in the future and because of individuals move between local authorities.

Children's Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what means the female partners of male recipients of the existing children's tax credit will be *(a)* identified and *(b)* notified of their entitlement to the proposed child tax credit. [82999]

Dawn Primarolo: To receive their entitlement to tax credits, people need to make a claim. The Inland Revenue is writing to claimants of the existing Children's Tax Credit and inviting claims for the new tax credits. Couples must claim the new Child Tax Credit jointly. Child Tax Credit is to be paid to the person in the family who is mainly responsible for looking after the children. Where a claim to the new tax credits is made jointly, the claimants themselves are asked to identify which of them is the main carer.

Customs and Excise (Shoreham)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what activities are undertaken by the H.M. Customs and Excise at Shoreham Harbour. [83259]

John Healey: It is not Customs policy to disclose information on operational deployment of staff at specific locations.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed by the H.M. Customs and Excise at Shoreham Harbour. [83260]

John Healey: There are currently some 60 Customs staff based at Shoreham Harbour.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what customs checks are regularly carried out on traffic at Shoreham Harbour and Shoreham Airport. [83333]

John Healey: It is not Customs policy to disclose information on levels of Customs checks and detection activities at specific locations.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many local staff are employed in customs inspections on traffic at Shoreham harbour and Shoreham airport. [83334]

John Healey: There are currently no local staff employed permanently in Customs inspections on traffic at Shoreham harbour and Shoreham airport. Flexibly deployed teams of officers attend targeted arrivals according to intelligence and perceived threat or risk. These officers may be from nearby local units, regional or national teams.

Excise Duty Prosecutions (Norther Ireland)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many successful prosecutions there have been in Northern Ireland for the evasion of excise duty on motor transport fuels in each year since 1997. [83006]

John Healey: Customs do not have figures for prosecutions resulting from all forms of revenue evasion in road fuels for years prior to 2000–01. Figures for 2000–01 and 2001–02 will be published in Customs' annual report for 2001–02.

For figures for the number of successful prosecutions in Northern Ireland for oils smuggling in the years 1996–97 to 2000–01 I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the former Financial Secretary to the Treasury to the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 271W.

Fuel Smuggling (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* vehicles and *(b)* litres of fuel were seized by HM Customs for alleged smuggling of petroleum products in Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [83005]

John Healey: I refer to the earlier answer given by the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury to the Member for Montgomeryshire on 2 May 2002 concerning the numbers of vehicles seized by Customs for alleged fuel smuggling offences in Northern Ireland. *Official Report* 7 May 2002 column 39W

Figures for the amount of fuel seized by Customs in Northern Ireland in the years 1998–99 to 2000–01 are contained in Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud, published at the time of the pre Budget Report in November 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

The Government will be publishing figures for fuel seizures in 2001–02 at the time of the forthcoming Pre-budget Report. Figures for vehicle seizures in Northern Ireland for oils fraud in 2001–02 will be published in Customs' Annual Report.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to tackle cross-border smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [83007]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the document "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud", published at the time of the 2001 pre-Budget report, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House, which explains the Government's action in Northern Ireland to tackle oils fraud. Updated information will be provided at the time of the 2002 pre-Budget report.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent meetings have taken place between Ministers and officials and their Irish counterparts to discuss the smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [83008]

John Healey: I refer to the answer given by the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury to the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) on 2 May 2002 concerning meetings between Ministers and their Irish counterparts to discuss the smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland, 7 May 2002, *Official Report* column 39W.

Officials regularly hold meetings with their Irish counterparts to discuss the smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the loss in revenue from petrol and diesel smuggling into Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [83009]

John Healey: Estimates of the revenue loss arising specifically from smuggling are not available. Estimates of the revenue loss arising from all forms of oils fraud and legitimate cross-border shopping in Northern Ireland for the years 1999 and 2000 are contained in the document Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud,published by HM Customs and Excise in November 2001. An estimate for 1998 is contained in the NAO report The Misuse and Smuggling of Hydrocarbon Oils, published in February 2002. Copies of both of these documents are available in the Library of the House. Figures for 2001 will be published at the time of the pre Budget Report.

Inland Revenue

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Inland Revenue has conducted an evaluation of the 1996 Spend to Save initiative; and if he will make a statement. [82040]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue did evaluate the 1996 Spend to Save initiative, and concluded that the programme successfully met its main objectives.

London Underground

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his Department's liabilities are in relation to the public-private partnership for London Underground. [81784]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 18 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1107W.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects a deal for the part-privatisation of London Underground to be finalised. [81786]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government expect that the public private partnership contracts to modernise the London Underground's infrastructure will be concluded shortly.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has had with the European Commission regarding the legal status of the public-private partnership of London Underground. [81788]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

In accordance with its EC obligations, on 12 April 2002 the Government notified the proposed PPP arrangements to the European Commission. On 2 October 2002 the European Commission decided that those arrangements do not constitute state aid.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much has been spent on *(a)* consultancy and *(b)* legal fees with regard to the public-private partnership for the modernisation of London Underground; [81816]

(2) what the cost has been to his Department in legal fees of the Government's involvement in the public-private partnership scheme to improve London Underground. [81810]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I understand from London Transport that their expenditure on external consultants, including legal advice, from 20 March 1998 (the date of the Government's announcement) to 30 September 2002, for work on the PPP and restructuring of London Underground, was £96.3 million. As a result of the delayed implementation of the PPP, London Transport currently estimate that the final amount should be between £103-£105 million, an increase of between £5–£7 million over its December 2001 forecast. Around £1.6 million of this increase arises from the Mayor's second unsuccessful legal challenge in July 2002. The court granted that these costs should be fully recovered from Transport for London.

Legal advice to my Department has generally been provided through our own internal legal advisers. Treasury Solicitors were instructed to act for my Department in connection with the Mayor's two unsuccessful legal challenges at a cost to the Department of around £45,000. Approximately half of this amount was subsequently recovered from Transport for London.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times he has visited east Lancashire in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82405]

John Healey: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has not visited east Lancashire in an official capacity.

Mortality Statistics

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which categories of deaths have *(a)* increased and *(b)* decreased as a result of changes in the ICD-10 coding for cause of deaths in 2001; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the changes in coding. [82685]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 25 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking which categories of deaths have *(a)* increased and *(b)* decreased as a result of the changes in the ICD-10 coding for cause of deaths in 2001 and for a statement on the reasons for the changes in coding. (82685)

The need to move to ICD-10 to maintain the value of mortality data to users is internationally recognised and it has been introduced in England and Wales on the recommendation of the World Health Organisation (WHO). ICD-10 more closely reflects current medical knowledge than ICD-9, which was developed in the early 1970s, introduced in 1979 and is now out-of-date. Many diseases or conditions that are now of particular interest to medical practitioners, and those working in public health and epidemiology, cannot be adequately classified using ICD-9, for example HIV/AIDS. In addition to this there is widespread demand for more modem data on heart disease and stroke. ICD-10 has been used for the classification of morbidity data in the NHS and in cancer registration since 1995. This created difficulties in comparing morbidity and mortality.

A fuller description of the main changes in classification was published in Health Statistics Quarterly, volumes 8 and 13.[1,2] Analysis of the numerical impact of the introduction of ICD-10 on a list of 108 major causes of death in England and Wales can be found in Health Statistics Quarterly, volume 14.[3]

[1] Rooney C and Smith S. (2000) Implementation of ICD-10 for mortality data in England and Wales form January 2001. *Health Statistics Quarterly* 8, 41–50.

[2] Rooney C, Griffiths C and Cook L. (2002) The implementation of ICD-10 for cause of death coding—some preliminary results from the bridge coding study. *Health Statistics Quarterly* 13, 31–41.

[3] Office for National Statistics. (2002) Report: Results of the ICD-10 bridge coding study, England and Wales, 1999. *Health Statistics Quarterly* 14, 75–83.

Motor Vehicle Seizures

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many motor vehicles were seized by Customs and Excise at channel ports in each of the last three years. [82371]

John Healey: Customs centrally-held information on the numbers of vehicles seized does not distinguish the location at which seizure took place. For the total number of vehicles seized across the UK in 1999–2000 I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 15 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 125W. Figures for the number of vehicles seized by Customs across the UK during 2000–01 are contained in the Government's response to the independent report by John Roques into "The Collection of Excise Duties in HM Customs and Excise" (Cm 5329, July 2001), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Figures for 2001–02 will be published at the time of the pre-Budget Report.

Profits Tax on Betting

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to review the gross profits tax on betting the gross profits tax on betting. [80298]

John Healey: The Government has today published the consultation document "The Modernisation of Gambling Taxes: Consultation on the Evaluation of the Gross Profits Tax on Betting—One Year on' copies of which have been deposited in the Library of the House.

VAT Relief

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has commissioned regarding VAT relief for charities; and if he will publish the results of this research. [79113]

John Healey: The Review of charity Taxation in 1999 looked carefully at the tax system for charities, including the question of VAT relief. More recently, as part of Spending Review 2002, the Cross Cutting Review of the Role of the Voluntary Sector in Delivering Services considered whether there is an effective way of mitigating the impact of irrecoverable VAT upon charities. Both of these reviews have been published and are available in the Library of the House.

Public Services (Expenditure)

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product was spent on the public services in each of the last 20 years. [81918]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Adam Price on 5 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on what percentage of GDP was spent on public services in the last 20 years (81918)

The term spending on public services is not precisely defined. The ONS produces statistics on Total Managed Expenditure, of United Kingdom National Accounts (the Blue Book) gives details of the components of this series. Copies of this are available in the House of Commons Library. The latest published data is shown in the following table:

	%
1982	48.2
1983	48.4
1984	48.0
1985	46.5
1986	44.6
1987	42.5
1988	40.0
1989	39.5
1990	39.8
1991	41.6
1992	43.8
1993	43.8
1994	43.3
1995	42.9
1996	41.4
1997	39.8
1998	38.6
1999	37.7
2000	37.9
2001	38.9

TRANSPORT

Air Traffic Control

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research *(a)* has been conducted by his Department and *(b)* has been assessed by his Department or is planned on the impact of air traffic growth on air traffic control services, and which has taken place *(i)* by 2004–05, (ii) by 2015 and (iii) by 2030. [81411]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) analysis included a preliminary high-level assessment of airspace issues by simulating a number of potential airport development packages. This was undertaken by the Civil Aviation Authority's Directorate of Airspace Policy and National Air Traffic Services. The results of this work are set out in chapter 18 of The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East main consultation document. Copies of the report by CAA and NATs have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Air Transport Consultation (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the role of the Scottish Executive in *(a)* collating and *(b)* responding to the recent consultation on the future of air transport. [82589]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers and officials from the Department for Transport and Scottish Executive have liaised closely on the preparation of the consultation document for Scotland and its associated background reports. Officials from both Departments will continue to work together on the analysis of the responses to the consultation and provide advice to Ministers for future discussions on the development of the air transport White Paper which we will publish next year.

Airport Security

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the level and effectiveness of security at airports, particularly *(a)* perimeter fencing, *(b)* outbuildings and *(c)* airside generally. [80960]

Mr. Jamieson: On the basis of an assessment of the risk, the Department for Transport sets aviation security policy, directs the industry and monitors compliance.

Aerodrome managers are required to establish and maintain restricted zones from which commercial air services operate. They must control access to such zones via a continuous physical barrier with designated, controlled access points to ensure that only authorised persons and vehicles are able to enter. DfT inspectors monitor compliance with these requirements and require remedial action where necessary.

Airport Expansion

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to make a full environmental impact statement about options for expansion of airports in the south-east of England. [80711]

Mr. Spellar: The "Appraisal Framework for Airports in the South East and Eastern Regions of England" published in November 2000 sets out the indicators for assessing the impacts of the runway options published in the "Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East" consultation. This includes a range of key environmental impacts such as noise, local air quality, climate change, townscape, landscape, biodiversity, heritage, and water.

The consultation seeks views on these and other key impacts associated with the runway options. Responses on these issues will be important considerations in the final decisions for the air transport White Paper which we will publish next year.

Birmingham International Airport

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what supporting documentation has been submitted to his Department in connection with the alternative Birmingham airport option; and how he plans to evaluate the alternative option against the Department for Transport options. [82916]

Mr. Jamieson: We have not received any other supporting documentation from Birmingham airport about their alternative option set out in "The Birmingham Alternative". We will need to consider their detailed response to the future development of air transport consultation and any supporting documentation accompanying it carefully once it is received alongside other representations on the options set out in the Midlands consultation document when preparing the Air Transport White Paper.

Bus Safety

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent research he has commissioned into the potential improvement of safety on coaches by the introduction of *(a)* seatbelts and *(b)* rollover bars. [83569]

Mr. Jamieson: Research was carried out in the UK in 2000–02 aimed at identifying any necessary improvements to the European standard for coach rollover protection requirements as a consequence of seat belt use. The results of this research will be published shortly and are currently being used in the international group responsible for developing the standard for rollover protection. Additional research looking at the restraint of children in coaches has recently been commissioned, and is due for completion in 2005. My Department is also contributing to the wider EU funded research project, "Enhanced Coach and Bus Safety" which is looking more widely into bus and coach safety standards.

Commissioners of Lights

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial contribution in euros has been made by the Irish Government in the financial years *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000 under the terms of an agreement reached in 1985 for the sharing of certain costs incurred by the Commissioners of Lights in the Republic of Ireland. [80812]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is given in the following table.

Financial years	*Amount in Irish Punts*	*Conversion to Euros*
1994–95	1,853,311	E2,353,220
1995–96	2,001,850	E2,541,826
1996–97	1,884,700	E2,393,076
1997–98	2,013,134	E2,556,153
1998–99	1,825,392	E2,317,770
1999–2000	1,426,832	E1,811,703

70 per cent. of the Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) total expenditure is deemed to be incurred in the Republic. The contribution varies each year in proportion to CIL's operating costs.

The single European currency was introduced in the Republic of Ireland on 1 January 2002. Prior to that date, the contribution was made in Irish punts.

Crossrail

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research has been conducted and is planned by his Department and the Strategic Rail Authority on the *(a)* economic, *(b)* social and *(c)* environmental implications of the proposed plans for Crossrail; [81744]

(2) what discussions his Department and the Strategic Rail Authority have had and plan to have; and what representations have been received by his Department and the Strategic Rail Authority on the *(a)* economic, *(b)* social and *(c)* environmental implications of the proposed plans for Crossrail; and if he will place copies of all related documentation in the Library. [81747]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department and the Strategic Rail Authority have received a number of representations about the proposed plans for Crossrail. Cross London Rail Links, the company jointly established by the SRA and Transport for London to develop proposals for Crossrail, are currently considering route and service options and working on the business case for them, including an assessment of the economic, social and environmental impacts.

Jet Skis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many personal injury accidents involving jet-skis have taken place in UK waters in each of the last five years. [83314]

Mr. Jamieson: H.M Coastguard incident reports record a total of 895 incidents involving personal watercraft between 1 January 1997 and 22 November 2002 around the UK coastline. No information is available on the number of personal injuries.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of jet-skis in use in England and Wales. [83315]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not keep statistics on the number of jetskis in use in England and Wales.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance his Department has issued to promote safe use of jet-skis to *(a)* individual owners, *(b)* local authorities with responsibility for beaches and *(c)* port and marina operators. [83319]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department takes the view that it is the responsibility of UK local authorities and harbour authorities to regulate personal watercraft using local bye-law powers. As such, no guidance has been issued, to date, to local authorities, although the Department is currently involved in an exercise to produce relevant information. A guide to Good Practice on Port Marine Operations was published for harbour operators in March 2002.

With regard to individual owners, the Department has produced a nationally distributed 'Voluntary Code of Practice for Leisure Users', which provides safety information to personal watercraft users. Additionally, along with national sporting bodies, manufacturers, and water safety organisations, it is conducting an ongoing safety campaign to encourage training and better awareness of the users' responsibilities.

London Trains

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains an hour can enter London on a single track. [81251]

Mr Spellar: This number will depend on many technical factors, such as the precise signalling system in use on the particular section of track in question.

London Underground

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to ensure that sufficient funds are in place for the continuing requirements of London Underground under the PPP. [82559]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government has offered an unprecedented long-term grant commitment averaging £1 billion per annum in support of the increased investment and improved service performance that will be delivered through the Tube modernisation plans.

Light Dues

Dr. Doug Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much revenue in the form of light dues has been collected in each financial year since 1997–98 from ships calling at ports in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* the Isle

of Man, *(c)* England and Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* the Republic of Ireland. [80810]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is given in the table as follows.

Light dues income 1997–98 to 2001–02

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Scotland	6,628,360.51	8,034,124.92	8,929,663.47	9,110,457.12	8,536,210.39
Isle of Man	37,729.06	44,424.38	20,635.93	19,012.13	19,400.57
England and Wales	41,540,875.68	54,942,311.20	55,756,005.50	57,923,611.28	62,489,782.79
Northern Ireland	706,507.01	617,011.16	662,503.18	599,414.51	662,195.49
R.O.I (Customs & Excise)	2,816,419.48	3,131,480.85	3,464,779.82	3,416,674.55	3,077,673.30
Total	61,729,891.74	66,769,352.51	68,833,587.90	71,069,169.59	74,785,262.54

Notes:
The figures above are for General Light Dues and does not include income from UK Fishing Vessels and Tugs.
The figures do not include any Light Dues refunds that were made.
The figures for R.O.I are shown in Sterling after conversion. Pre conversion figures shown as follows.

R.O.I (Customs & Excise)	
3,154,665.35	1997–98
3,597,474.41	1998–99
4,246,163.66	1999–2000
4,396,335.39	2000–01
4,144,997.18	2001–02

Luton Airport

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the cost of *(a)* a bypass round Hitchin and *(b)* widening the M1 in evaluating the case for a new long runway at Luton airport. [80712]

Mr. Spellar: "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East" main consultation document is seeking views on a range of options, two of which are for development of the single runway at Luton airport.

Chapter 10 of the SERAS Stage Two Appraisal Findings report sets out the estimated costs of the surface access enhancements associated with the Luton airport runway options. Copies of this report have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Motorway Development (Homeowners' Compensation)

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what levels of compensation are payable to homeowners affected by new motorway development. [82285]

Mr. Jamieson: Compensation is a complex subject. In cases where property is being acquired for a motorway scheme, the homeowner is paid the full market value. The claim may also include professional costs and payments for the loss of their home, disturbance and other items.

Where property is not being acquired, homeowners may be entitled to claim compensation under Part 1 of the Lands Compensation Act 1973. This takes into account the impact of noise, fumes, artificial lighting and other factors on the value of their property.

A series of booklets 'Compulsory Purchase and Compensation' (1–5), which explains the compensation entitlements arising from highway works, is available to the public and a set will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Multi-modal Study (South-West)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will inform hon. Members directly about his decision with regard to the South West Area Regional Multi-Modal Transport Report. [82613]

Mr. Jamieson: We are currently considering the recommendations from this study alongside the views from the respective regional planning bodies, and would hope to be in a position to announce our response to the report and the recommendations shortly.

We will write to hon. Members within the study area on the day of the announcement. Copies of our letters to the Chairs of the regional planning bodies will also be placed in the Libraries of the House.

National Air Traffic Services

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what (1) measures are being taken to ensure that a continuous 24-hour service is available for the National Air Traffic Services' online safety information service; on how many occasions the service has been suspended, and for how long in each case; and what assessment he has made of the safety implications of United Kingdom pilots having to obtain safety information via alternative sources to the NATS online information service; [81927]

(2) if he will make it his policy that the maximum period of downtime on the NATS online information service be not more than 30 minutes in any three-month period; [81925]

(3) what assessment he has made of the implications the faults on the NATS online information service might have for pilots flying from airfields in North Yorkshire. [81926]

Mr. Jamieson: The setting of service standards for civil air traffic services in the UK is a matter for NATS in consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority.

The CAA recognise that some users have experienced problems receiving NOT AM information from the Web-based system over the past three months, however the information has always been available by telephone from the UK AIS Office.

NATS do not have a precise record of the numbers of suspensions to this service. However, a recent software update to the online service has resulted in a marked improvement to the speed and reliability of the system.

Network Rail

Mr Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how mach money has been *(a)* granted to and *(b)* guaranteed for Network Rail. [81021]

Mr Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to the House on 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 971W, and to the minutes mentioned in that statement.

Oil Tankers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his definition is of partial protection in relation to single hull oil tankers; and if he will make a statement. [83002]

Mr. Jamieson: The term "partial protection" refers to tankers having wing tanks or double bottoms in protective locations which are not used for the carriage of cargo or operating only with hydrostatically balanced loading. Such tankers do not have full double hulls, the standard required for tankers built since 1996.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will press for an immediate ban on single hull oil tankers plying the high seas. [83004]

Mr. Jamieson: We support the recent international agreement at the International Maritime Organization, and applied in the EU by Regulation, under which single hull tankers will be phased out in stages up to and no later than 2007. Such tankers must be replaced by tankers with double hulls.

Open Skies Agreement

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the potential role of Open Skies for Regional Airports in the United Kingdom. [81408]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* There are already no capacity restrictions on flights between the US and UK regional airports (defined for this purpose as all UK airports except Heathrow and Gatwick). An "open skies" deal, whether on the partial US model or on a full liberalisation model, would allow US airlines unrestricted fifth freedom rights from regional airports.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EU will *(a)* open and *(b)* conclude negotiations with the USA on an Open Skies Agreement. [83043]

Mr. Spellar: In order to open aviation negotiations with the United States the European Commission would first need a mandate from the Council.

Railtrack

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on new investment on the railway network by Rail Track in Administration over the last year. [81259]

Mr. Spellar: Details of the amount spent on enhancements and renewals relating to the railway network by Railtrack plc (in Administration) for the period to 31 March 2002, are contained in the company's accounts published on 31 October 2002 and details of expenditure for the period including the balance of the administration, will be included in the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2003, which are expected to be published around June 2003.

Railways (Disabled Access)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much funding his Department is allocating for the refurbishment of railway platforms to ensure full disabled persons' access. [83316]

Mr. Jamieson: No specific funding has been allocated for platform refurbishment in connection with access for disabled passengers. Access for wheelchair users between platforms and trains is currently achieved by the use of ramps.

Access to railway stations, as with other public transport infrastructure, is covered by the provisions of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act. From 2004, station operators will have to take reasonable steps either to remove or alter impediments to access, to find ways of avoiding them or to provide the service by a reasonable alternative means.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London Underground stations do not allow disabled persons access to the platforms. [83317]

Mr. Jamieson: Improving the accessibility of the underground system is an essential part of the plans to modernise the system. 29 of the 253 stations owned by London Underground are currently step free, and a further eight step-free stations are served by underground services. By 2020 over 100 stations will have step free access, opening up large areas of London to many people previously unable to use the network.

Shoreham Port Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which officials in his Department who were responsible for the re-appointment of board members of Shoreham Port Authority at the end of 2001 had their duties switched to deal with movement of military personnel and supplies for the Afghanistan campaign. [83262]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

South-East Region Airfield Study

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration was given to Hullavington in the site search for the South East Region Airfield Study; and if he will make a statement. [83032]

Mr. Jamieson: Around 400 new and existing sites in southern England were considered in the SERAS preliminary site search study. Hullavington was taken forward into the latter stages of the site search study where it was assessed against a range of criteria. These included topography, obstacle limitation surfaces, airspace, noise, air quality, environment, RPG/ economics, commercial demand, travel times and quality of surface access.

Hullavington and Alconbury were taken forward for more detailed appraisal into the main SERAS study as prospective sites for small-scale airport development. Following the conclusion of the first stage of the SERAS study, Ministers agreed that Alconbury should be taken forward, and that Hullavington should not.

Tourist Signs

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on brown tourist signs. [82595]

Mr. Jamieson: White and brown signs giving directional information about tourist destinations are controlled by traffic authorities as part of their statutory responsibility for securing the safe and efficient movement of traffic. The main purpose of white and brown signs is to guide visitors to their intended tourist destination along the most appropriate route during the latter stage of their journey, particularly where the destination may be difficult to find. The design of signs to direct traffic to tourist attractions and facilities, and of directional traffic signs generally, is controlled through the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD). Revised TSRGD, which we expect to lay within the next few weeks, will add to the range of symbols and designs available for traffic authorities to use.

Decisions about the provision of signs at particular locations are the responsibility of the relevant traffic authority in the light of their local circumstances and signing policies. My Department consulted earlier this year on proposals for updated guidance to local authorities and the Highways Agency on dealing with applications for new white and brown signs. We recognise the importance of getting an appropriate balance between the needs of local tourism, safety, efficient traffic management and the environment. The draft guidance has been further revised in the light of the responses to the consultation and to take account of the revisions to the TSRGD, and we expect it to be available early next year.

Traffic Lights

Mr. John Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new sets of traffic lights have been installed in *(a)* London and *(b)* the rest of England since April 1997. [81244]

Mr Spellar Local highway or traffic authorities have powers to install traffic signals on their roads. The Department has no central record of these.

Trinity House

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Trinity House Lighthouse Service has been successful in obtaining further maintenance work under contract from other bodies; and if he will list contracts *(a)* entered into and *(b)* pending and their financial value. [80811]

Mr. Jamieson: Trinity House Lighthouse Service (THLS) has obtained contract work to the value of £834,688 from the organisations listed in the table.

Customer	*Scope of services*
Anglian Water Services	Buoy Rental
ABP—Cardiff	Buoy Maintenance Services
ABP—Southampton	Casualty Attendance
ABP—Swansea	Buoy Maintenance Services
Brightlingsea Harbour Commissioners	Buoy Servicing Agreement—commenced March 2002
Brighton West Pier Trust	Buoy Hire Agreement—commenced November 2001
Cardiff Harbour Authority	Intensity, range and sector checks
CEFAS	Charter of Vessels
Cowes Harbour Commissioners	Purchase and Hire of Moorings
Environment Agency (Welsh Regions)	Annual Ship Services
Falmouth Harbour Commissioners	Ship Services
First Corporate Shipping t/a The Bristol Port Company	Buoy Maintenance Agreement—commenced November 1999
Harwich Haven	Utilisation of Ship for Buoy Maintenance Services
Magnox Electric plc	Buoy Rental
Marine Current Turbines Ltd.	Supply of Fog Detector and Lantern
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	Hire of Wreck Marker Buoys
Ministry of Defence	Buoy Rental
Milford Haven Port Authority	Buoy Maintenance Services
National Power plc	Maintenance Services to Navigation Light
National Wind Power	Siting of anemometry equipment on Pan Sand Beacon—commenced September 1998
Neg Micon UK Ltd. (formerly Wind Energy Group Ltd.)	Siting of anemometry equipment on three existing buoy stations—commenced June 1998
Noordzeewind	Data Collection Agreement
Penwith District Council	Navigation Light Maintenance Agreement—commenced April 2002
Ramsgate Royal Harbour	Ship Services
Scarborough Borough Council	Buoy Maintenance Agreement—commenced April 1998

Customer	*Scope of services*
Sedgemoor District Council	Navigation Light Maintenance Agreement—commenced September 2000
Sovereign Harbour Marina Ltd.	Launch Services
States of Guernsey	Ship Services
States of Jersey	Ship Services
Tendring District Council	Sale of Scrap Buoy and Chain
Wells Harbour Commissioners	Buoy Servicing Agreement—commencing March 2002
Yorkshire Water Services	Buoy Maintenance Agreement—commenced January 2001
The following contracts are commercial in confidence:	
Commercial in Confidence	Charter of THV Patricia 10 August 2001 to 15 August 01
Commercial in Confidence	Data Collection Services—commencing December 2002

The contracts have utilised spare capacity in the THLS fleet and include both maintenance contracts and one-off project based contracts. THLS are working on a number of positive leads for additional work but are unable to identify at this stage if any are likely to become firm orders.

Unregistered Ships

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the conditions of work of foreign nationals on un-registered ships. [81054]

Mr. Jamieson: Merchant shipping legislation governing conditions of work on UK registered ships, such as hours of work, applies equally to all seafarers regardless of their nationality.

The working hours of all seafarers (whatever their nationality) on board UK registered ships are limited by Directive 1999/63/EC, which the UK implemented in September 2002.

Rates of pay are matters for negotiation between employers and employees, subject to the national minimum wage. Foreign nationals on UK registered ships are not covered by the national minimum wage except when in UK waters.

Employers of seafarers recruited abroad to work on UK registered ships are exempt from the employment provisions of the Race Relations Act 1976 when employing seafarers abroad.

Waste (Trust Ports)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent guidance has been issued by his Department regarding the disposal of human waste from house boats moored in trust port waters. [83266]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Waterloo Station

Mr. John Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains per hour enter Waterloo; and what his plans are for capacity there. [81248]

Mr. Spellar: There are approximately 45 trains per hour entering London Waterloo station at peak periods. The Strategic Rail Authority has invited comments on a consultation paper on its Capacity Utilisation Policy.

West Anglia Rail Route Modernisation

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he expects the Strategic Rail Authority's indicative timescale for West Anglia Route Modernisation, as set out on page 53 of 'The Strategic Plan', including additional capacity at Cambridge Station, to be maintained. [82414]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 21 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 269W. The time and cost of any project at this stage cannot be guaranteed, as it is always possible for underlying problems with existing infrastructure to be revealed when work commences.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Plan Puebla Panama

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to conduct a social and environmental impact assessment of the Plan Puebla Panama in Mexico. [82231]

Mr. Rammell: None. There is currently no British Government involvement in Plan Puebla Panama nor plans for any. The Mexican authorities continue to develop the Plan with their Central American neighbours.

Bahrain

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Bahraini authorities regarding British nationals facing pre-trial interviews in Bahrain. [81782]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The British Embassy in Bahrain has had discussions with the Bahraini authorities about a British national facing a pre-trial interview. My noble Friend Baroness Amos will write to the hon. Member with more details about the case.

British Embassy (Yemen)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the staffing is at the British embassy in Yemen. [82357]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are nine UK-based staff and 45 locally engaged staff in the embassy in Sana'a.

Central African Republic

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the military situation in the Central African Republic. [82665]

Mr. Rammell: HMG is concerned at the recent coup attempt in the Central African Republic and welcomes the current cessation of hostilities. We welcome the arrival of a contingent of troops from CEMAC (Central African Economic and Monetary Community) to undertake a peace-keeping role. We support the UN's efforts to bring relief to the civilian population.

Consular General's House, San Francisco

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to sell the Consular General's house in San Francisco; what the Estates Department's conclusion was on the sale of the Consular General's house in San Francisco following their visit there in February; and how much the visit of the Estates Department to San Francisco cost the Department. [82530]

Mr. Rammell: We have yet to identify an alternative house for the Consul General in San Francisco. An FCO survey team visited the Post in March and viewed 12 possible properties for purchase. None was suitable. The present house will only be sold when an alternative is found which meets the operational requirements of the Post and gives value for money to the taxpayer.

The survey team also reviewed the suitability of the present offices and looked at a possible alternative property. The associated travel costs of the visit were approximately 17,000.

Democratic Republic of Congo

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards the setting up of a peace commission in the Ituri district of the Democratic Republic of Congo; and if he will make a statement. [82757]

Mr. Rammell: Negotiations continue between Uganda and the DRC on setting up the Joint Commission provided for in the Luanda Agreement, which the two sides signed on 6 September. The Commission will make a significant contribution to securing peace in the Ituri district of the DRC and we attach importance to an early agreement. We are also working with the UN and other interested partners for a successful outcome to the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, which will lead to the creation of an all-inclusive transitional Congolese Government. This Government will have authority throughout the DRC, including Ituri.

Departmental Telecommunications

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at how many missions his Department's telecommunications network has installed both telephone systems and network connections; and if he will make a statement. [82035]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network (FTN) connects our overseas missions to a telecommunications network and to a telephone system (PBX). The related hardware is installed by the FCO's PFI partner, Global Crossing. There are separate, but interlinked, timetables for the two types of installation. The number of missions that have already received network connections and new telephone systems is 150 and 177 respectively.

Not all missions are receiving both. To date, the number of missions with both network connection and new telephone system is 141.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the maximum period of time that his Department's communications would be disrupted in the event of the failure of Global Crossing to continue in operation; and if he will make a statement. [82036]

Mr. Rammell: Contingency arrangements are in place to allow the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to continue to operate without disruption should Global Crossing, for any reason, withdraw their service. We are concluding work connected with service to North America and Western Europe, and for service within the United Kingdom, which will further enhance existing contingency arrangements and ensure no loss of service.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what interruptions of service his Department's telecommunication network has had in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [82037]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network (FTN) connects our diplomatic missions overseas to a telecommunications network; and to a telephone system (PBX). Both services are provided through service level agreements (SLAs) under the contract with our PFI partner, Global Crossing. While there have been some circuit interruptions, as is to be expected from a world-wide network, the overall performance has exceeded contractual requirements and has served the FCO very well.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department will incur financial penalties in the event of Global Crossing becoming bankrupt; and if he will make a statement. [82038]

Mr. Rammell: The FCO would incur no financial or contractual penalties in the event of Global Crossing being declared bankrupt but would assume financial commitments in either appointing a new prime contractor or in taking on the role of prime contractor to ensure continuation of service. The FCO is monitoring Global Crossing's progress towards a successful exit from Chapter 11 protection.

EU Enlargement

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications of enlargement of the European Union for UK relations with Russia. [82455]

Mr. MacShane: We and our EU partners are working to ensure that the effect of enlargement on the EU's relations with Russia—and therefore on the UK's relationship with Russia—will be positive. The EU wants to help Russia maximise the considerable opportunities enlargement offers. EU work with Russia on WTO accession, the EU/Russia energy dialogue, the concept of a common economic space, and increased political and JHA co-operation are all contributing to this end. In addition, the EU is working closely with Russia to ensure that Kaliningrad, its Baltic sea enclave, remains a fully integrated part of the Russian Federation after enlargement.

EU/ACP Meeting

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received concerning banned Zimbabwean Ministers being granted visas to attend the EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Brussels at the end of November; under what terms these visas have been granted; what role the European Development Fund will have in funding these visits; and if he will make a statement. [82785]

Mr. Straw: On 7 November Belgium alerted EU partners to the request for visas to attend the EU/ACP meeting from Christopher Kuruneri, Zimbabwe's Deputy Minister for Finance and Paul Mangwana, Minister of State for State Enterprises. Both are on the EU travel ban list. The Belgian Government explained that under the terms of the Lome and Cotonou Agreements, Belgium had a legal obligation to grant these visas, since these agreements override Council decisions on sanctions. The Belgian Government undertook to attach maximum restrictions. The banned individuals were granted visas only for the period 19–29 November, restricted to the territory of Belgium.

The meeting of the EU/ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly, funding issues and invitations to ACP countries, are matters for the co-Secretariat of the EU/ACP. Once the invitation had issued, the choice of representatives from Zimbabwe was a matter for the Zimbabwe Parliament.

The EU's Common Position 2002/145/CFSP imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe specifically allow member states to grant exemptions where travel is justified on grounds of attending meetings of international bodies.

EU/SADC Meeting

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to send a representative to the meeting scheduled for EU and SADC leaders to be held in Lisbon in April 2003; what representations he has made to other SADC and EU countries concerning this meeting; whether Zimbabweans on the EU travel ban list will be able to attend this meeting; whether he plans to support a relocation of this meeting to a venue outside of the EU; and if he will make a statement. [82772]

Mr. Straw: The meeting scheduled to be held in Lisbon in April 2003 is an EU/Africa meeting. There has so far been no formal EU discussion of attendance or relocation. The Government considers that no-one subject to an EU travel ban should attend a meeting in the European Union unless their right to attend is required pursuant to a legal obligation. The Government will decide its own representation closer to the time.

Gibraltar

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what powers he has to hold a referendum in Gibraltar. [81714]

Mr. MacShane: This Government has always made clear that there will be no change in the sovereignty of Gibraltar unless the people of Gibraltar agree to it in a referendum. If there were such a set of proposals on the table that included such a change, then the Government would ensure that the necessary arrangements were in place to hold a referendum, most probably through seeking an Order in Council as was done in 1967.

Gracemoor Consultants

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the former employees of his Department who have taken up positions with Gracemoor Consultants, stating in each case the name, position previously held and date of leaving. [82151]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are unable to answer this question as instructed by the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information Part 2, section 12, Privacy of an Individual, which states that unwarranted disclosure to a third party of personal information about any person would constitute an invasion of privacy.

Nepal

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role the Military Intelligence Support Group within the Nepalese Army will play in conflict prevention; and what its objectives are. [82372]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The role of the Military Intelligence Support Group (MISG) is to enhance the intelligence gathering capability of the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA). Its objective is to provide accurate intelligence so that the RNA are able to identify Maoist military activity.

Overseas Prisoners

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further progress his Department has made in assisting Jonathan Lincoln Brown, a constituent who is held in Oman. [82050]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our embassy in Muscat continues to make representations to the Omani authorities on behalf of Mr. Lincoln Brown, who remains at liberty in Oman though he is not permitted to leave. On 25 September 2002, our embassy wrote to the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs querying the process by which Mr. Lincoln Brown was initially denied the Right of Appeal in 2001. Although his Right of Appeal was

subsequently restored and heard on 6 May 2002, it failed. Mr. Lincoln Brown has now said that he will appeal to the Supreme Court against this decision.

Our embassy has also informed the Omani authorities by a Diplomatic Note sent on 17 November, of Mr. Lincoln Brown's intention to leave Oman. We are seeking from them confirmation that he can do so. Our embassy will continue to press for an early and substantive reply on both issues.

Prestige

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken and will take at intergovernmental and European levels on accusations made by the Spanish Government and by the European Commissioner for Transport that the accident off Galicia involving the oil tanker Prestige was linked to Gibraltar's alleged failure to comply with Community legislation; and if he will make a statement. [83133]

Mr. MacShane: We have made clear to the Spanish Government and to the European Commission that the accident off Galicia involving the oil tanker Prestige was in no way linked to any alleged failure by Gibraltar to comply with Community Legislation. The UK's Permanent Representative to the EU wrote to the Commission on this, and I have arranged for a copy of the Commission's letter and the reply to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Somalia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the status of the peace talks in Somalia. [82664]

Mr. Rammell: The UK has followed with keen interest the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference which started on 15 October in Eldoret and is chaired by Kenya under the auspices of the regional organisation IGAD.

All the faction leaders present in Eldoret signed a Declaration on Cessation of Hostilities and the Structures and Principles of the Somalia National Reconciliation Process on 27 October. This was welcomed by the European Union in a declaration on 28 October.

The UN Security Council also issued a Presidential Statement on Somalia on 21 November reiterating its strong support for the Conference. The Conference resumed its discussions on 19 November.

Thailand (BAE Systems)

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the UK Ambassador in Thailand has given to BAe to help them export to that country. [83016]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is established Government policy to support British companies with legitimate defence exports and the Embassy in Bangkok has offered commercial assistance to Bae Systems with their efforts to do business in Thailand.

On 18 October the Ambassador signed a Joint Minute on Defence Co-operation with the Thai Deputy Prime Minister, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh in Bangkok. The Joint Minute refers to a commercial agreement between Bae Systems and the Royal Thai Government, the details of which are a matter for BAe Systems and the Royal Thai Government.

Turkey

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the election in Turkey and its impact on Turkey's accession to the EU. [82343]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary issued the following statement on 4 November:

"While the results so far are unofficial, they indicate that AKP will be the largest party in the Turkish Parliament. This is a clear expression of the popular will. As the Prime Minister said this morning, we look forward to working with the new government, as soon as it is formed. I am glad to note the commitment of AKP leaders to taking forward EU/Turkey relations. The UK is a longstanding supporter of Turkey's EU candidature. I stand ready to help Turkey move further and faster along the road to Europe. I also note AKP leaders' commitment to working with the IMF for continued economic recovery; and the stress they have placed on the promotion and protection of human rights.

Britain and Turkey have much to do together, particularly in the run up to the Copenhagen European Council. I very much hope this will include progress on Cyprus. We must all redouble our support for the UN Secretary-General's efforts to achieve a just and lasting settlement in Cyprus"

The Foreign Secretary reiterated these points in his meeting with Turkish leaders on 20 November.

UN Resolution 1441

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to find a peaceful outcome to implementing UN resolution 1441. [82753]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK played a pivotal role in securing the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1441, which offers Saddam Hussein a final chance to give up his weapons of mass destruction peacefully. We will continue to give the UN weapons inspectors all possible help to complete their task effectively. But ultimately it is up to the Iraqi regime to decide whether or not to co-operate. If it chooses not to, resolution 1441 makes clear that it will face serious consequences.

Unexploded Landmines

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of unexploded landmines in Eritrea. [82758]

Mr. Rammell: The United Nations Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE MACC) has reported that no recent estimate has been made of the number of unexploded landmines in Eritrea as a whole. It is estimated that no more than 100,000 of the approximately 250,000 landmines laid during the 1998–2000 conflict remain in the UNMEE-monitored Temporary Security Zone on the border with Ethiopia,

from which approximately 4,000 landmines have so far been cleared. There is no reliable data on contaminated areas or numbers of landmines for the rest of the country. A country-wide Landmine Impact Survey is currently being conducted by the UN Development Programme, the results of which are due in mid-2003.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of unexploded landmines on the demarcation of the disputed border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. [82663]

Mr. Rammell: The United Nations Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Co-ordination Centre (UNMEE MACC) has reported that, based on detailed reconnaissance of the new border line, it is estimated that up to 150 border pillar sites may be contaminated by landmines or unexploded ordnance (UXO). All access routes to the border to be utilised by the demarcation survey and pillar construction teams have to be checked and cleared of mines where necessary. UNMEE has been mandated by the Security Council to conduct demining operations in support of the demarcation teams, and UNMEE MACC is co-ordinating and managing this project. The EU has provided Euro 1 million to the Border Commission Trust Fund for Quality Assurance and Explosive Detection Dog support contractors to supplement the UNMEE assets to be utilised for the demining support project.

Yemen

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between Britain and Yemen. [82354]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK has good relations with the Republic of Yemen. We welcome President Saleh's co-operation in the fight against terrorism. We are in close touch with the Yemenis on this and on other issues.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens are in Yemen. [82355]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are 343 British citizens registered with the embassy. We have no reliable figure for others who are not registered.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the US Government concerning the situation in Yemen. [82356]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We regularly discuss the situation in Yemen, and other countries, both formally and informally with the US Government. These discussions cover a wide range of subjects, including counter-terrorism, security, democracy, human rights, the economy and development.

Zambia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the use of public funds by the ruling MMD party in Zambia during the presidential election in December 2001. [82822]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has received no such reports. However, the second interim statement by the European Union Election Observation Mission, which was issued before the Presidential election in December 2001,alleged the use of Government resources for party political purposes. Evidence of this has been presented to the Zambian Supreme Court as part of the on-going petition challenging the legitimacy of the election result.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received about the use by the Zimbabwe Republic Police of tear gas from the UK; and if he will make a statement. [82259]

Mr. Rammell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today (UIN 82568), to the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Oliver Letwin).

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of British-made tear gas being used in Zimbabwe against citizens. [82568]

Mr. Rammell: We have received a report from Amnesty International in the UK about the alleged use by the Zimbabwean Police of British made tear gas against Zimbabwean students in November 2001. There has been a UK arms embargo on Zimbabwe since May 2000. We have urged Amnesty to pass any evidence to HM Customs and Excise, who are responsible for the enforcement of UK export controls.

EDUCATION

Academic Research

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the impact of university staff turnover on the quality of academic research and higher education in the last five years. [81771]

Margaret Hodge: The Department has carried out no specific assessment of the impact of university staff turnover on the quality of academic research and higher education. However, the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise showed that 55 per cent. of research staff now work in Departments containing work of international excellence compared with 31 per cent. in 1996. In addition, the recently completed QAA eight year cycle of HE subject reviews, which included an assessment of teaching quality, identified only 1 per cent. of unsatisfactory provision. The Higher Education Funding Council in September 2002 pointed to some subject areas where it is difficult to recruit including some shortage areas particularly ICT, business, science and engineering. We recognise these difficulties and the challenges our universities face recruiting and retaining in an international market. Top US universities, in particular, pay some academics and researchers salaries, which can be twice as much as their British counterparts earn.

Accommodation Centres (Education)

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions he has had with the teaching unions on his proposals to educate some children seeking asylum in accommodation centres. [81053]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare, has had discussions with the National Union of Teachers and the NASUWT on the Government's proposals to educate in accommodation centres some children whose family is seeking asylum.

Asperger's Syndrome

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to provide assistance to pupils with Asperger's syndrome to ensure that they can enter public examinations on an equal footing, with respect to part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [82502]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Schools are required under part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to take reasonable steps to prevent disabled pupils from being put at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled pupils in respect of education and associated services. This would include, where appropriate, negotiating special arrangements for pupils with disabilities who are taking public examinations. What constitutes a reasonable step will depend on the circumstances of individual cases and schools will need to take into account any relevant factors, including the need to maintain academic, musical, sporting and other standards, the financial resources available to them and the costs of taking a particular step.

In addition, both the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the examination boards make special arrangements for children with special educational needs, with and without statements, where it can be shown that they usually have additional or different provision in school. For pupils with Asperger's syndrome special arrangements are likely to take the form of extra time or rest breaks. The tests or examinations can also be taken in a separate room if that is appropriate.

Car Parking

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81867]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Under the proposed central London charging zone within my Department there are:

(a) 27 car parking spaces available to employees of the Department

(b) 14 car parking spaces available to visitors in the Department.

Child Protection

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in developing a system of identification, referral and tracking for every child at risk of social exclusion in each local authority. [81066]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The Government announced its intention to promote better local systems for the identification, referral and tracking of children at risk as part of its street crime initiative last summer. Six local authorities, Bolton, Camden, Kensington and Chelsea, Knowsley, Lewisham and Sheffield, were selected as Trailblazers for funding of up to £1 million to fast-track the development of appropriate systems, and the remaining 28 participating authorities were invited to bid for up to £100,000 for initial developmental work.

The Cross-Cutting Review on Children at Risk found that the failure to share information between agencies was a significant barrier to the provision of effective preventive services for children and young people at risk of social exclusion. On 16 August I therefore announced that, as a result of the Spending Review 2002, additional funding would be made available to support all local authorities in developing local systems to identify, refer and track children at risk. The offer of £100,000 has now been extended to all local authorities, and a further four Trailblazers are being identified to extend the geographical coverage and range of authorities. In both cases, authorities are due to submit their plans for taking this work forward to the Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) for assessment and approval during December.

Draft guidance based on the emerging experiences of the Trailblazer authorities will be published during March 2003 to support all local authorities in the further development of local systems. Concurrently, the CYPU is working with other Departments, including the Cabinet Office's Green Paper team, to develop coherent central approaches to the identification, referral and tracking of children at risk in the context of work to develop local preventive strategies.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81847]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Staff within my Department on official business who are required to drive their own or officially provided vehicles within the charging zone will be reimbursed.

Connexions Cards

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much revenue has been raised by selling information contained on Connexions cards. [82605]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: No revenue has been raised by selling information contained on the Connexions Card.

Dance and Drama Awards

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria applicants for the Dance and Drama Awards scheme are required to meet; what representations he has received about the administration of the awards scheme; and if he will make a statement. [82741]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Dance and Drama Awards are given to the "most talented" students following open auditions at the schools that offer the awards. I have received no representations regarding the administration of the scheme in the last two years. I am pleased that our external evaluators report that the scheme is performing well and the awards are enabling students from lower income families to access high quality Performing Arts training. Last year all students passed their Trinity College London qualifications and all providers met the high quality standards set for inspection.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many awards made under the Dance and Drama Awards Scheme went to schools which were not members of the National Council for Drama Training in each of the last three years; what contracts and agreements his Department has with the National Council for Drama Training; and if he will make a statement. [82742]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Of the 820 new Dance and Drama Awards allocated to schools each year the following Awards were allocated to providers that were not members of the National Council for Drama Training:

399 Awards in 2002;

424 Awards in 2001; and

355 Awards in 2000.

The Department for Education and Skills has no contracts or agreements with the National Council for Drama Training.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the relationship between the National Council for Drama Training and Trinity College Examination Board; and if he will make a statement. [82743]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I have made no assessment of the relationship between the National Council for Drama Training and Trinity College Examination board. These bodies are both independent and make an important contribution to training for the Performing Arts.

Drugs Education

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received from *(a)* LEAs, *(b)* drug action teams and *(c)* school heads on the guidelines for drug education in secondary schools. [82269]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department for Education and Skills has regular contact and consults widely with schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to ensure that they are involved in the policy making process, and officials have discussed drug education with the Home Office, to whom drug action teams are accountable, via correspondence and at regular meetings.

In the last six months officials have received correspondence from schools and LEAs about various matters related to drugs education.

We have recently started the process of revising and consolidating Government guidance on drug, alcohol and tobacco education for schools with a view to issuing new guidance in Autumn 2003. Three pre-drafting consultation events held across the country in October, included representatives from drug action teams, LEAs and schools. We will consult widely on the draft guidance in the spring.

EU Education Benchmarks

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the staying-on rate in post-16 education in coalfield areas was, in each year since 1997, and how this compares with the national average. [82250]

Margaret Hodge: Data on the percentage of students continuing in post-compulsory education at age 16 for coalfield areas cannot be produced reliably at present. Participation rates by LEA and by local LSC area for 16 and 17-year-olds are published in Statistical Bulletin 14/01, "Participation in education and training by young people aged 16 and 17 in each local area and region, England, 1995/96 to 1999/00".

National participation rates are published annually in a Statistical First Release (SFR), the latest being issue 16/02, "Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16–18 Year Olds in England: 2000 and 2001."

The percentage of 16-year-olds participating in full-time and part-time education in England since 1997 is as follows:

End of calendar year	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001 (provisional)*
Full-time education	69.4	69.8	71.3	71.4	71.2
Part-time education	6.7	6.6	6.6	6.5	7.3

Source:
SFR 16/02

Heroin

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many LEAs collect statistics on actual and perceived heroin abuse by parents with primary school children; [82270]

(2) how many primary schools have more than 5 per cent. of pupils with a heroin addicted parent at home; [82271]

(3) what recent assessment his Department has made of the impact on primary school children of having a heroin-dependent parent at home; [82272]

(4) what recent estimate he has made of the number of children at primary school level who have a parent addicted to heroin at home. [82273]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Local education authorities and primary and secondary schools are not required to collect information about the drug use of their pupils' parents. There are inherent difficulties in collecting information about drug use; because of its often illegal nature, drug users are often reluctant to identify themselves to statutory bodies.

The Home Office is responsible for collecting information on the scale of drug misuse in England and Wales. The report of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs "The Children of Problem Drug Users" is due to be published next year and will contain estimates of the numbers of children affected by parental drug misuse. The report is also expected to make recommendations to address the problem.

When parents use drugs—especially problematic and illegal drugs like heroin—their children may be exposed to a range of emotional and physical hazards. Children may respond in a variety of ways, including: disturbed or anti-social behaviour; becoming withdrawn or introverted; turning to drink or drugs to escape unpleasant home situations; running away from home; losing concentration in class; and reluctance to form or develop friendships with schoolmates. The child may also be the subject of bullying if schoolmates perceive him or her to be 'different' or 'not fitting in' with the peer group. Schooling is likely to be interrupted if the child is depended upon to care for drug using parents.

The Government recognise that the children of drug using parents are a vulnerable group. They should therefore benefit from the new requirement for every top tier or unitary local authority to prepare from April 2003 a local preventive strategy to improve outcomes for children aged 0–19 who are at risk of social exclusion. This was announced by the Minister for Young People on 6 September. On 30 October the Prime Minister announced to the House the Government's intention to publish a Green Paper on Children at Risk in the New Year. My Department is playing a full part in helping to make sure that vulnerable children and young people are identified as soon as possible, and that their needs are met with a coherent and effective response from the relevant statutory and voluntary agencies.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which learning and skills councils *(a)* have and *(b)* do not have a member representing schools with sixth forms. [80989]

Margaret Hodge: Since April 2002 the LSC has been responsible for the funding of school sixth forms. In the Secretary of State's Grant Letter for 2002–03 we asked the LSC to widen council representation from the schools sector. Since then the LSC has been actively recruiting school teachers and head teachers and will continue to do so. Currently there are 19 local LSCs with teachers or head teachers of schools with sixth forms on their local councils. These are: Kent and Medway; Berkshire; Milton Keynes; Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire; Surrey; Bedfordshire; Cambridgeshire; Essex; Hertfordshire; Norfolk; Suffolk; County Durham; North Yorkshire; Greater Merseyside; Coventry and Warwickshire; Gloucestershire; West of England; London South; Northamptonshire; and Derbyshire. Three more local LSCs have head teachers of schools which do not have sixth forms.

In addition the LSC is the process of recruiting a head teacher of a school with a sixth form to its national council.

Further experience of schools' matters is brought by those local council members who come from local authorities and local education authorities (30 local councils have Directors of Education/Chief Education Officers, 40 local councils have elected members and 46 local councils have members with other local authority backgrounds). In addition 40 local LSCs have members who are school governors.

Preventive Education

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding his Department has targeted on preventive education programmes about *(a)* drugs and *(b)* youth offending; what funding is targeted at vulnerable groups; and if he will make a statement. [82711]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department recognises the importance of preventative activity and ensuring that support reaches those most in need and we have made significant funding available to facilitate this.

(a) Drug, alcohol and tobacco education in the curriculum is funded via the Standards Fund. This funding, made available to local education authorities (LEAs) is to support the training of teachers and deliver effective drug, alcohol and tobacco education and prevention programmes. £15.5 million has been made available in 2002–03 and this will rise to £17.5 million in 2003- 04. The breakdown for 2002–03 is: Standards Fund Drug Prevention Grant—£7.5 million; Standards Fund Drug Education Advisers Grant—£5.7 million; Teacher training and Connexions Adviser training £2.3 million. The breakdowns for 2003–04 have not yet been announced.

This increase will improve the quality and coverage of drug, alcohol and tobacco education, fund drug adviser support in each LEA and help teachers deliver programmes tailor-made to meet the needs of young people across the country, including those most vulnerable to the risks of drug misuse.

(b) Through our Behaviour Improvement Programme, we have allocated £50 million to 34 LEAs with high rates of street crime and truancy to work with targeted schools in improving behaviour and attendance. Under the Programme, this summer, we allocated a further £16 million to the Connexions Partnerships covering the 34 LEAs to provide key workers and diversionary activities for over 9,000 of the young people in those areas most at risk of offending.

The Connexions Service brings together a wide range of agencies to provide information, advice, guidance and support to all young people aged 13–19, but with a

sharp focus on those who need it most. I announced last week that funding for Connexions will rise to £515 million by 2005–06. The vision statement for Connexions that I issued last week, along with ministerial colleagues across Whitehall, reaffirms our joint commitment to securing better outcomes for this age group, but specifically around increasing the number who participate in education training and employment and reducing the number of young people who become involved in crime.

Public Service Agreements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will place the data underlying his Department's value for money scores in relation to the 1998 public service agreements in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [80415]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Progress against our CSR 98 targets was reported most recently in the Department's 2002 Annual Report. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

School Standards

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the progress made towards his Department's targets on *(a)* reducing the number of secondary schools classed as failing, *(b)* reducing school truancies and *(c)* ensuring that all permanently excluded pupils obtain an appropriate full-time education. [81077]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:*

(a) Significant progress has been made in tackling failure. The number of secondary schools classed as failing has declined and continues to do so. There are currently 51 secondary schools requiring special measures compared with 90 schools in summer 1998.

(b) The Department's Public Service Agreement target is to reduce school truancies by 10 per cent by 2004 compared to the 2002 rate, sustain the new lower level, and improve overall attendance levels thereafter. The Department's Statistical First Release showing school absence for the 2001/02 school year published on 9 October 2002 shows the national rate of unauthorised absence to be 0.7 per cent. of half days missed.

(c) All Local Education Authorities have said that they would be able to provide suitable full time education to all permanently excluded pupils from September 2002. Officials are currently conducting a survey to ensure that this target has been met.

School Transport

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the additional school transport required in *(a)* The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and *(b)* Wokingham District as a result of the Government's plans for housing; and what additional funding he has provided for it. [81759]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: It is for local education authorities to determine how much to spend on home-school transport, taking account of need in their area. Funding for home to school transport is routed through the Education Standard Spending Assessment.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on his policy on pilot-free school bus transport for secondary school pupils living less than three miles from school, with special reference to Staffordshire. [82441]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Local education authorities (LEAs) are encouraged to pilot and evaluate changes to home to school transport entitlement, particularly where low income groups may otherwise be cut off from successful schools or alternative types of learning locally.

Some LEAs have already expressed an interest in exploring such pilots, including Staffordshire County Council. The outcome of their bid for funding under the Rural Bus Challenge will be announced early in the new year. LEAs are also encouraged to seek funding through local Public Service Agreements when these are negotiated or renegotiated.

Schools Funding (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire had a cash budget cut this financial year. [81189]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The information requested is submitted to the Department according to local education authority areas, rather than districts within an area. Chesham and Amersham is a district of Buckinghamshire Local Education Authority. In Buckinghamshire LEA, 36 schools had a fall in their cash budget share in 2002–03. Of these, six schools closed mid-year. Five of the 36 schools also had a fall in their cash budget share per pupil.

Changes in pupil numbers are the principal reason for changes in budget share. 200 schools did not have a fall in their budget share, but of these, six had a fall in their cash budget share per pupil. This was largely in cases where small primary schools had rising rolls and, therefore, received less of the extra funding that goes to the smallest schools under the authority's formula.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent on each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupil in *(i)* 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03 in (A) Chesham and Amersham and (B) Buckinghamshire. [81190]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The information requested is submitted to the Department according to local education authority areas, rather than districts within an area. Chesham and Amersham is a district of Buckinghamshire Local Education Authority. Buckinghamshire LEA spent *(a)* £2,250 per primary school pupil and *(b)* £3,030 per secondary school pupil in the 2000–01 financial year. The Department is in the process of collecting data for the 2001–02 financial year and I will write to the hon. Member when it is available. Data for 2002–03 will not be collected until September 2003.

Skills Base

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent analysis has been

carried out by the Learning and Skills Council of the skills base in coalfield areas compared to the national average. [82276]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Special Educational Needs

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if a child who is assessed as having special educational needs which are best met in a mainstream maintained school will be permitted to attend such a school; and if the LEA will have a duty to find a school place for that child. [81052]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* If no statement is maintained for a child, they must be educated in a mainstream school. Children with statements of special educational needs should also be taught in a mainstream school and the LEA should find a place for them where parents wish it, and it is not incompatible with the efficient education of other children. This will also apply to accommodation centre residents who subsequently remain in this country after leaving the centre. For children and their parents who are resident in an accommodation centre, local education authorities will be able to disapply the relevant provisions of the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 to name a mainstream school in a child's statement, having carried out a statutory assessment of a child's special educational needs, if they consider that the accommodation centre or a special school will not be able to meet the child's needs. We would, however, expect local education authorities to take this course of action only rarely, and the great majority of children will have their special educational needs met appropriately in the accommodation centres.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what education a child with special educational needs who is living in an accommodation centre will receive while their assessment is in the process of being completed. [81069]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* Children with special educational needs will continue to receive education in accommodation centres while they are being assessed. Education provided within the accommodation centres will have the same broad range and be of equivalent quality to that provided in mainstream schools, including support through School Action and School Action Plus under the Special needs Code of Practice.

Student Loans

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to change the interest rates charged to students who receive loans from the Student Loans Company. [82418]

Margaret Hodge: We have announced our intention to publish a strategy document setting out our vision for the development and reform of higher education, including the outcome of the review of student support. The document will be published in January; it would not be right to pre-empt it here by saying what is or what is not planned.

University Merger (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether he has been consulted on the proposed merger of Imperial College and University College, London. [82420]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not been consulted. I understand that Imperial College and University College, London announced their decision not to merge on 18 November.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Credit Card Fraud

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what he estimates the annual cost of credit card fraud to be in the UK economy; [80735]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with credit card companies and the banking industry regarding credit card fraud. [80734]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office does not compile estimates of the cost of credit card fraud and this information is not available from police recorded crime statistics.

In the publication, "2002: Fraud in Focus", the Association for Payment Clearing Services (APACS) estimated the losses from cheque, debit and credit or charge card fraud at £317 million in 2000 and £411.4 million in 2001. APACS recently estimated losses in the 12months to August 2002 at £429.4 million.

I met representatives of APACS in January 2002 to discuss the establishment of a joint national cheque and credit card fraud squad. The Dedicated Cheque and Plastic Card Unit came into existence in April 2002, with funding provided by both the private sector and the Government. Home Office officials hold quarterly meetings with representatives from APACS and the British Bankers Association (BBA) to monitor the Unit's progress.

In addition, Home Office officials hold regular discussions with key representatives from the credit card companies and the banking industry about credit card fraud and progress of the project to introduce microchips into payment cards to help their authentication and personal identification numbers (PINs) in place of signatures.

Hearsay Evidence

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the treatment of hearsay evidence. [80499]

Hilary Benn: Under the proposals set out in the Government White Paper, "Justice for All", we will allow reported evidence, 'hearsay', to be included in criminal proceedings if there is a good reason for the original maker not to be able to give evidence personally

(e.g. through illness or death); or where records have been reliably compiled by businesses. In these circumstances, the evidence should automatically go in. The courts would also have the powers to decide that other evidence of this sort can be given, with certain safeguards.

Furthermore, under these reforms, witnesses' previous and original statements would be more widely admissible at trials in order to make it easier for them to give their evidence.

Police Constables (Nottinghamshire)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans have been made for the recruiting of additional Special Constables in Nottinghamshire Constabulary's 'B' Division. [80699]

Mr. Denham: We recognise that the Special Constabulary has a vital role to play in reducing crime and providing reassurance to the public.

We are working with stakeholders on a variety of measures to help forces improve the recruitment, management and deployment of Specials, including good practice guidance.

We have set aside £300,000 to help "Specials Champions" drive forward initiatives to support the development of the guidance. The "Champions Initiative" will help identify effective local recruitment practices and procedures, including recruitment from visible ethnic minority communities and also other groups which, traditionally, have been harder to attract to the special constabulary.

Taser M26

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his assessment is of the deterrent capabilities of the Taser M26. [80624]

Mr. Denham: The deterrent capabilities of Taser were considered by the Home Office's Police Scientific Development Branch in their second phase report on less lethal technology, which was published in November 2001.

Trial by Jury

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on trial by jury. [80498]

Hilary Benn: The responses to the consultation exercise are currently being considered. I will arrange to publish them in due course.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been issued since their introduction in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire; and if he will make a statement. [81177]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* An anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) is a civil order made by a court which currently can be applied for by a local authority or the police. There have not been any notifications received by the Home Office of ASBOs issued within the Chiltern district council local government area, which includes Chesham and Amersham. The table shows the number of notifications received by the Home Office of ASBOs issued within Buckinghamshire by local government authority up to 30 June 2002 (latest available).

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made locally have been consistently under reported in returns made by magistrates courts and are considering how reporting can be improved.

Number of anti-social behaviour orders reported to the Home Office which have been issued as from 1 April 1999 to 30 June 2002 within Buckinghamshire by local government authority

Area	From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000[1]	From 1 June 2000 to 30 June 2002	Total
Police force area/MCC			
Thames Valley	1	29	30
Local government authority			
County of Buckinghamshire			
Milton Keynes BC	[3]	3	3
Wycombe DC	[3]	2	2

[1] Total figure only available for Thames Valley police force area within this period. Local government authority not known.
[2] Includes total figure for counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire
[3] Not available.

Burrell Case

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department was informed of the collapse of Regina *v.* Paul Burrell; and if he will make a statement. [81716]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The Attorney General kept my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary informed of developments immediately prior to the collapse of the Paul Burrell trial. This was a matter of courtesy; the Home Secretary has no responsibility for the conduct of criminal trials, the prosecution of which are entirely the responsibility of the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81834]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* With the exception of a limited number of staff who are entitled to claim excess fares allowance on permanent transfer, Home Office staff are responsible for paying their own everyday home to office travel costs. The introduction of a Central London Road User charge will not affect this. Home Office staff who travel on official business are required to use the most efficient and economical means of travel, taking all costs into account. Subject to that, staff who are required to drive their own vehicles, or hire vehicles, within the charging zone will be reimbursed.

The estimated cost of the charge in relation to Home Office fleet vehicles is £53,000 per year. The additional cost in relation to individual journeys on official duty is not expected to represent a significant element of the overall budget for official travelling and related costs.

Conviction Rates

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the conviction rate was in relation to the overall number of estimated crimes in each year since 1992. [81002]

Mr. Denham: Convictions for offences covered under the definition of recorded crime are only available on a consistent basis for all areas for 1998–99, 1999–00 and 2000–01. The available information is contained in the table.

Convictions for notifiable offences as a percentage of recorded crime, England and Wales, 1992–2001–02

Period	Recorded crime	Convictions	Convictions as a percentage of recorded crime
1992	5,591,717	—	—
1993	5,526,255	—	—
1994	5,258,139		
1995	5,100.241	—	—
1996	5,036,552	—	—
1997	4,598,327	—	—
1998–99	5,109,089	755,705	14.8
1999–2000	5,301,187	756,629	14.3
2000–01	5,170,843	706,277	13.7
2001–02	5,527,028	—	—

Notes:
Criminal Statistics, England and Wales
Crime in England and Wales, 2001–02
Home Office Court Proceedings Database

Cycling (Accidents)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it is his policy that, in a motor accident between a driver and a cyclist, the driver should be presumed to be at fault. [82569]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There is no legal presumption to this effect, and the Government do not intend to introduce one. Road traffic law is based on the principle that the prime consideration in deciding how to deal with road traffic offenders should be the degree of culpability. In many cases, even though an accident between a driver and a cyclist might have had tragic consequences, the driver may not have been at fault. In the police investigation of such an accident, the cyclist and driver are treated on exactly the same basis. Any decision as to charges against either party will depend on an assessment of all the evidence available.

IT Securtity

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80777]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office and its agencies use a variety of information technology (IT) systems, ranging from stand-alone machines to large networks. Those systems processing sensitive information are subject to on-going IT security accreditation checks by the Departmental Security Unit.

The number of cases of digital attacks detected on Home Office systems was *(a)* 108 in October and *(b)* 2,518 in 2002.

All these cases involved the detection and prevention of computer viruses. There were no recorded instances of hacking.

Murder (Sentencing Tariffs)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has in relation to tariff-setting arrangements for those convicted of murder. [83771]

Mr. Blunkett: The House of Lords has made decisions today in two cases that deal with the arrangements for the sentencing of adults convicted of murder. These judgments concern matters of fundamental significance for the criminal justice system and the role of Parliament and Ministers in formulating policy on the provision of adequate punishment for the guilty and the protection of the public.

In the case of Pyrah and Lichniak, the House of Lords has confirmed that the mandatory life sentence for murder is compatible with the rights protected by the European Convention of Human Rights. This sentence will remain in place.

The case of Anderson deals with the Home Secretary's power to set the tariff, or minimum period a convicted murderer must remain in custody until he becomes eligible for release. This power has ensured ministerial accountability to Parliament within the criminal justice system for the punishment imposed for the most heinous and serious of crimes. When Parliament took its decision to abolish the death penalty for murder, this was the framework with which it was replaced. The House of Lords has not ruled that the Home Secretary's power is unlawful. All existing tariffs therefore stand. The House of Lords has declared instead that the Home Secretary's power to set tariffs for those convicted of murder is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. The existing law and tariffs set according to it therefore remain until new legislation is in place.

This judgment will affect only the issue of who sets the tariff in each case. As is proper in a democracy, Parliament will continue to retain the paramount role of setting a clear framework within which the minimum period to be served will be established. I am determined that there should continue to be accountability to Parliament for these most critical decisions. This is fundamental to our democracy and to the maintenance of confidence in the criminal justice system.

We need to study the judgment carefully before finalising our proposals but I intend to legislate this Session to establish a clear set of principles within which

the courts will fix tariffs in the future. These principles will be debated and agreed by both Houses of Parliament and in setting a tariff, the judge will be required, in open court, to give reasons if the term being imposed departs from those principles. The Attorney General already has powers in relation to unduly lenient sentences and it will be open to him to challenge any tariff which he does not consider to be consistent with these principles.

These principles will set a framework within which judicial discretion, which is an essential feature of sentencing, will operate. They will be robust and comprehensive. We envisage that they will comprise a statement of the major guiding principles followed by a series of clear messages about the tariffs Parliament expects to be imposed for different categories of murder. The principles will provide entry points for particular categories of murder, which would be adjusted up or down in line with specified aggravating and mitigating factors. The principles will set out that for the most serious crimes—such as the sexual, sadistic murder of children—life should mean life. The principles will incorporate the same aggravating factors upon which previous Home Secretaries and I have based our decisions. These factors will include murder committed in the course of armed robbery or the murder of prison or police officers in the course of their duty as set out to Parliament by my predecessor Leon Brittan in 1983. In the case of existing tariffs, these arrangements will ensure that any judicial reconsideration is on the basis of this same set of principles.

I believe that coupled with the new arrangements for the determination of release of mandatory life prisoners by the Parole Board, under which I will have an opportunity to make representations on the impact of any future offending by the prisoner concerned, the provisions I have outlined will amount to a sensible and secure system for the management of life sentences generally. The new scheme will be compatible with our Human Rights obligations and will also ensure that Parliament has established the framework for dealing with the most dangerous and evil people in our society.

Murder Statistics (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many murders in Leeds were committed by a person well known to the victim in the last five years; and what proportion of the total number of murders this represents; [81484]

(2) what the clear up rate for murders committed in Leeds was in the last five years. [81485]

Hilary Benn: Details of homicides held centrally locate the offence by police force area only. The available information relates to currently recorded offences of homicide (murder, manslaughter and infanticide) by West Yorkshire police and is given in the following table.

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Total number of currently recorded homicides	33	29	33	25	36
Number of homicides where victim known to suspect	20	18	18	12	20
Proportion of homicides where victim known to suspect (percentage)	61	62	55	48	56
Number of homicides with suspect	30	26	33	23	34
Percentage of homicides with suspect	91	90	100	92	94

As at 3 October 2001, figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available.

North Wales Police

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much *(a)* Home Office funding, *(b)* National Assembly funding and *(c)* local authority funding was received by North Wales police in each of the last 10 years at present-day prices. [80579]

Mr. Denham: The available information is set out in the following table:

£ million

	Home Office grant[1]	*National Assembly for Wales grant*[2]	*Council tax*	*Total in cash terms*	*Total at 2001–02 prices*[3]
1995–96[4]	35.3	24.5	8.8	68.6	80.2
1996–97	37.6	24.0	10.7	72.3	81.9
1997–98	37.3	25.1	11.2	73.6	80.9
1998–99	39.1	24.1	13.6	76.8	82.1
1999–2000	38.7	25.9	15.7	80.2	83.8
2000–01	41.5	26.1	18.8	86.3	88.2
2001–02	46.0	28.0	20.1	94.1	94.1
2002–03[5]	49.6	28.7	23.6	102.0	99.5

[1] Home Office grant includes principal formula police grant, Crime Fighting Fund, Rural Policing grant, capital grant, DMA funding and Airwave grant. Under the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) floors and ceilings arrangements, police authorities in England were guaranteed a minimum increase in principal formula police and ODPM grants of 2.3 per cent. for 2002–03. Floors and ceilings are not applied by the National Assembly for Wales, but to ensure North Wales benefited from a minimum increase of 2.3 per cent., my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary exceptionally agreed to make a special payment to North Wales police authority of £362,000.

[2] National Assembly for Wales grant includes national non domestic rates and revenue support grant.

[3] Real terms are at 2001–02 prices using gross domestic product deflator at 27 September 2002.

[4] Before 1995–96, when most police authorities became independent local authorities, revenue support grant and national non domestic rates were paid as part of respective county council grant funding.

[5] The grant figure for 2002–03 is not directly comparable with that for 2001–02 owing to changes in funding for the National Crime Squad/National Criminal Intelligence Service, now funded centrally rather than through police authorities. On a comparable basis, grant for 2001–02 would be £93.3 million.

Police

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what areas of police *(a)* deployment,

(b) management and *(c)* enforcement he is responsible to Parliament for in terms of parliamentary questions. [80526]

Mr. Denham: The Secretary of State for the Home Department is responsible to Parliament for an efficient and effective police service in England and Wales. To that end the Police Reform Act 2002 has extended the scope of regulations, codes of practice and directions to take remedial action that the Secretary of State may issue. The Secretary of State shares with chief officers of police and police authorities the management of policing, but is not responsible for the deployment of police officers and staff. Nor is he responsible for enforcing the law—this is a matter for those who hold the office of a constable or who have otherwise been given specific powers by Parliament. The control and direction of police officers and police support staff is vested in the chief constable, save for those staff who by agreement work for the police authority.

In former times, the Secretary of State has declined to answers related to police operations and this has been upheld by the Speaker. Recent Secretaries of State have often tried to accommodate hon. members with specific information relating to the police. Most information should be sought direct from the chief officer of police or the police authority.

Clifford Police Station (York)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how many days York's Clifford street police station was closed during and following the flood in York in November 2000; what was the revenue cost to the North Yorkshire police authority of the closure; what assessment he has made of the wider economic cost to other people in North Yorkshire who use the police station and are protected by its services; what damage was done to the building; how much it cost to repair; and whether the cost of the repairs was covered by insurance. [80997]

Mr. Denham: The Chief Constable of North Yorkshire police informs me that Clifford street police station was closed for the period between 3 November 2000 and mid February 2001.

The main damage was to decorations and the flooring. The cost to the force, including cleaning and moving, was approximately £18,800. This was covered by the force's insurance.

During the closure services were provided from the nearby Fulford road station. The force informs me that there may have been a marginal effect on response times but that there was no great effect on residents or businesses in the city centre.

Community Support Officers (Nottinghamshire)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce community support officers into Nottinghamshire Constabulary's 'B' Division. [80703]

Mr. Denham: On 23 September my right hon.Friend the Home Secretary announced a fund of 19 million for the recruitment of more than 1,000 Community Support Officer's (CSOs) in England and Wales this financial year. 27 forces bid successfully for a share of this funding.

Nottinghamshire is among the forces which will benefit from this. They bid successfully for £222,577 to recruit and train 12 CSOs and will deploy them on certain estates in the city of Nottingham.

Deployment of CSOs is a matter for the Chief Officer of the force concerned. I understand there are no current plans to introduce CSOs into Nottinghamshire's 'B' Division.

Police Paperwork

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce paperwork for police officers. [82149]

Mr. Denham: Sir David O'Dowd's taskforce was commissioned to give the Government a police service view of what could be done to tackle the administrative burdens and inefficient working practices which keep police officers off the streets. The taskforce report highlighted ways to free up significant amounts of officers' time. We have now set up a steering group, co-chaired by the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office, to take the taskforce recommendations forward.

The Government recognise its responsibilities to support this work, including considering changes to legislation where necessary. Indeed, in line with a number of taskforce recommendations, the Police Reform Act 2002 has already made the necessary changes in the law to enable chief officers to expand the range of functions that support staff can perform in the custody suite. We will also ensure that significant funding is made available to improve police information technology. This is a vital opportunity to change the culture and management of the police service and bring about a real difference to the everyday lives of officers on the front line.

Police Recruitment (Medical Standards)

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to provide new guidelines to police forces on medical standards for police officer recruitment. [80924]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* The medical and eyesight standards for entry into the police service have been reviewed as a part of the national recruitment standards project.

We expect to receive the draft recommendations for the medical standards early next year. Following the consultation period the medical standards will be put in place.

The draft recommendations for the eyesight standards have been circulated to forces for comments. Following consultation the new eyesight standards will be put in place early next year.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to meet the Acting Chief Constable of Leicester concerning ethnic minority recruitment. [81503]

Mr. Denham: I have no current plans to do so. Support and assistance is being offered to forces on ethnic minority recruitment through annual reviews by the Home Office and Her Majesty's Inspectorate Constabulary against agreed interim targets. Good or promising practice in the areas of recruitment, retention and progression will be promulgated when identified.

Police Transfers

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Chief Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis concerning the current advertising campaign by the Metropolitan police to encourage police officers of Thames Valley to leave their employment and work in the Metropolitan police; and if he will make a statement. [82380]

Mr. Denham: I am aware of the concern about the recent advertisements issued by the Metropolitan police.

It is healthy to have a degree of interchange of experience between police forces, to allow officers to pursue their personal and career development. But we have made clear that it is essential that recruitment exercises should be conducted in a responsible manner that does not cause operational difficulties for colleagues in other forces.

Retail Workers (Assaults)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the trends in assaults on workers in the retail sector; and what action he has taken in the light of such assessments. [80541]

Mr. Denham: Statistics are not collected on a regular basis about assaults on shop staff. However, we have launched the first independent crime victimisation study of the retail and manufacturing sectors for 10 years. This will gather valuable information about the types of crime businesses suffer and help in developing the best ways to tackle these. In May 2002 we issued "Don't Discount Crime", a new user-friendly crime reduction guide for retailers. This is of particular relevance to small retailers and includes basic guidance on what steps to take to reduce crime as well as what to do in crime situations. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also published "Work- related violence: managing the risk in smaller businesses" on 9 July 2002. The publication includes 10 case studies on reducing risk of violence to staff.

Security Alert Rating

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the security alert rating was for the country in each year since 1997. [81005]

Mr. Blunkett: There is no single national alert system. Different systems apply in various public sectors, and there is a range of alert systems for critical industries, aviation and maritime interests, dependent on the circumstances of each. These are based upon assessments provided centrally.

Shotgun Licences

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent guidelines he has published for issuing shotgun licences; and if he will make a statement. [82130]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Chapter 11 of the Home Office publication, "Firearms Law: Guidance to the Police", provides an overview of the shotgun certificate procedure. The guidance was published in March this year, but has been available on the Home Office website since December 2001.

It is for the police to determine in individual cases whether or not to issue, refuse or to revoke a certificate.

Special Constables

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables were employed by each police service in each year since 1992. [81003]

Mr. Denham: For 1992 and 1993 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) collected data on the number of special constables in England and Wales at the end of the calendar year. In December 1992 there were 19,035 special constables. The figure for December 1993 was 20,573. The HMIC data was collected for the financial year 1994–95 when there were 20,026 special constables.

Since 1995, data on special constabulary strength has been collected by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate for end of March and September each year. This is shown in the table.

Special constable total strength, September 1995 to March 2002

	September 1995	*March 1996*	*September 1996*	*March 1997*	*September 1997*	*March 1998*	*September 1998*	*March 1999*	*September 1999*	*March 2000*	*September 2000*	*March 2001*	*September 2001*	*March 2002*
Avon and Somerset	676	688	662	759	629	621	584	547	482	459	416	400	391	364
Bedfordshire	196	189	189	182	186	186	175	154	148	151	134	115	119	118
Cambridgeshire	264	275	302	303	336	320	308	310	293	274	214	218	197	207
Cheshire	269	274	350	475	491	459	416	407	358	350	307	290	233	191
Cleveland	204	195	180	160	157	164	136	126	108	128	122	93	98	85
Cumbria	221	201	184	189	184	198	210	204	193	176	167	156	125	102
Derbyshire	440	413	405	428	414	380	355	317	303	282	286	275	263	260
Devon and Cornwall	1,079	1,102	1,133	1,148	1,079	1,024	916	918	908	870	836	796	780	689
Dorset	230	254	263	289	325	315	303	305	287	298	278	267	258	253
Durham	192	187	187	184	178	144	159	159	169	157	155	146	146	134
Essex	548	608	614	634	641	638	590	544	528	483	478	445	413	381
Gloucestershire	330	330	315	297	287	276	245	233	221	206	197	183	153	154
Greater Manchester	749	746	710	685	657	598	567	523	498	457	408	367	355	338
Hampshire	549	564	519	621	681	698	747	760	720	615	500	454	437	444
Hertfordshire	307	315	309	297	306	306	267	238	232	216	214	198	177	206
Humberside	380	391	363	340	348	324	289	269	263	246	198	212	207	207
Kent	598	555	545	589	588	592	565	526	484	436	416	392	366	327

Special constable total strength, September 1995 to March 2002

	September 1995	March 1996	September 1996	March 1997	September 1997	March 1998	September 1998	March 1999	September 1999	March 2000	September 2000	March 2001	September 2001	March 2002
Lancashire	594	553	510	483	500	489	465	449	397	382	362	360	325	363
Leicestershire	334	360	391	415	402	406	350	316	303	247	202	162	155	143
Lincolnshire	311	299	279	271	273	260	233	216	218	195	179	166	160	155
City of London	81	77	90	86	84	76	69	64	66	56	46	43	34	36
Merseyside	349	333	392	401	407	419	463	458	467	476	452	541	507	468
Metropolitan police	1,657	1,850	1,797	1,714	1,528	1,282	1,214	1,138	1,173	758	754	774	753	680
Norfolk	325	319	311	402	346	337	351	336	317	285	270	259	240	244
Northamptonshire	298	289	301	316	314	288	262	230	210	199	195	188	177	177
Northumbria	479	471	458	533	480	400	352	342	356	332	323	300	276	256
North Yorkshire	359	360	368	362	337	358	302	276	245	217	189	182	186	185
Nottinghamshire	534	537	596	620	597	558	530	461	405	411	411	335	281	341
South Yorkshire	423	381	330	308	295	281	266	246	236	205	193	188	189	206
Staffordshire	687	702	752	685	643	595	558	468	460	482	461	402	395	384
Suffolk	419	407	391	379	300	397	402	420	420	391	376	349	322	308
Surrey	241	260	248	297	231	235	226	224	205	175	168	149	176	187
Sussex	514	511	485	472	465	442	415	393	377	352	317	306	301	306
Thames Valley	764	744	731	656	694	609	587	569	514	472	463	418	377	356
Warwickshire	351	340	357	381	379	345	323	261	260	260	260	221	208	209
West Mercia	587	613	564	582	558	512	499	515	512	476	443	399	364	339
West Midlands	849	897	913	945	949	889	784	731	697	680	662	617	604	598
West Yorkshire	783	709	664	690	604	589	590	559	572	484	452	415	371	349
Wiltshire	259	233	120	154	150	149	176	184	182	173	172	152	160	147
Dyfed Powys	304	314	309	283	241	254	237	237	237	202	193	191	174	157
Gwent	129	136	157	157	149	119	114	113	110	119	131	137	148	142
North Wales	323	332	324	341	388	358	336	400	262	247	233	207	203	125
South Wales	469	461	383	361	362	366	360	338	331	267	254	254	250	277
Total	19,655	19,775	19,451	19,874	19,163	18,256	17,296	16,484	15,727	14,347	13,487	12,722	12,054	11,598

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many serving special constables there are; and how many there were in each year since 1997. [81909]

Mr. Denham: Data on the strength of the special constabulary in England and Wales are collected by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate for the end of March and September each year. The numbers of special constables from March 1997 to March 2002 are given in the table.

Special constabulary strength 1997–2002

	Number
March 1997	19,874
September 1997	19,163
March 1998	18,256
September 1998	17,296
March 1999	16,484
September 1999	15,727
March 2000	14,347
September 2000	13,487
March 2001	12,722
September 2001	12,054
March 2002	11,598

Note:

Figures supplied by Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on measures taken to recruit special constables. [81910]

Mr. Denham: We are supporting forces in the recruitment of special constables through advertising and promotional material. In the last year, the Home Office has run a police specials recruitment campaign in the national press. Advertisements appeared under the police "Could You?" campaign branding and sought to demonstrate the kind of situations that a special constable could face.

Information is not available on the direct effect on recruitment, but expressions of interest on the hotline number and website rose from 247 in December 2001 to 1,681 in January 2002 when the ads were first run.

We have also produced new recruitment literature, which will be sent to all new inquirers interested in becoming a special constable. A new information pack is also being produced for employers to promote the potential benefits business can derive from supporting staff who are interested in joining the special constabulary.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what charges per officer are imposed by the police force for providing special constables to cover events where necessary. [81915]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally. The decision whether to charge for the provision of special police services under section 25 of the Police Act 1996 is a matter for police authorities and chief constables.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will break down the cost, per officer, of training and equipping specials within the special constabulary. [81916]

Mr. Denham: This information is not held centrally.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations his Department has received concerning initiatives encouraging public sector employers to allow employees leave to serve in the special constabulary; [81919]

(2) what representations his Department has received from the special constabulary regarding payment and conditions; [81908]

(3) what representations his Department has received concerning the average length of time served by a special constable within the service; [81914]

(4) what representations his Department has received concerning the success of advertising for recruitment within the special constabulary; [81913]

(5) what representations his Department has received regarding the effectiveness of the special constabulary; [81907]

(6) what representations his Department has received regarding the introduction of *(a)* pay and *(b)* benefits for the special constabulary; [81906]

(7) what recent representations his Department has received regarding the number of special constables leaving the special constabulary. [81911]

Mr. Denham: We consult regularly with representatives of the special constabulary and other stakeholders on the future development of the special constabulary and on conditions of service issues.

We believe that the special constabulary has a vital role to play in combating crime and providing reassurance to the public.

We are working with stakeholders on a package of measures which are designed to increase the size of the special constabulary. We intend to amend the Special Constabulary Regulations to provide greater flexibility for police authorities to a limited number of trial schemes for making small payments to specials. These trial schemes will require the approval of the Secretary of State. A new headline role for specials has been agreed and a national "foundation" training package developed. We are working on joint Home Office/ Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) good practice guidance covering all aspects of the recruitment, management and deployment of specials.

We have identified a number of "special champions" projects to take forward initiatives to support the good practice guidance and have allocated £300,000 this year for this work.

We fully recognise the contribution employers can make to supporting the work of specials. We are looking at how we can develop closer links with employers to increase awareness of the range of skills specials acquire through their training and operational experience and to encourage engagement with the special constabulary.

Stolen Art and Artefacts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to provide a national database of stolen art and artefacts; and if he will make a statement. [80983]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office is considering with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the National Crime Intelligence Service and the police, the feasibility of implementing a national database of unlawfully obtained cultural property as recommended by the House of Commons Select Committee in a report entitled "Cultural Property: Return and Illicit Trade" published in July 2000.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police forces employ specialists in stolen art and artefacts. [80985]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office does not keep a central record of which forces employ specialists in stolen art and artefacts but all police forces in England and Wales appoint a due diligence officer who is a focal point for dealing with art and antiques crimes within their force.

Strip Searching

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the terms of reference are of the research he has commissioned into the effectiveness of strip searching; what consideration he has given to providing the manual completion and compiling of strip search records while an IT solution is being prepared; and what information on strip searches he has tasked the Prison Service IT provider to monitor. [81213]

Hilary Benn: The research into strip-searching to be conducted by the University of Nottingham was commissioned as a response to the review of searching. The Prison Service accommodates large and diverse populations all of which may have differing experiences and attitudes to strip-searching. The research was commissioned to identify whether, and if so what, changes can be made in the procedures for strip searching to improve its effectiveness. The aim of the research is to consider the views of staff, their approach and demeanour while conducting strip searches and the perceptions of prisoners of strip searching. A copy of the review of searching is available in the Library.

While some records of strip searches are kept, for example of cell searches, to record every search would pose an unacceptable administrative burden and could only be achieved at a disproportionate cost. Manual records do not allow for easy analysis or collation of statistics and it is for these reasons that an Information Technology (IT) solution is being developed.

The IT provider for the Prison Service has been asked to produce a system that will enable all prisons to record the frequency and outcomes of strip searches, to provide information on the prisoner, such as age, gender and ethnicity, the reason for the search, the amount of time taken to conduct the search, a record of finds, and a facility that can generate statistical information on strip searches.

Mr. Kevin McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has collated on the use of strip searches and alternative body search technology in the prison regimes of other Council of Europe Member States. [81223]

Hilary Benn: The Police and Scientific Development Branch (PSDB) are responsible for carrying out technological research for the Prison Service. They are constantly looking at any new technology that is available on the market to ascertain if it would be suitable for use in prisons and the Prison Service has set aside resources to enable the Police Scientific Development Branch to do this. At present, there are no suitable available alternatives capable of finding all items found during a rub down or strip-search, such as drugs, weapons, or other contraband.

All searches are carried out in accordance with legislation and European Court of Human Rights, and any new technology available on the market would not be considered if in any way either was breached.

Telephone Tapping (MPs)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards the tapping of telephones of hon. Members. [80518]

Mr. Blunkett: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister (Mr. Blair) informed the House on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 367W, Government policy remains as stated in 1966 by the then Prime Minister, the Lord Wilson of Rievaulx. In answer to questions on 17 November 1966, Lord Wilson said that he had given instructions that there was to be no tapping of the telephones of Members of the House of Commons and that if there were a development which required a change of policy, the Prime Minister would at such moment as seemed compatible with the security of the country, on his own initiative, make a statement in the House about it.

Young Offenders

Miss McIntosh:: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders were successfully prosecuted in *(a)* April 1997 and *(b)* April 2002 and what was the average sentence *(i)* given and (ii) served in (A) England and Wales and (B) North Yorkshire. [81767]

Hilary Benn: The available information, relating to April 1997 and April 2000 is contained in the table.

Information for 2000 is the latest currently available, that for 2001 being published in December and that for 2002 due for publication in the Autumn of 2003.

Persons aged 10 to 20 convicted of all offences at both magistrates' courts and the Crown Court in April 1997 and April 2000, those sentenced to immediate custody and average sentence length, England and Wales and North Yorkshire

	England and Wales	*North Yorkshire*	*England and Wales*	*North Yorkshire*	*England and Wales*	*North Yorkshire*
April 1997	19,997	268	1,877	19	11.3	7.4
April 2000	18.530	219	1,866	20	9.6	5.4

The average sentence served is available for young offenders (aged under 21) discharged from prison. Table 3.13 in Prison Statistics England and Wales 2000 provides statistics on the average time served for young offenders discharged during 2000 from determinate sentences on completion of sentence or on licence. Equivalent information for those discharged in 1997 is given in Table 3.13 of Prison Statistics England and Wales 1997. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Figures for North Yorkshire are contained in the table.

CABINET OFFICE

PIU Report on Sport

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the PIU Report on Sport will be published. [82533]

Mr. Alexander: The joint Strategy Unit/DCMS Report on Sport will be published in due course.

Charter Marks

Tim Loughton: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many Government Departments hold *(a)* a Charter Mark and *(b)* a Plain English web award. [83300]

Mr. Alexander: No Government Departments are Charter Mark holders themselves.

Currently 2,485 organisations within the public sector are Charter Mark holders, covering a wide range of sectors such as health, education, the courts, the employment service, Inland Revenue, local government and Police Forces. For example, all but a handful of local authorities have been awarded Charter Marks for a total of 874 individual services.

Plain English awards are a matter for individual Departments and are not coordinated centrally. There is no central record of these awards maintained within the Cabinet Office.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Arson

Paul Holmes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many incidents of arson there have been in the United Kingdom in each year since 1992. [83139]

Mr. Leslie: The table contains information on the number of malicious fires attended by local authority fire brigades in the United Kingdom in each year between 1992 and 2000 (the latest year for which data are available). Malicious fires are those where malicious or deliberate ignition was proved or suspected (this includes fires which were recorded by the brigade as 'doubtful').

Malicious fires attended by location, UK, 1992–2000[1]

Thousands[2]

		Location			
	Total	*Dwellings*	*Other buildings*	*Road vehicles*	*Other outdoors*
1992	79.5	10.6	15.7	47.8	5.5
1993	80.2	10.8	16.9	46.6	6.0
1994[3]	84.6	13.7	22.4	40.3	8.2
1995	85.5	13.8	21.9	41.5	8.3
1996	88.4	14.3	21.4	44.4	8.3
1997	82.6	13.8	18.9	42.2	7.6
1998	86.2	13.4	17.1	48.8	7.0
1999	103.0	13.9	17.9	63.0	8.2

Malicious fires attended by location, UK, 1992–2000[1]

Thousands[2]

		Location			
	Total	*Dwellings*	*Other buildings*	*Road vehicles*	*Other outdoors*
2000[1]	111.1	14.2	18.0	70.8	8.2

[1] Provisional.

[2] Figures are rounded and the components do not necessarily sum to the independently rounded totals.

[3] Figures from 1994 are based on sample data weighted to brigade totals. They include 'late' calls and heat and smoke damage only incidents, which were not recorded prior to 1994.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many incidents of arson there were in *(a)* Chesterfield and *(b)* Derbyshire in each year since 1997. [83140]

Mr. Leslie: In 2000, the Fire Service in Derbyshire attended 1,225 fires where malicious or deliberate ignition was proved or suspected (this includes fires which were recorded by the brigade as 'doubtful'). This compares to 1,244 such fires in 1999, 1,003 in 1998 and 949 in 1997. Incident data are not available below brigade area level. 2000 is the latest year for which data are available.

Asylum Seekers (London)

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the financial impact on each London borough of their duties with regard to asylum seekers and refugees; and what assistance he has given to London boroughs to cope with these financial pressures. [80539]

Mr. Raynsford: We have looked carefully with local government during the spending reviews at all the pressures that they face. Additionally, we have provided local authorities with increases in general revenue grant since taking office. London boroughs received an average general grant increase of 5.6 per cent. in the current financial year.

We have also revised the formats of the grants providing essential living needs of asylum seekers supported under the Asylum Support (Interim Scheme) Regulations 1999, as amended and are looking to do the same with the grant for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to provide resources to house the families with children in Redbridge who reside in temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast accommodation. [80542]

Mrs. Roche: In June this year, the London Borough of Redbridge was allocated just over 426,000 to help them reduce the number of homeless families with children in Bed and Breakfast hotels (B&B) and to meet the national commitment of ensuring that by March 2004 no such household is in B&B, other than in an emergency, and even then for no more than six weeks. Rebridge will also benefit from the increased housing benefit subsidy rates, estimated nationally at £10 million, introduced in April this year. This provides additional subsidy to local authorities to secure self-contained temporary accommodation, rather than B&B, for homeless households.

The net costs to local authorities of securing accommodation for homeless applicants, apart from those costs related to the use of authorities' own housing stock, are funded through general grant. Grant is distributed through Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) and local authorities' responsibilities in this area are contained within the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) SSA block. The London Borough of Redbridge received an increase in it's EPCS SSA of £1.35m which equals a 3 per cent. increase. For local authorities overall, the EPCS SSA is set to increase by an average of 4 per cent. a year up to 2005/06.

Birth Certificates

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether it is possible for a father's name to be left blank on a birth certificate in a case where the name of the father is known. [82564]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Oliver Letwin dated 25 November 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning whether it is possible for a fathers name to be left blank on a birth certificate in a case where the home of the father is known.

Under current law, the home of the father is not a factor in whether his name appears on the birth certificate or not.

There is a common law presumption that a child born to a married woman is the offspring of the mother and her husband. In these circumstances, the law requires the husband's name to be recorded as the father in the birth registration unless that presumption is rebutted.

Where the parents are not married to each other, there is no such presumption of paternity. By law, the name of the child's father may be recorded in the birth registration only where paternity is acknowledged by both parents or where it has been established by an appropriate court order. Otherwise the father's name would be left blank.

Children in Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the Department of Education and Skills and *(b)* the Department of Health regarding runaway children in care. [83275]

Mrs. Roche: The Social Exclusion Unit in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently working on projects on both the educational attainment of children in care and young runaways. Ministers and officials from the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health have been very closely involved in both projects.

Civil Service

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people over the age of 60 *(a)* are employed in the civil service and *(b)* were appointed to full-time positions in the civil service in the last 12 months. [82535]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the age of civil servants is collected centrally via the Mandate system, which covers about 98 per cent. of those employed. *(a)* In April 2002, there were 8,540 civil servants aged over 60, representing 1.7 per cent. of the total. *(b)* In the year to April 2002, 350 staff aged over 60 were recruited to full-time posts. This represents 0.5 per cent. of all new full-time appointees.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on the employment of people over the age of 60 in the civil service. [82536]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

In line with all employers in the public and private sector, the Government believes that the civil service should be allowed to determine retirement age policy with regard to its business needs while giving staff as much choice as possible about when they retire. Departments and agencies are free to set the normal retirement age for their own staff subject only to the requirement that the minimum age at which civil servants can retire with full superannuation benefits is 60.

Against this background, 75 per cent. of the civil service now has the option to remain in work until 65, and a further 11 per cent. has the option to remain in work on short service concessions. Those Departments and agencies which have decided that there is a strong case for retaining a retirement age of 60 in the current circumstances will be expected to continue to re-examine the issue and look positively at offering more flexibilities to older staff.

The normal retirement age for the senior civil service is 60. However, Heads of Departments and Agency Chief Executives have the flexibility to retain members of the senior civil service beyond 60 if they judge it to be in the public interest and are satisfied about the fitness and efficiency of the individual to carry out his or her duties.

Contaminated Land (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much land in the Greater London area is contaminated; and if he will make a statement. [82734]

Mr. McNulty: There are no figures currently available on how much land in the Greater London area is contaminated. A survey of London boroughs was carried out by LPAC in 1993 that indicated that at that time there were about 1,400 hectares of land that were not able to be developed for an alternative use without a significant degree of treatment.

Since April 2000 local authorities in England have been under a statutory duty to inspect their areas to identify contaminated land under part IIA ("contaminated land") of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. To date, local authorities have mostly concentrated on preparing inspection strategies. The majority of these have now been been published and for many authorities inspections are under way.

Council House Sales

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many council properties were sold under the right to buy in *(a)* December 2001 and *(b)* January 2002; [81704]

(2) how many council properties were sold under the right to buy in *(a)* December 2000 and *(b)* January 2001; [81942]

(3) how many council properties were sold under the right to buy scheme in *(a)* December 1999 and *(b)* January 2000. [82393]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Data on the sale of council dwellings are collected from local authorities in England on a quarterly rather than monthly basis. Information on quarterly right to buy sales is presented in Table 6 of the publication "Housing Statistics, March Quarter 2002", and is also available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister website.

Council Tax

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether it is his policy to permit local authorities a greater discretion in the setting of discounts for council tax payable by single people. [82573]

Mr. Leslie: On 19 November, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced that we would include provision in our Local Government Bill to enable English and Welsh local authorities to introduce their own locally defined discounts and exemptions. This would allow local authorities to increase the national 25 per cent. single person discount if they so wished. Local authorities would not have power to reduce or remove the current 25 per cent. discount.

Eden District Council

David Maclean: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services in Eden District Council, Cumbria. [83144]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will announce the new system for distributing Formula Grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be around the start of December. Once the Government have allocated their grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has already guaranteed that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and hopes to do better than that when announcing the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Empty Homes

Nick Harvey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he plans to abolish the 50 per cent. discount on council tax for empty homes; and if he will make a statement. [82715]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich announced in a written statement on 19 November that we would be giving English local authorities the discretion to reduce or remove the current 50 per cent. council tax discount on long-term empty property. We are including the necessary provision in our forthcoming Local Government Bill and, subject to parliamentary approval, we aim to implement this change in time for 2004–05 council tax bills.

English Partnerships

John Mann: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria are being used to determine whether the coalfield programme is maintained by English Partnerships or the regional development agencies. [82256]

Mr. McNulty: In announcing the outcome of the quinquennial review of English Partnerships on 24 July 2002, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister confirmed English Partnerships' role in regenerating those places most badly affected by abandonment and decay and confirmed that he was asking English Partnerships to continue to operate the National Coalfields Programme. This approach was considered to offer the most effective method of delivering the programme.

John Mann: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consultation with hon. Members is planned on the future of English Partnerships. [82257]

Mr. McNulty: Hon. Members were welcome to make their views known on the future of English Partnerships during the recent Quinquennial Review. Views received were taken into account and the outcome of the review was announced to Parliament on 24 July 2002.

Fire Service College

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects the suspension of Mr. Terry Glossop, the commandant of the Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh to be resolved; what investigations have taken place; what further investigations need to be undertaken; how many written reports he has received; how many of his officials have been involved; and what reasons underlie the length of time the investigations have lasted. [82656]

Mr. Leslie: The investigation into financial regularity and propriety is currently under way. Mr. Glossop is fully aware of the arrangements. As the investigation is on-going it would be inappropriate to comment further at this stage.

Fire Services (CBRN)

David Davis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many CBRN decontamination facilities have been established since 11 September 2001, and where they are. [82389]

Mr. Leslie: We have taken steps to assure the efficient functioning of the fire service's existing decontamination facilities and to facilitate, by agreement, the delegation of decontamination operations from local ambulance services to the fire service. Additional equipment, funded from the Capital Modernisation Fund, is on order and will be deployed in 2003. Its location is being determined by an assessment of risk.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what costs are being centrally reimbursed to fire authorities in respect of additional expenses they incur due to the strikes by the fire brigade union. [82598]

Mr. Raynsford: Central Government will meet the additional costs incurred by the Ministry of Defence in providing emergency fire cover, and by Police Authorities in supporting it. Central Government will not meet any other additional expenses incurred by Fire Authorities due to strikes by the Fire Brigades Union.

Government Programmes

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was budgeted in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 for *(i)* Excellence in Cities, (ii) Neighbourhood Management and (iii) Business Brokers Programme; what funds budgeted for in each year were not spent; and whether funds were carried forward in each case. [81701]

Mrs. Roche: Excellence in Cities (EiC) had a total budget allocation of £182 million for the financial year 2000–01, of this some £12 million was unspent and reverted to the departmental central budget.

For the financial year 2001–02 the total budget was some £303.1 million. Information is not yet available on amounts left unspent by the EiC Partnerships, however any unspent funds will remain within the EiC authorities to be re-allocated, this reflects new flexibilities now available under the DfES Standards Fund.

Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (NMP) and the Business Brokers (BB) are two programmes which form part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's New Ventures Fund (NVF). Plans for both programmes were put in place after the unit was set up in April 2001; there were no budgets for either in 2000–01.

The NVF had a total budget of £50 million for 2001–02. Of this £6 million was allocated to NMP in 2001–02 and expenditure totalled £2.4 million. BB proposals were less advanced and expenditure totalled £41,000. Some £22 million of NVF funding was unspent to be carried forward.

Both programmes form part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's spending plans for this year 2002–03 and for the SR2002 period.

Homelessness

Adam Price: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many homeless families there are in the UK. [82724]

Mrs. Roche: Information on local authorities' activities under homelessness provisions in England is published in a quarterly Statistical Release, "Statutory Homelessness: England". Table 2 of the Statistical Release presents a summary of those households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need under the homelessness provisions of the 1996 Housing Act

Copies of the Statistical Release are held in the House Library and the latest edition, published on 11 September, presents statistics up to and including the second quarter of 2002.

For information about other parts of the United Kingdom, I refer the hon. Member to my. right hon. Friends the members for Torfaen, Airdrie and Shotts and Hamilton North and Bellshill.

Housing Research

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what internal and external research programmes and reports have been commissioned by *(a)* the Affordable Housing Unit and *(b)* the Planning Housing and Growth Unit since February. [81697]

Mr. McNulty: The Research Analysis and Evaluation division has commissioned, on behalf of the Affordable Housing Unit and the Government Office for London, three research projects.

1. Research aimed at helping to accelerate schemes involving affordable housing through the development process, in April 2002. ("Improving the delivery of Affordable Housing").

2. Research on the potential to utilise the space above existing buildings in and around London and the south-east (such as garages and supermarkets) for mixed development was published in February 2002.

3. Research on the potential for using fiscal measures to tackle the affordability problem was commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in late 2001, and published in September 2002.

As with other parts of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Planning Housing and Growth Unit will be drawing on the departmental research programme which oversees a wide range of urban, housing, planning and development issues. The unit will commission additional research when necessary.

Local Authorities (Fraud)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if a hotline for reporting fraud within and against local authorities has been introduced. [83269]

Mr. Leslie: Since a high proportion of fraud perpetrated against local government is benefit fraud by the public, the Department for Work and Pensions has established a fraud hotline which people can telephone to give information about benefit fraud. Many local authorities have also established fraud hotlines.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many local authorities have established staff anti-fraud practices; and what form these systems have taken. [83268]

Mr. Leslie: The Audit Commission's January 2001 publication "Protecting the Public Purse" included the following summary of anti fraud arrangements in local government:

	Percentage of councils answering 'yes'		
Question	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Does the council have an anti fraud and corruption strategy?	50	72	84
Does the council have formal arrangements to comply with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998?	n/a	56	87
Does the council have a police liaison contact?	46	74	80
Does the council have a local code of conduct for members?	89	91	92
Does the council have a standards committee?	n/a	26	57

Local Government Finance

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of spending by *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council, *(b)* South Buckinghamshire district council and *(c)* Wycombe district council has been financed by council tax payers in each year since January 1996; and what proportion is to be financed by council tax payers in 2002–03. [82386]

Mr. Leslie: The proportions of revenue expenditure financed from the council tax for Buckinghamshire county council, South Buckinghamshire district council and Wycombe district council in the financial years 1995–96 to 2002–03 are set out in the table:

Income from council tax as a percentage of spending

Year	*Buckinghamshire county council*[1]	*South Buckinghamshire district council*	*Wycombe district council*
1995–96	27	38	37
1996–97	28	31	39
1997–98	31	33	41
1998–99	34	63	42
1999–2000	34	48	47
2000–01	35	58	55
2001–02[2]	34	55	35
2002–03[2]			

[1] For 1997–98 onwards this excludes the area of Milton Keynes borough council, which became unitary from 1 April 1997.
[2] 2001–02 and 2002–03 are budgeted figures; 1995–96 to 2000–01 are outturn figures.
Source:
1995–96 to 2000–01 Revenue Summary Returns. 2001–02 and 2002–03 Budget Estimate Returns

Manton Pit Site

John Mann: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the timescale is for agreement between English Partnerships and the East Midlands Regional Development Agency on the infrastructure works and marketing of the former Manton pit site; [82254]

(2) what the English Partnerships' budget is to bring the former Manton pit site to the market. [82255]

Mr. McNulty: English Partnerships and the East Midlands Regional Development Agency have already agreed on much of the infrastructure works and marketing of the former Manton Pit site. In addition, reclamation and the agreed level of infrastructure work has been delivered through an agreement with English Partnerships and the East Midlands Regional Development Agency, which is currently on the market. However, both organisations continue to work towards establishing the needs for further works, and may seek approval for further expenditure depending on the outcome of an economic appraisal which they hope to bring to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister early in 2003.

To date, £4.3 million has been approved for investment in Manton Colliery in order to reclaim, service, manage and market the site as well as undertake further feasibility work to consider additional investment.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many local authorities have implemented the Learning Curve neighbourhood renewal scheme; and if he will list them. [83267]

Mrs. Roche: The Learning Curve, published on 21 October, is the Government's strategy to promote better skills and knowledge for everyone working in neighbourhood renewal. It sets out 23 measures, including face to face advice, regional networks, and an innovative website, renewal.net, to ensure that everyone, including local authority staff working in our most deprived areas can acquire the skills and knowledge they need to deliver real, lasting change. Some measures are already in place, others will be developed with a range of organisations, including the Local Government Association and local authorities, over the coming months.

I have placed a copy of the Learning Curve strategy in the House Libraries.

Park Homes

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he intends to publish the Government's response to the survey on the economics of park homes; and if he will make a statement. [82517]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister welcomes the publication of the report on the Economics of the Park Homes Industry, which makes an important contribution to addressing issues of concern to park home residents. It highlights the importance of site owners taking a professional approach to financial management of the park, and the need for those who are buying a park home to be aware of their current position under the law and of the costs and risks involved.

There is no plan to publish a formal Government response to the report.

Planning

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will publish his Department's research into the effectiveness of implementation of PPG3 and on the progress made by local authorities in carrying out urban capacity studies; and if he will make a statement. [82456]

Mr. McNulty: The intention of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is to publish the research by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners on assessing the implementation of PPG3 as soon as possible, however the timing is dependent on satisfactory completion of the report. 90 per cent. of unitary authorities and district councils responding to the questionnaire survey forming part of this research had, by spring 2002, completed an urban housing capacity study or had one in preparation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what assessment he has made of *(a)* partnership working between counties in cross-border policy making on PPG3 issues and *(b)* the effectiveness of regional planning bodies in facilitating this; and if he will make a statement; [82461]

(2) whether his Department's review of the effectiveness of the implementation of PPG3 includes assessment of how sensitively possible conflicts with PPGs 15 and 16 have been resolved in practice; [82462]

(3) what consultations his Department is having as part of its research into the effectiveness of implementation of PPG3; and whether these consultations include contacts with *(a)* English Heritage and *(b)* the DCMS with regard to the impact of urban infill on the historic environment and heritage of cities. [82463]

Mr. McNulty: The research for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners on assessing the implementation of PPG3 has:

(i) considered cross-boundary working between planning authorities in the context of planning for sub-regional housing markets and the distribution of previously-developed land. The research has found evidence of improvements in joint working since PPG3 was published but also a number of difficulties. The research points to a number of options for addressing these and highlights the important role to be played by our proposed regional spatial strategies.

(ii) found that protection of the historic environment has been the basis for refusals of planning permission for residential development.

(iii) included a postal survey of local planning authorities, housing departments, house builders and regional development agencies. This survey has been supplemented by in-depth interviews with a number of organisations across the English regions with first-hand experience in planning for housing. The research team has not discussed the impact of urban infill on the historic environment and heritage of cities with either English Heritage or the DCMS but this matter has been raised by others.

Public Services (Babergh)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services in Babergh. [82841]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce the new system for distributing formula grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be around the start of December. Once the Government have allocated its grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Rough Sleepers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when his Department next plans to undertake a street count of those living rough in *(a)* London and *(b)* West Sussex. [83274]

Mrs. Roche: Local authorities are responsible for homelessness in their areas and as such also take responsibility for the co-ordination and timing of street counts. It is the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister policy that areas where more than ten people are sleeping rough conduct a count at least every twelve months. This would apply to any local authority areas in West Sussex or London.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what methodology is used to count the number of rough sleepers; and what plans he has to change this. [83276]

Mrs. Roche: Guidance was first published in 1996 on counting methodology developed in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations helping people sleeping rough. Independent evaluation has confirmed that the methodology remains the most robust method for measuring relative levels of rough sleeping and of change over time.

Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that the counts are undertaken and that the methodology is followed. The snapshot counts should take place on a single night, between 12 am and 6 am. The definition of people who should be included in rough sleeper counts is clearly set out in the guidance. It is: people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters); people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations or bashes).

There are no current plans to change this methodology. Changing the methodology could reduce the value of counts in measuring change.

Rural Deprivation

David Maclean: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of rural deprivation in the local government formula grant review. [83146]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 52W.

Rural Services

David Maclean: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account he has taken of the extra cost of providing services in rural areas in the local government formula grant review. [83145]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002, *Official report*, column 49W.

David Maclean: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research was conducted by his Department into the impact of dispersal and settlement patterns on the cost of providing services in rural areas as part of the local government formula grant review. [83143]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 49–50W.

Social Exclusion Unit

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the reports the Social Exclusion Unit is working on and the proposed completion dates in each case. [83271]

Mrs. Roche: The SEU is contributing to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's aim to create thriving, inclusive, sustainable communities, with current projects looking at:

young runaways;

transport and social exclusion; and

the educational attainment of children in care.

We hope that the young runaways and transport reports will be published shortly. The children in care report will be published in the New Year.

Social Housing

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many *(a)* local authority properties, *(b)* registered social landlord properties and *(c)* residential properties were classified unfit for human habitation in *(i)* December 2001 and (ii) January 2002; [81705]

(2) how many *(a)* local authority properties, *(b)* registered social landlord properties and *(c)* residential properties were classified unfit for human habitation in *(i)* December 2000 and (ii) January 2001; [81943]

(3) how many *(a)* local authority properties, *(b)* registered social landlord properties and *(c)* residential properties were classified unfit for human habitation in *(i)* December 1999 and (ii) January 2000. [82394]

Mr. McNulty: The precise information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Local authorities in England report a wide range of housing information on their annual Housing Investment Programme returns, including the number of residential properties which the authority considers likely would be "certifiable as unfit under the legislation as defined in Part XVIII of the Housing Act 1985 as amended by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989". The latest available data on this basis, for the past three years, is presented in the table.

Numbers of unfit[1] dwellings in England

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
Dwellings owned by:			
Local Authorities	173,490	160,600	151,930
Registered Social Landlords	11,610	14,690	21,660
Other private or public	1,254,320	1,253,750	1,198,730
All unfit residential properties	1,439,420	1,429,040	1,372,320

Notes:

[1] Dwellings regarded as failing to meet one or more of the statutory fitness criteria, but not necessarily certified as unfit. All figures as at 1 April.

Source:

ODPM Housing Investment Programme returns (annual)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many empty *(a)* local authority properties, *(b)* registered social landlord properties and *(c)* residential properties there were in *(i)* December 2000 and (ii) January 2001; [81940]

(2) how many empty *(a)* local authority properties, *(b)* registered social landlord properties and *(c)* residential properties there were in *(i)* December 2001 and (ii) January 2002; [81707]

(3) how many empty *(a)* local authority properties, *(b)* registered social landlord properties and *(c)* residential properties there were in *(i)* December 1999 and (ii) January 2000. [82396]

Mr. McNulty: The precise information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Local authorities in England report a wide range of housing information on their annual Housing Investment Programme returns, including the number of residential properties vacant as on 1 April. The latest available data for the past three years is presented in the table:

Numbers of vacant dwellings in England

Dwellings owned by	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Local authorities	83,900	87,200	80,300
Registered social landlords	32,600	37,500	41,300
Other private or public	650,500	635,800	633,500
All vacant residential properties	767,000	760,500	755,100

Note:
All figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
Sources:
Vacant local authority dwellings are taken from ODPM's annual Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns.
Vacant Registered Social Landlord (RSL) dwellings figures are taken from the Housing Corporation's annual Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR) completed by RSLs.
Total vacant residential dwellings figures are calculated summing local authority, "Other public sector" and "Other private sector" data from ODPM's HIP returns, together with RSL vacant dwellings from the Housing Corporation's RSR return.

Supporting People Strategy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many local authorities have not drawn up a shadow Supporting People Strategy. [83272]

Mr. McNulty: All local authorities have drawn up a Supporting People Strategy.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many complaints his Department has received from *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* service providers and *(c)* service users regarding the implementation of the Supporting People Strategy. [83273]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has been in constant dialogue with all partners and stakeholders throughout the implementation of the Supporting People Programme through the Supporting People Kweb and the Supporting People helpline.

The helpline takes on average some 100 calls per week and 'complaints' are not registered separately.

Temporary Accommodation

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the quality of temporary accommodation provided by London boroughs; and what action he has taken in the light of these assessments. [80529]

Mrs. Roche: Homelessness legislation requires that all temporary accommodation offered to homeless households must be suitable, taking account of the law on unfitness, overcrowding and multiple occupation houses.

London boroughs also have a duty to ensure that their environmental health officers carry out regular inspections of all bed and breakfast hotels used for statutorily homeless households in their locality. They must abide by the joint London boroughs' code of practice on hotel standards.

We are committed to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children except in an emergency, and even then for no more than six weeks, through a number of measures to promote better quality self-contained accommodation and action to prevent homelessness.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Ministerial Visits (East Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many times the Lord Chancellor has visited East Lancashire in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82367]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor has not visited East Lancashire in the course of his official duties. The following table details the number of official visits to Lancashire undertaken by the Parliamentary Secretaries at the Lord Chancellor's Department since 1997, and the purpose of each visit.

Date	*Place visited*	*Purpose*
23 September 1998	Burnley	To visit the Magistrates Court
15 September 1999	Blackburn	Roundtable Meeting for North West Associate Pioneers
15 September 1999	Rawtenstall	Visit to the Magistrates Court
11 October 1999	Rawtenstall	Visit to the Magistrates Court
5 October 2000	Preston	Visit to the Preston Combined Court
5 October 2000	Blackburn	Visit to Magistrates Court
23 January 2001	Preston	Community Legal Service Event
5 February 2002	Preston	Launch of Preston e-mail application unit
19 February	Preston	Visit to the Court of Protection at the Combined Court
7 October 2002	Blackburn	Domestic Violence Roadshow

Wasted Costs

Mr. Soames: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions in the last five years a judge has made a wasted costs order. [82471]

Yvette Cooper: The Department does not collect information on the making of wasted costs orders centrally. To ask all the courts in England and Wales to provide the information to answer the Question would be at a disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Mental Health (Murders)

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many murders have been committed by persons with mental disorders in the community but not taking their medicine in the periods *(a)* 1990 to 1993, *(b)* 1993 to 1997, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 2000 to 2002. [82806]

Jacqui Smith: The National Confidential Inquiry in to Suicides and Homicides by People with a Mental Illness started data gathering in 1996, and have data which are fully analysed and published available to the end of 1999.

The data show that between 1 April 1996 and 31 March 1999 there were a total of 145 homicides committed by people with a mental illness who had been in contact with mental health services (i.e. secondary care) in England and Wales in the 12 months prior to the homicide offence. Of these 32, or 26 per cent., were reported to be non-compliant with medication in the month before the event.

Acute Stroke Beds (North Cheshire)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people who had suffered a stroke were admitted to acute stroke beds in each of the hospitals constituting the North Cheshire Hospitals Trust in each of the past five years. [82706]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally in the form requested. However, the table shows the latest available published data[1] for finished consultant episodes for stroke at Halton General Hospital and Warrington Hospital national health service Trusts for each of the five years 1996–97 to 2000–01.

Trust	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Halton general hospital NHS Trust	93	90	112	129	68
Warrington hospital NHS Trust	259	224	264	242	240

[1] Hospital Episodes Statistics: Finished Consultant Episodes for "Stroke" (ICD10 code 160–169)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute stroke beds are available in each hospital in the North Cheshire Hospitals Trust; and how many will be available in each hospital under the trust's plan A Vision for Future Services. [82707]

Jacqui Smith:. There are currently 24 acute stroke beds at Warrington Hospital. At Halton Hospital, stroke patients are currently admitted to general acute beds as there are no beds dedicated to stroke care. Under the plan outlined in the discussion document, "Vision for Future Services," the 24 acute stroke beds at Warrington Hopital would be retained and six new acute stroke assessment beds established at Halton Hospital.

Age-related Macular Degeneration

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have suffered irreversible vision loss as a result of wet age-related macular degeneration in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [82708]

Mr. Lammy: A study sponsored by the Macular Disease Society in 2001 estimated that there were 182,000 people with age-related macular degeneration

with a best eye visual acuity below that judged appropriate for certification as blind or partially sighted. Around 10 to 15 per cent. of those will have the 'wet' type of the condition; it is not possible to say how many of which have benefited from treatment.

Antipsychotic Medicines

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to maximise compliance and minimise compulsion in relation to the use of antipsychotic medicines for severe mental illness. [83306]

Jacqui Smith: This Government see the development of robust community-based mental health provision as the key to ensuring that people adhere to their care plans helping them maintain their care and treatment.

The NHS Plan proposed to increase and develop the number of community-based teams, such as crisis resolution teams, also called home treatment teams, assertive outreach teams, also known as assertive community treatment teams, early intervention teams and community mental health teams. These teams will support and encourage patients to adhere to their care plans, minimising the need for compulsory treatment.

Autism

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support his Department gives to adults with autism. [82712]

Jacqui Smith: Adults with autism are benefiting from funding of over £200,000 which the Department made through the Section 64 Scheme of Grants to Voluntary Organisations between 1998–99 and 2001–02. We are currently devoting a further £154,000 over three years to the National Autistic Society project "Independence and Autism: Good Practice for Service Providers". This will support the development of new services to enable adults with autism or Asperger's Syndrome to live independently.

The "Valuing People" White Paper directly covers every adult with autism who also has a learning disability. Implementation guidance, issued in August last year, makes clear that adults with Asperger's Syndrome or higher functioning autism are not precluded from using learning disability services, where appropriate, and may require an assessment of their social functioning and communication skills in order to establish their level of need. By bringing together a wide range of local statutory agencies, "Valuing People" gives us the scope to improve opportunities and services for people across the autistic spectrum.

People with autism will also gain, along with others, from the investment we are making to improve standards in health and social care services. In particular they will benefit from the NHS Plan, the mental health national service framework, which covers the mental health needs of adults with autism, and fair access to care services.

Beta Interferon

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the criteria are for the prescription of beta interferon to multiple sclerosis sufferers; and how patients obtain funding. [82018]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* All patients with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis (MS) and those with secondary progressive MS, in which relapses are the dominant feature, are eligible under the "risk-sharing scheme" for treatment with a disease modifying drug on the national health service if they meet the criteria set out by the Association of British Neurologists.

Patients with relapsing-remitting MS should:

be able to walk independently (beta interferons) or at least 100 metres without

assistance (glatiramer acetate);

have had at least two clinically significant relapses in the last two years; and

be aged 18 or over.

Patients with secondary progressive MS should:

be able to walk at least 10 metres with or without assistance;

have had at least two disabling relapses in the last two years;

have had minimal increase in disability due to gradual progression over the last two years; and

be aged 18 or over.

NHS bodies are required to fund any treatment within this scheme prescribed by clinicians for eligible patients, in accordance with statutory directions.

Cane Hill

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is in negotiations with a third party over the future of Cane Hill, Coulsdon; and if he will make a statement. [80786]

Mr. Lammy: The Cane Hill site at Coulsdon is included in the one-off-sale. A preferred party has been selected for the one-off sale portfolio, which includes the Cane Hill site.

It is intended to conclude this one-off sale of the Secretary of State's retained estate as soon as possible. With a number of sites included within the portfolio, there is a need for a substantial and detailed negotiation before contracts can be exchanged.

Car Parking

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81860]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* There are 150 parking spaces within the congestion charging zone, available to both employees of this Department and visitors. Spaces are not specifically allocated to staff and visitors. This response does not cover parking on national health service property.

Cataract Surgery

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in West Sussex are waiting for cataract surgery, broken down by hospital trust. [83322]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of patients waiting for specialty ophalmology in Surrey & Sussex Strategic Health Authority, by National Health Service Trust

Trust	Total waiting list	Less than 3 months	3 to 6 months	6 to 9 months	9 to 12 months	12 to15 months	Over 15 months
Worthing & Southlands	1,740	529	476	366	240	129	0
Surrey & Sussex Healthcare	1,110	592	424	89	5	0	0
Brighton & Sussex University	1,584	693	517	308	56	10	0
Royal West Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:
1. Figures as at end of September 2002.
2. Information is only available for the wider ophalmology specialty.
3. Information is provided for those trusts in or providing services for West Sussex residents.
4. No figures are held for opthalmology at the Royal West Sussex NHS Trust.

Source:
DH Return KH07

CBRN Incidents

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made in establishing *(a)* a national doctrine, *(b)* national standards and *(c)* national commonality of equipment to enable ambulance services to respond to a CBRN incident. [82583]

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made in establishing *(a)* a national doctrine, *(b)* national standards and *(c)* national commonality of equipment to enable ambulance services to respond to a *(i)* chemical, (ii) biological, (iii) radioactive and (iv) nuclear incident. [82160]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* Ambulance services are required to maintain their capability to respond to a range of major incidents, including chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear incidents. But due to the changes in risk and scale, the Ambulance Service Association has been working in conjunction with other emergency services to produce a national approach based on a common doctrine, standard approach and common procedures. This work is approaching its conclusion and that we can expect recommendations shortly. National procurement arrangements for interim personal protective equipment have already been completed and higher specification equipment and decontamination units are now being delivered, which will ensure that each ambulance service will have access to common equipment.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulance personnel in each ambulance trust have been trained in dealing with a CBRN incident. [82581]

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulance personnel have been trained in dealing with a *(a)* chemical, *(b)* biological, *(c)* radioactive and *(d)* nuclear incident in each ambulance trust. [82159]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* Ambulance services, based on their local risk assessment, were required to train teams of staff in dealing with a chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear incident. As they take delivery of decontamination units and newer protective equipment, further training programmes are being instigated on a cascade basis. The current number of staff trained is not collected centrally.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS community psychiatric nurses there were in each year since 1995. [83331]

Mr. Hutton: Between September 1995 and September 2001, the number of qualified nurses employed in the community psychiatry area of work increased by over 3,500, or 43 per cent.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed in the community psychiatry area of work in England as at 30 September each year

	Whole-time equivalents	Headcount
1995	7,970	8,560
1996	8,710	9,330
1997	9,010	9,740
1998	9,460	10,230
1999	9,710	10,550
2000	10,190	11,080
2001	11,040	12,220

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts
3. Figures exclude learners and agency staff
4. Figures are for qualified nurses working in community psychiatry. This includes community psychiatry nurses and nurses with other first level qualifications

Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost is to his Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81879]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Any additional costs to the Department as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Deaf Children in Care (Sexual Abuse)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of deaf children suffered sexual abuse while in local authority care in the last year for which figures are available. [82697]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not hold this data centrally

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales in the last three months; and how many of these were due to delayed discharge. [82494]

Mr. Hutton: In England, data are collected on the number of patients whose operation has been cancelled for non-clinical reasons "on the day of surgery and at the last minute". The most recent data available for the quarter ending June 2002 shows there were 14,808 operations cancelled at the last minute for non-clinical reasons, of which 10,819 operations were cancelled on the day of surgery.

The data collected on cancelled operations for non-clinical reasons are not broken down into the reasons for cancellation. Therefore, no data can be provided on how many operations are cancelled due to delayed discharge from hospital.

Health matters in Wales are the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Dementia

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to improve the training of doctors in the diagnosis and treatment of dementia; [82262]

(2) if he will make a statement on Government support for people with Alzheimer's Disease; [82263]

(3) what recent representation he has received about the need for earlier diagnosis by GPs of dementia; [82261]

(4) how the National Carers Strategy is meeting the needs of people who care for those with dementia. [82265]

Jacqui Smith: The Government fully recognise the importance of ensuring that the needs of people with dementia and their carers are met. For that reason, the national service framework (NSF) for older people has a standard, a service model and milestones to monitor progress around the health and social needs of older people with mental health problems, including all people with dementia, and requirements around meeting the needs of their carers.

A key element of the NSF requirements is ensuring early diagnosis of dementia. We are aware of concerns over this, and of the research funded by the Alzheimer's Society to assess ways of helping primary care teams with diagnosis and treatment of dementia. The Department's care group workforce team for older people's services is also looking at the training needs of staff working with people with dementia.

Various other strands of work are under way to help with implementation of the NSF. For example, consideration is being given to the inclusion of a clinical guideline on the management of dementia within the programme of work of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

As a result of the national carers strategy, carers of people with dementia have a right to an assessment of both their needs and ability to continue caring. Ring-fenced money totalling £85 million this year and £100 million next year has been provided to allow carers to take short term breaks from their caring responsibilities. In certain circumstances, carers may also receive cash that they can use to purchase the services they need.

Dermatology (West Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Action on Dermatology programme capital projects have been awarded to primary care trusts in West Sussex. [83283]

Ms Blears: The former West Sussex Health Authority was allocated £142,000 in action on dermatology funding. Information is not available centrally on how this money was disseminated to the wider health community.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of hours was an individual in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales received domiciliary care in *(i)* May 1997 and (ii) the last month for which figures are available. [82496]

Jacqui Smith: The number of hours of home care is collected for households, not individuals. The average number of hours of home care received by a household in England was 5.4 hours in September 1997 and 7.6 hours in September 2001. Corresponding data for 2002 are not yet available.

Information on the number of people receiving home care in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Burns: : To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales were receiving domiciliary care in *(i)* May 1997 and (ii) the last month for which figures are available. [82495]

Jacqui Smith: In 2000–01, some 1.3 million adults in England were helped to live independently at home through the provision of a variety of community-based social services. Corresponding data for 1997–98 is not available.

The number of households receiving home care in England in September 1997 and September 2001 was 479,100 and 381,200 respectively. The number of people in these households is not known.

Information on the number of people receiving home care in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Exeter Hospice

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the amount received by the Exeter Hospice this year was an allocation from the NHS Cancer Plan for Specialist Palliative Care. [82599]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave her on 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 396W. Information is not held centrally on the sources of the funding provided to Exeter Hospiscare.

Finished Provider Spells

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many finished provider spells in hospital for 0–18 year olds there were in 2000–01, in each *(a)* health authority and *(b)* NHS trust. [80599]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Flu Vaccinations (West Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly people have been given flu vaccinations in West Sussex; and what percentage of the elderly population of the county this represents. [83320]

Ms Blears: I am advised by Surrey and Sussex Strategic Health Authority that by 31 October the number of older people over 65 immunised against flu in West Sussex was 79,747. Although this is the most recent count available locally of individual patients, the strategic health authority estimates that by 18 November, 55 per cent, of over 65s in West Sussex had been immunised.

Foreign Nurse Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many agencies have been brought to the attention of his Department by work force development confederations for failure to adhere to the ethical foreign nurse recruitment policy. [82963]

Mr. Hutton: Work force development confederations have reported three cases since the code of practice was established.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reimbursement and relocation expenses are paid to nurses recruited to the NHS from countries other than the UK. [82576]

Mr. Hutton: In 1999, the Department published a document, "Guidance in International Nursing Recruitment". The document clearly outlines the responsibilities of trusts in the payment of reimbursement and relocation expenses.

It is the responsibility of national health service employers to pay for recruits' airfares to ensure they are met on arrival in the United Kingdom. The document stipulates that NHS employers must make sure that appropriate accommodation is available for the recruit before they arrive in the country.

There is a General Whitley Council (GWC) agreement on removal expenses: section 26 of the GWC Handbook, which is essentially an enabling agreement insofar as it gives the employer discretion about how much removal expenses are payable and to whom.

Foster Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the recruitment drive to recruit foster carers. [82034]

Jacqui Smith: There was a national recruitment drive in 2000. The campaign succeeded in its aim to raise the public profile of foster care, help establish a positive image of foster care as vocational and professional, and challenge the stigma of children being in public care. It resulted in a large number of people requesting the information packs. The choice protects review is considering recruitment of foster carers and there is a clear message that the best recruitment campaigns are those delivered locally, so that the methods of recruitment can be responsive to local populations. The Department is supporting work on this through a Section 64 grant to fostering network, who are working with local authorities to develop advice on how best to go about recruitment.

Foundation Hospitals

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what constraints there will be on foundation hospital trusts' autonomy over the level of local pay settlements for clinical and non-clinical staff; [83311]

(2) if he will make a statement on the accountability mechanism for foundation hospital trusts; [83264]

(3) who will be eligible to sit on boards of foundation hospital trusts; and how they will be appointed. [83265]

Mr. Hutton: We will shortly issue a publication that will set out in detail our proposals to establish national health service foundation trusts.

Free Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements his Department is making to avoid confusion in the new payment system for free nursing care where PCT and social services boundaries are not coterminous; [82832]

(2) what assessment he has made of the transactional costs between PCTs and social services arising from the new payment system for free nursing care *(a)* by NHS Region and *(b)* for England. [82833]

Jacqui Smith. Circular HSC 2001/17: LAC(2001)26 contains guidance on the respective responsibilities of the national health service and local authorities on NHS funded nursing care. Further supplementary guidance on the arrangements from April 2003 will be published shortly. This will emphasise the need to ensure that transactional costs are kept to a minimum.

The level of funding that will be available to primary care trusts in England for 2003–04, including the amounts needed for administration, are currently under consideration and will be announced in due course.

General Practitioners

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of vacancies for GP posts there are; what the average number of applicants per GP vacancy post was in the last 12 months; and what the average time to recruit for a GP vacancy post in the Adur, Arun and Worthing Primary Care Trust was in the last 12 months. [83281]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Hearing Aids (Blackpool)

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when digital hearing aids will be available to patients of Blackpool Victoria Acute Health Trust. [81101]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Blackpool Victoria Hospital Trust issues patients with digital hearing aids based on the patient's individual clinical need. However, the trust is currently negotiating with the local primary care trust for additional funding, which will extend this provision further.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80774]

Mr. Lammy: Protection of the Department's information technology (IT) systems is of primary importance, and the risk of digital attack is continually re-assessed in the light of changes in technology and the perceived danger. Technical and procedural measures are regularly adjusted to take account of changing circumstances.

The Department recently achieved compliance with the British Standard (BS7799) for Information Security, which covers IT security procedures. To ensure IT security processes and procedures remain effective, regular independent security audits and tests are conducted.

The number of cases of digital attack detected was 2 in October and 3,476 in 2002 to date. These attacks were all in the form of e-mailed computer viruses.

Looked-after Children

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many looked-after children obtain *(a)* no GCSEs, *(b)* one A-G GCSE, *(c)* five A-G GCSEs, *(d)* one A*-C GCSE and *(e)* five A*-C GCSEs in 2002; and what targets have been abandoned for the educational achievement for looked-after children in the last year. [81676]

Jacqui Smith: Data on the educational qualifications of children who ceased to be looked after in England during year ending 31 March 2002 are not yet available. The Department plans to publish these data on 28 November 2002.

The Government have not abandoned any of their public service agreement targets on the educational achievement of looked-after children.

Mass Contamination

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the Memorandum of Understanding agreed in December 2001 between his Department and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, setting out the arrangement for co-operation between the Fire Service and the Ambulance Service to respond to mass contamination of the public. [82579]

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the Memorandum of Understanding agreed in December 2001 between his Department and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, setting out the arrangement between the Fire Service and the Ambulance Service to respond to mass contamination of the public. [82162]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The Memorandum of Understanding is between two Government Departments, and as such, did not constitute agreement between Fire and Ambulance Services, but is intended to provide a national framework against which those services can produce locally agreed plans and procedures for mass decontamination. A copy of the Memorandum of Understanding will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made to treat mass casualties arising from a chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear attack. [82158]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The planning for the response to a mass casualty incident involves the scaling up of the normal response to a major incident. Following the September 11 2001 terrorist attack on the United States, specific guidance was issued to the national health service on the public health response to the deliberate release of chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear incidents, mass decontamination and mass casualties.

The Department has made available, through the emergency planning section of its website, www.doh.gov.uk/epcu, a comprehensive package of guidance for clinicians on dealing with the consequences of deliberate release. This information is regularly updated. The website contains a link to the public health laboratory service website, which provides additional clinical and other information.

Additional arrangements have been put in place for the provision of decontamination units and protective equipment for NHS staff and strategic stockpiles of medical supplies and other equipment.

Mental Health (Deaf People)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of detention was for deaf people detained under the Mental Health Acts in the last year for which figures are available. [82702]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mental Health Bill

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish his mental health bill; and if he will make a statement. [83303]

Jacqui Smith: A draft Mental Health Bill and consultation document was published on 25 June 2002. The consultation exercise closed on 16 September and we are currently considering almost 2000 replies. We intend to introduce a Bill as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

New Treatments

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is regarding NHS provision of new treatments recommended by a consultant clinician before these have been assessed by NICE. [81770]

Mr. Lammy: National health service bodies should use existing arrangements to access the publicly available evidence and to determine local policies for the managed entry of new interventions, as set out in Health Circular HSC 1999/176.

NHS Dentists

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank the primary care trusts in order of the number of vacancies available on NHS dentists' lists at the last date for which information is available. [81673]

Mr. Lammy: Most general dental practitioners (GDPs) working in the national health service general dental services are self-employed and are free to choose and vary the number of patients they wish to register. Primary care trusts do not control patient registrations and there is no fixed limit for the number of patient registrations allowed per dentist. Furthermore, patients do not need to be registered to be seen by an NHS dentist.

It is therefore not possible to quantify the number of "vacancies" on dentists lists.

The number of GDPs continues to increase. There were 18,114 GDS practitioners on 30 June 2002, of which 16,181 were principal dentists. This compares to 18,004 and 16,167 respectively, 12 months earlier.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio is of NHS general dental practitioners to population in each primary care trust area. [81674]

Mr. Lammy: Primary care trusts (PCTs) assumed responsibility for dentistry on 1 October 2002.

The ratios of national health service general dental practitioners to population in each PCT area are not yet available centrally.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists per head of population there were in *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS region in each of the last six years. [81685]

Mr. Lammy: The number of national health service dentists per 100,000 population for England and for each NHS region for 1996 to 1997 is contained in table 1. The regional breakdown is different for 1998 to 2001 due to reorganisation and these figures are contained in table 2.

NHS dentists covers dentists working in the general dental service (GDS), hospital dental service (HDS), community dental service (CDS), personal dental service (PDS) and salaried service of the GDS. Dentists have been counted in each dental service in which they practise apart from dentists working in the PDS and GDS that are counted as GDS dentists only.

These figures are on a headcount basis rather than a whole time equivalent (wte) basis and therefore take no account of part-time working.

Table 1: NHS dental services: numbers of dentists[1] per 100,000 population[2], 1996 to 1997—England

	1996	1997
England	40.7	41.6
Northern and Yorkshire	39.6	39.1
Trent	36.9	35.1
Anglia and Oxford	37.1	38.6
North Thames	46.3	47.0
South Thames	46.4	48.2
South and West	43.0	42.5
West Midlands	33.8	36.4
North and West	39.2	42.1

[1] Dentists are counted in each dental service in which they practice apart from dentists working in the PDS and GDS that are counted as GDS dentists only.
[2] ONS mid year population estimates based on the 1991 Census.

Table 2: NHS dental services: numbers of dentists[1] per 100,000 population[2],—England

	1998	1999	2000	2001
England	42.6	43.4	43.9	45.8
Northern and Yorkshire	39.9	40.3	40.8	43.0
Trent	35.5	36.9	37.2	37.7
West Midlands	37.2	37.6	38.6	40.6
North West	42.9	44.0	43.7	45.5
Eastern	39.5	40.5	41.4	43.2
London	53.0	52.9	52.7	55.4
South East	42.9	44.2	44.9	47.0
South and West	46.3	47.2	48.3	49.9

[1] Dentists are counted in each dental service in which they practice apart from dentists working in the PDS and GDS that are counted as GDS dentists only.
[2] ONS mid year population estimates based on the 1991 Census

NHS Litigation Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many claims the NHS Litigation Authority received in the 2001–02 financial year in respect of employer liability; how much it paid out in costs; and how many cases remain outstanding. [83285]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service litigation authority received 2,439 claims from NHS employees in the financial year 2001–2001. Of these 2,210 remain open.

A total of £1.89 million has been expended on these claims in total but this figure includes on-going payments in claims which remain open.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many claims in respect of employer liability remain unresolved by the NHS litigation authority; and of these, how many are up to *(a)* six months old, *(b)* one-year-old, *(c)* two-years-old, *(d)* three-years-old, *(e)* four-years-old and *(f)* over four-years-old. [83286]

Mr. Hutton: There are a total of 4,820 claims for compensation from national health service employees currently being handled by the NHS litigation authority. Of these:

1,163 are up to six months old.

1,113 are between six months and 12 months.

1,822 are between 12 and 24 months.

687 are between 24 and 36 months.

35 are between 36 and 48 months.

The litigation authority took over the handling of claims in 1988.

NHS Staff

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio is of medical and clinical staff practising in the national health service to total staff employed by his Department, health NDPBs and the NHS. [81024]

Mr. Hutton: The data are shown in the table. 64 per cent. of staff employed in the national health service, Department of Health and health non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are medical and clinical staff practising in the NHS.

Staff and medical and clinical staff employed within the NHS, Department of Health and NDPBs in England

	All staff	*Medical and clinical*
Total	1,175,348	750,636
NHS	1,167,166	[1]750,018
DH	4,953	134
NDPBs	3,229	484

[1] Includes doctors, GPs, nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, scientific, therapeutic and technical staff, health care assistants, nursing, midwifery and health visiting learners and ambulance staff.

North-West NHS Staff Redundancy

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total cost of severance and redundancy payments to employees of the Bury health care, North Manchester health care, and Oldham and Rochdale NHS trusts on the formation of the Pennine Acute hospitals trust. [82972]

Jacqui Smith: Pennine Acute hospitals national health service trust was established on 1 April 2002, following the dissolution of Bury health care, North Manchester health care, Oldham and Rochdale health care NHS trusts. The new trust inherited 22 directors, eight of whom have been, or will be, made redundant.

The total cost of their severance packages is £1,758,617. The directors have not received this sum of money collectively; the figures represent the cost to their employers and include the capitalized costs of early retirement pensions as well as redundancy payments.

The severance packages have all been approved by the appropriate remuneration committees and signed off by the trusts' external auditors.

Nursing and Residential Care

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people sold their homes to pay for *(a)* nursing and *(b)* residential care in Shrewsbury and Atcham in the last year for which figures are available. [83183]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

Ophthalmology Choice

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been allocated to the Ophthalmology Choice scheme as a part of the Patient Choice Project; and for what duration. [83321]

Mr. Hutton: The London Patient choice project has allocated £11 million in 2002–03 towards providing choice for ophthalmology patients in London. Funding for 2003–04 and future years has yet to be confirmed.

Pain Management

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all NHS hospitals have in place policies for the assessment and management of pain. [80112]

Mr. Lammy: While the Department does not collect information on this issue centrally, we do know from the Clinical Standards Advisory Group report, published in April 2000, that acute pain services were available in 220 out of 250 national health service trusts throughout the United Kingdom, and that in addition, local pain guidelines had been widely developed.

Primary Mental Health Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many graduate primary care mental health workers there are, in each NHS region. [83332]

Jacqui Smith: No graduate primary care workers have been employed yet. Funding to employ graduate primary care workers will be allocated to primary care trusts with their general allocation next financial year.

Prescriptions

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to enable those individuals who have a disability affecting their mobility to obtain repeat prescriptions via a general practice surgery or pharmacist *(a)* by telephone and *(b)* otherwise remotely. [82280]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* We expect general practitioner practices to provide information for patients on how they may obtain repeat prescriptions. Local pharmacies may also decide to offer patients a range of repeat medication, prescription collection or prescription delivery services.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral statement of 18 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 365, on benefit uprating, what will be the entitlement of a single person receiving contributory jobseekers allowance in 2002–03 and 2003–04 to free prescriptions; and what estimate he has made of the number of recipients of contributory jobseekers allowance who receive free prescriptions. [82415]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* People receiving contributory jobseekers allowance are not automatically entitled to free prescriptions, but may make a claim for help under the national health service low income scheme. Whether or not they are entitled to free prescriptions will depend on their personal circumstances. Their entitlement will be calculated using the current rate of income support plus allowances and premiums. No help is available if a person has capital of

more than £8,000 (£12,000 if they or their partner are aged 60 or over). In 2001–02, 29 people receiving contributory jobseekers allowance successfully claimed entitlement to free prescriptions.

Severe Mental Illness

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to give legal status to advance statements for people with severe mental illness. [83305]

Jacqui Smith: Following consultation on the Draft Mental Health Bill we are considering how to ensure that, wherever possible, patient's views are taken into account while they are being treated under compulsory powers, whether expressed in an advance statement or in any other way.

In the policy document 'Making Decisions' the Government said,

"a clear statement of the present legal position concerning advance statements would be helpful to lawyers, doctors and patients."

This would affect many other patients including those with severe mental illness treated voluntarily, who for whatever reason, lose the ability to make their own decisions. An Incapacity Bill will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Social Workers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policies he is introducing to make existing social workers realise that their work is valued. [83325]

Jacqui Smith: The Government and the Department of Health are committed to the enhancement of the professional status of those involved in social care work.

The national social care recruitment campaign, launched in October 2001, has just entered its second year. It is aimed at informing the public about social work and social care, as well as encouraging recruitment and retention. The campaign includes both national and local press and radio advertising and particular efforts are being made in some areas such as London and the South East that have more severe problems with recruitment and retention of social workers.

This commitment was further proven by the introduction of the Care Standards Act 2000, this brought into being, among other regulatory bodies, the General Social Care Council (GSCC). The GSCC is responsible for improving standards across the sector and registering qualified and competent social workers and social care staff. As part of this process, the GSCC published codes of practice for social care workers and employers on 23 September 2002.

The training strategy implementation fund—£15 million in the current year—is available to all employers in social care to support 26,500 staff to participate in skill development programmes. The focus of half of this funding will be to strengthen the National Vocational Qualification infrastructure within the workplace. With this investment, employers will be able to further train their staff and managers and establish a culture of lifelong learning and continuous professional development within social care.

Introduction of the new three year degree and bursaries will be a unique opportunity to transform the status, image and position of social workers—making social work what it should be, a graduate profession in its own right—and build on the best of social work education and training.

Specialised Health Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what directions his Department gave to the regional specialist commissioning groups in requiring them to seek the views of their local providers, commissioners and patients' and carers' representatives. [82777]

Mr. Hutton: Regional specialised commissioning groups (RSCGs) were asked to seek views within their RSCG area of their local providers, commissioners and patients'/carers' representatives on commissioning arrangements for specialised services and to submit an overall RSCG response to the Department by 30 September 2002.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the process and timetable is for completion of the review into commissioning specialised services; how the views of patients will be taken into account, and when he will announce the outcome. [82778]

Mr. Hutton: A summary of the responses will be placed in the Library in December and guidance will be issued in the new year.

The responses of patients' organisations to the review will be considered alongside other responses received. Each regional specialised commissioning group (RSCG) sought views of their local commissioners, providers and patients' organisations. London RSCG commissioned the College of Health to consult patient groups and received 31 responses as a result; two national patient organisations were represented on the national review group; and 14 responses from individual patients' associations and voluntary organisations were submitted directly to the Department.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many responses his Department received as part of its review of commissioning arrangements for specialised services from *(a)* regional specialised commissioning groups, *(b)* local service providers, *(c)* commissioners, *(d)* patients' representatives and *(e)* carers' representatives; and how many responses were submitted directly. [82782]

Mr. Hutton: A total of 53 responses were directly submitted to the review of commissioning arrangements for specialised services.

Specialist Stroke Services

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department's 2003–04 Priorities and Planning Guidance will require action from hospitals on developing specialist stroke services; and if he will make a statement. [82705]

Jacqui Smith: The Department's 2003–06 priorities and planning framework requires that by April 2004 all general hospitals caring for people with stroke have a specialised stroke service. The national service

framework for older people established the development of an integrated stroke service and improvements in the delivery of stroke care as a priority.

Trained Nurses

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trained nurses there were in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 in England and Wales. [82578]

Mr. Hutton: As at March 2000, there were 634,529 nurses registered with the UK Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (now the Nursing and Midwifery Council). This is the number of nurses registered to practice throughout the United Kingdom. It fell to 632,050 in 2001 and rose to 644,024 in 2002.

Between September 2000 and September 2001, the number of qualified nurses employed in the national health service in England increased by 4 per cent. from 335,950 to 350,380. This marked the early achievement of the NHS Plan target for 20,000 extra nurses by 2004 over a 1999 baseline.

Information on Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Government spent on fees in respect of training nurses in the last year for which figures are available. [82577]

Mr. Hutton: Work force development confederations contract directly with local universities for nurse training and spent £342 million on tuition costs in 2001–02, the latest year for which information is available.

West Sussex Health Authority

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the financial deficit of the West Sussex health authority at its dissolution; and how this was divided between the primary care trusts that took over its commissioning role; [82469]

(2) if he will make a statement on the level of the financial deficit of the Princess Royal hospital, Haywards Heath at the time of its merger with the Royal Sussex County hospital, Brighton; and how this has been apportioned. [82470]

Ms Blears: The Surrey and Sussex Strategic health authority has advised me the former West Sussex health authority did not have a deficit.

The Princess Royal hospital was part of Mid Sussex national health service trust. On 31 March 2002 the trust was dissolved and the management of the acute services provided by the hospital was transferred to the Brighton and Sussex University hospitals NHS trust. The final accounts of the Mid Sussex NHS trust presented an outturn deficit of £2.7 million. However, the underlying deficit was £4.7 million.

In June 2002 the trust was allocated transitional funds of £4 million from the NHS bank to offset the underlying deficit. The trust planned to manage the remainder of the deficit through cash releasing efficiency savings.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 26 November 2002

TREASURY

Employment Statistics

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were *(a)* in employment and *(b)* unemployed, expressed as a percentage of the total population in *(i)* Birmingham, (ii) the West Midlands region and (iii) London region in each of the past 10 years. [82865]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Lynne Jones, dated 26 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment and unemployment in Birmingham, the West Midlands and London. (82865)

The attached tables give estimates of employment and unemployment expressed as a percentage of the total population aged 16 and over resident in the Birmingham Local Authority District, the West Midlands and London for each of the past 10 years. These estimates are from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Table 1: Employment as a percentage of all persons aged 16 and over; resident in the Birmingham local authority district, West Midlands and London; June to August 1993 to 2002; not seasonally adjusted

Percentage

	Birmingham	*West Midlands*	*London*
1993	[1]—	56.0	55.5
1994	52.5	57.8	55.9
1995	49.8	57.6	56.7
1996	52.4	57.8	57.1
1997	53.7	58.8	58.7
1998	54.6	59.6	59.4
1999	52.1	59.5	61.0
2000	51.4	59.0	60.6
2001	51.2	59.6	60.8
2002	54.2	59.9	60.5

[1] Data not available

Note:

These Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates are not seasonally adjust (NSA) and have not been adjusted to take account of the recent Census 2001 results. ONS are working toward producing reweighted LFS estimates based on the findings of the 2001 Census, which will be available from summer 2003.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 2: Unemployment as a percentage of all persons aged 16 and over; resident in the Birmingham local authority district, West Midlands and London; June to August 1993 to 2002; not seasonally adjusted

Percentage

	Birmingham	*West Midlands*	*London*
1993	[1]—	7.4	8.9
1994	9.5	6.3	8.3
1995	8.6	5.6	8.0
1996	7.7	5.7	7.5
1997	7.9	4.8	6.3
1998	5.8	4.1	5.3
1999	6.1	4.4	5.0
2000	6.3	3.7	4.8
2001	4.9	3.4	4.3
2002	6.6	3.8	4.6

[1] Data not available

Note:

These Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates are not seasonally adjust (NSA) and have not been adjusted to take account of the recent Census 2001 results. ONS are working toward producing reweighted LFS estimates based on the findings of the 2001 Census, which will be available from summer 2003.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the numbers of jobs that have been created in the past six years in *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* the West Midlands region and *(c)* the London region. [82866]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Lynne Jones, dated 26 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of jobs that have been created in the last 6 years in *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* West Midlands region and *(c)* London region. (82866)

There are no figures for jobs created but an indication can be obtained by comparing the annual surveys of employee jobs. The Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) gives an estimate of the number of employee jobs in December of each year and the latest year for which figures are available is 2000. The ABI was preceded (prior to 1998) by the Annual Employment Survey (AES) which estimated employee jobs in September of each year, and comparisons can only be made if the AES data is rescaled. The earliest year for which rescaled AES figures are available is 1995.

Between 1995 and 2000 the AES/ABI data show net increases in the number of employee jobs in the 3 specified areas of:

a) Birmingham : 11,000

b) West Midlands region : 150,000

c) London region : 602,000

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the working age employment rate was for *(a)* each Government office region and nation of the UK and *(b)* each ward of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne at *(i)* April 2000, (ii) April 2001 and (iii) April 2002. [83243]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Cousins, dated 26 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about working age employment rates. (83243)

The attached table gives estimates of working age employment and rates for each Government Office Region and nation of the UK, and for Newcastle Upon Tyne Local Authority District, for the three month periods ending May 2001 and May 2002.

LFS estimates are available for three month periods; they are not available for calendar months. Estimates at ward level are not available.

Working age [1] employment rates [2] by area of residence; United Kingdom; spring (March to May) 2001 and 2002; not seasonally adjusted

Percentage

Government office region and countries of the UK	*March to May 2001*	*March to May 2002*
England	75.3	75.1
North East	68.4	68.5
Newcastle upon Tyne	66.4	63.2
North West	72.9	72.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	73.3	72.9
East Midlands	75.6	76.5
West Midlands	74.1	74.3
Eastern	79.8	79.2
London	71.1	70.9
South East	80.3	80.1
South West	78.8	79.0
Wales	68.1	68.5
Scotland	73.4	73.1
Northern Ireland	67.1	67.5

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59.

[2] Working age people in employment as a percentage of the working age population.

Note:

These Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates are not seasonally adjusted (NSA) and have not been adjusted to take account of the recent Census 2001 results. ONS are working toward producing reweighted LFS estimates based on the findings of the 2001 Census, which will be available from summer 2003.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in how many constituencies unemployment has *(a)* risen and *(b) (i)* risen and (ii) fallen by more than 30 per cent. in the past year. [83234]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Peter Bottomley dated 26 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking for the number of constituencies unemployment has *(a)* risen and *(b)* risen and fallen by more than 30 per cent in the past year. (83294)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles statistics for unemployment from surveys following the internationally standard International Labour Organisation definition. However, by parliamentary constituency the survey sample size is too small to provide estimates. ONS also compiles statistics of claimants of the Jobseeker's Allowance working age benefit.

Between October 2001 and October 2002 there were 285 parliamentary constituencies out of a total 659 which showed an increase in the levels of claimant count over the year. In the same period, 24 parliamentary constituencies showed a rise of more than 30 per cent while none fell by more than 30 per cent.

Air Conditioning (Great George Street)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the reasons for installing air conditioning equipment using hydrofluorocarbons in its office at Great George Street. [82684]

Ruth Kelly: The air conditioning chillers installed in the refurbished Treasury building were procured by Exchequer Partnership in May 2000. At the time of the development of the brief and detailed design for the building the use of refrigerant containing HFCs was in accordance with the accepted industry best practice and fully in line with Government and international environmental and energy policy. The refurbishment has been independently assessed under the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method and has been awarded an Excellent rating.

Barristers Fees (VAT)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the unique deferred VAT liability system on barristers' fees; and if he will make a statement. [82953]

John Healey: The Barristers Deferment Scheme is available to barristers who cease to practise and sets out rules for accounting to Customs and Excise for any outstanding VAT. Like all special VAT accounting schemes, this scheme is kept under review by Customs.

Children (Poverty Statistics)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of children were living in poverty in each constituency in the last year for which figures are available. [83189]

Dawn Primarolo: Poverty is a complex multi-dimensional issue, affecting many aspects of children's lives—including income, health, housing, the quality of their environment and opportunities to learn. There is therefore no single measure of the number of families with children in poverty in each constituency of the UK.

The Government have a PSA target to reduce by a quarter the number of children living in households below 60 per cent. of median income by 2004, compared with 1998–99.

In "Opportunity for All", the Government's annual anti-poverty report, the Government report progress in tackling poverty and social exclusion against this and a range of other indicators. The annual "Households Below Average Income" report, published by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Office for National Statistics, gives a breakdown of the percentage of children below the 60 per cent. median income threshold in each region of Great Britain. But no such information is available on a constituency-by-constituency basis.

Climate Change Levy

Mr Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of financial impact of the introduction of the Climate Change Levy tax on the glass industry; [82601]

(2) which industries have *(a)* gained and *(b)* lost from the introduction of the Climate Change Levy. [82602]

John Healey: All industries face the same challenges and opportunities from the climate change levy. All revenue from the levy is recycled back to business through reductions to employer national insurance contributions (NICs) and support for energy efficiency. While the levy package is broadly revenue neutral to business as a whole, the effects on any specific sector will depend on a number of factors, including:

the future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support;

employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded NICs cuts;

what use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy-exempt renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power; and

use made of the 80 per cent. discount where-as in the case of glass-this is available via voluntary agreements with energy-intensive sectors.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated total of Treasury receipts from the Climate Change Levy is in 2002–03. [83540]

John Healey: The projection for CCL receipts in 2002–03 is shown in table C7 of the financial statement and Budget report 2002 and is £0.9 billion. An updated 2002–03 receipts projection for all duty heads, including CCL, will be published in the 2002 pre-Budget report on 27 November.

Coin Production

Ms Stuart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on what basis the Treasury decided not to put its contract for UK coin production out to tender; and if he will make a statement; [80655]

(2) what plans he has to open the next Treasury contract for the UK coin production to market competition. [80656]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury keeps the arrangements for the supply of circulation coins under review. The current arrangements have several years to run. When the time comes, the Treasury will consider all the possible options for the future supply of UK circulation coin, including the possibility of commercial tendering.

It would be improper at present to comment further on this issue, given that it may have a bearing on the case brought against the Treasury by the Birmingham Mint, which is currently before the courts. Exemption 4 (Law enforcement and legal proceedings) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of tax relief in Central London road user charges incurred in the financial years ending 31March *(a)* 2003, *(b)* 2004 and *(c)* 2005. [81823]

John Healey *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The information on which to base an estimate of the cost is not available.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome of the ECOFIN Council held on 5 November was, what the Government's position was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [82936]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended ECOFIN on 5 November.

Council reached political agreement on the prospectus directive. I argued for greater freedom of choice of home state for issuers of non-equities, and secured an amendment to the text ensuring choice for all bonds denominated in units of €5,000 or more. A vote on the amended text was taken and a qualified majority obtained, with the UK voting in favour. In accordance with the revised Council rules of procedure following the Seville European Council, the initial debate and vote on the directive were held in public session.

The Council noted the Commission's annual oral update on progress against the Risk Capital Action Plan.

Professor Jaap Winter, Chair of the high level group of Company Law Experts outlined the key recommendations in his group's report on creating a modern regulatory framework for company law and corporate governance in the EU. This report was published on 4 November. Members of the Council noted the report and will discuss it in more detail at a later date.

ECOFIN discussed, in restricted session, progress on the draft directive on the taxation of savings. The Presidency and the Commission reported on negotiations with third countries, which are to be concluded by end 2002 according to the timetable agreed at the Feira European Council.

There was also a discussion on energy taxation. It was concluded that further preparatory work was needed on the outstanding issues ahead of further discussion at the December ECOFIN.

Ministers decided that agreement on VAT Administrative Co-operation should be postponed until the December ECOFIN.

ECOFIN noted a draft interim report from the Economic and Financial Committee and the Economic Policy Committee on ongoing work on streamlining economic and employment policy processes. It was agreed that further work on this should be undertaken jointly with the preparatory committee for the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council before the report is submitted to the Copenhagen European Council.

In accordance with Article 104 of the Treaty, the Council agreed that Portugal had an excessive budget deficit, above the 3 per cent. limit, in 2001, and adopted a Recommendation for Portugal to bring the excessive deficit to an end by 31 December 2002.

ECOFIN also agreed conclusions on the reform of governance of the European Investment Bank and the capital and reserves of the European Central Bank in light of enlargement.

Under AOB, the economic and financial situation in the Lebanon was raised by the French Finance Minister.

After the Council meeting, ECOFIN Ministers held a dialogue with their counterparts from the EU candidate countries.

Ethiopia (Debt Relief)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to provide debt relief to Ethiopia; what recent discussions he has had with international organisations about providing debt relief to Ethiopia; and if he will make a statement. [83153]

John Healey: The UK is already providing 100 per cent. debt relief to Ethiopia. As a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Ethiopia is eligible for debt relief under the enhanced HIPC initiative. In November 2001 Ethiopia reached Decision Point under the initiative and qualified for interim debt relief on payments due. For its part the UK goes further than is required under the terms of the HIPC initiative and always provides 100 per cent. debt relief. The UK Government are working with other donors, the World bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help Ethiopia reach Completion Point under the HIPC initiative.

At that point debt will be irrevocably cancelled. To reach Completion Point Ethiopia will need to have demonstrated a clear commitment to poverty reduction, and show how its country-owned poverty reduction strategies will be able to use the resources released by debt relief to reduce poverty. The IMF and World bank estimate that Ethiopia could reach Completion Point as early as July 2003.

EU Savings Directive

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations have been made by his Department to *(a)* the Cayman Islands and *(b)* Bermuda seeking to encourage compliance with the EU Draft Savings Directive. [83459]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have held a number of discussions with both territories.

Income Statistics

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of the population of *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* the West Midlands region and *(c)* the London region had an income *(i)* twice, (ii) three times, (iii) four times, (iv) five times and *(v)* more than five times the national average in each of the past 10 years; [82874]

(2) how many higher rate taxpayers there were in *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* the West Midlands region and *(c)* the London region expressed as a percentage of the total population of each specified area in each of the past 10 years. [82873]

Dawn Primarolo: Available estimates are in the tables.

Number of higher rate taxpayers[1] as a percentage of the total population[2] for the respective geographical areas

Percentage

	Birmingham	*West Midlands region[3]*	*London region*
1995–96	1.9	2.6	5.3
1996–97	1.7	2.3	5.2
1997–98	1.8	2.1	5.2
1998–99	2.2	2.6	6.0
1999–2000	2.0	2.8	6.3
2000–01	2.8	3.3	7.9

[1] Number of higher rate taxpayers based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

[2] Source for population estimates: Office for National Statistics, General Register Office for Scotland, and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

[3] Government Office Region.

Number of individuals[4] with total income over twice GB average earnings[5] as a percentage of the total population[6] for the respective geographical areas

Percentage

	Birmingham	*West Midlands region[7]*	*London region[7]*	*UK*
1995–96	1.0	1.5	3.3	2.1
1996–97	1.1	1.3	3.5	2.2
1997–98	1 0	1.2	3.6	2.3
1998–99	1.1	1.4	4.0	2.4
1999–2000	1 0	1.6	4.2	2.5
2000–01	1.4	1.6	4.9	2.7

Number of individuals[4] with total income over three times GB average earnings[5] as a percentage of the total population[6] for the respective geographical areas

Percentage

	Birmingham	*West Midlands region[7]*	*London region[7]*	*UK*
1995–96	0.5	0.5	1.6	0.9
1996–97	0.4	0.5	1.6	0.9
1997–98	0.4	0.4	1.8	0.9
1998–99	0.4	0.5	2.0	1.0
1999–2000	0.4	0.6	2.0	1.1
2000–01	0.5	0.6	2.4	1.2

Number of individuals[4] with total income over four times GB average earnings[5] as a percentage of the total population[6] for the respective geographical areas

Percentage

	Birmingham	*West Midlands region[7]*	*London region[7]*	*UK*
1995–96	0.2	0.2	1.0	0.4
1996–97	0.2	0.3	1.0	0.5
1997–98	0.2	0.2	1.1	0.5
1998–99	0.3	0.3	1.3	0.6
1999–2000	0.2	0.3	1.3	0.6
2000–01	0.3	0.3	1.5	0.6

Number of individuals[4] with total income over five times GB average earnings[5] as a percentage of the total population[6] for the respective geographical areas

Percentage

	Birmingham	West Midlands region[7]	London region[7]	UK
1995–96	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.3
1996–97	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.3
1997–98	0.1	0.2	0.8	0.3
1998–99	0.2	0.2	0.9	0.4
1999–2000	0.1	0.2	0.9	0.4
2000–01	0.2	0.2	1.1	0.4

[4] Number of individuals based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.
[5] Average earnings based on the New Earnings Survey.
[6] Source for population estimates: Office for National Statistics, General Register Office for Scotland, and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
[7] Government Office Region.

Inland Revenue Buildings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any of the Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue buildings sold to Mapeley or Mapeley Steps were liable for stamp duty; whether stamp duty was paid; and on how many of the buildings. [82764]

Dawn Primarolo: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Gentleman on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 747W.

Instruments of Torture

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what attempts illegally to export instruments of torture from the UK have been discovered by HM Customs and Excise; and what prosecutions have resulted from such discoveries in each year since 1997. [82942]

John Healey: No evidence of attempts to export instruments of torture from the UK illegally has been discovered by HM Customs since 1997.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance has been given to HM Customs and Excise on the identification and prevention of the illegal export of instruments of torture under the current legislation in each year since 1997. [82943]

John Healey: Since 1997 Customs have been immediately informed by the Department of Trade and Industry of changes to the UK's export control list and relevant European regulations. Torture equipment and items that could be used for internal repression are included in the control list and in applicable European regulations. Customs ensure that this information is passed to all relevant staff and officers at ports and airports.

Insurance Industry (Terrorism)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the insurance industry, with particular reference to the cost of providing public liability and employers' liability cover to business; and if he will make a statement. [82830]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The terms, conditions and price of insurance products adapt in response to the many factors that affect market conditions. These factors include the impact of claims arising from the appalling attacks of 11 September 2001, and the willingness in the insurance industry to take on terrorism risk.

Network Rail

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the guarantees and stand-by loan facilities extended to Network Rail represent contingent liabilities in the resource accounts of the Department of Transport. [81808]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The contingent and non-contingent liabilities in connection with Network Rail were set out in the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to the House on 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 971W, and in the minutes mentioned in the statement, which were laid before Parliament. The situation in relation to the facilities extended to Network Rail will be reported in the resource accounts of the Department for Transport in accordance with HM Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual.

PFI Prisons (Accounting)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the accounting treatment of PFI prisons. [83237]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on 21 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 280W.

Population Statistics

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will institute an inquiry into the accuracy of *(a)* the census 2001 population figures and *(b)* the 2001 mid-year population figures. [82946]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Sir Sydney Chapman, dated 26 November 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking if he will institute an inquiry into the accuracy of *(a)* the 2001 Census population figures and *(b)* the 2001 mid-year estimate population figures. (82946)

I am confident that the 2001 Census figures provide the most accurate estimate of the 2001 population, both nationally and locally. The 2001 Census results are the first to represent the entire population. This was achieved through a new strategy known as the 'One Number Census'. One of the key elements was an independent follow-up survey—the Census Coverage Survey (CCS), which involved an intensive face-to-face survey of a sample of over 16,000 postcodes containing 320,000 households covering every local authority in England and Wales. By combining the results of the Census and the CCS, it was possible to estimate the total resident population in 2001— the 'one number'—to a high

level of precision, plus or minus 0.2 per cent, and to provide information on the characteristics of those persons missed by the Census.

Thus in 2001, the Census results represent 100 per cent of the population. Census response, that is the proportion of people returning a form in England and Wales, was 94 per cent. The 6 per cent of people estimated to have been missed by the Census have been added to the counts using a statistical process that was subject to extensive consultation, and based on the results of the CCS.

In addition, the 2001 Census has undergone rigorous testing and quality checking throughout both the fieldwork and processing. Census tests were carried out in 1997 and 1999 and a survey designed to measure the accuracy of response to each question has been completed. Furthermore, a comprehensive set of verification and validation checks were built in to the processing of the data, and data quality played a key role in all aspects of processing the forms. All information on accuracy will be contained in a Census Quality report to be published in 2003.

The population base for the 2001 Census was defined so as to be entirely consistent with that used in the calculation of the mid-year estimates, and the 2001 Census figures will form the basis of the mid-year population estimates throughout the next decade. Thus, the 2001 mid-year estimate was calculated by adjusting the census figures to take account of births and deaths and an estimate of the net migration in the interval between Census day (29 April) and the 30 June.

However, in the light of the evidence, shown by the 2001 Census figures, that the previous (pre-2001) mid-year estimate series had been over-estimating the size of the population and growth in the population over the last few years, the Office for National Statistics will be conducting an assessment of accuracy of the mid-year population estimates that is aimed at learning lessons from the 2001 Census results and making improvements to the method and data sources used to produce mid-year estimates in the future. The results of this assessment are due to be published on the National Statistics website in February 2003. A National Statistics Quality Review on international migration is also currently underway.

Some local authorities have experienced an unexpectedly large shift between their population estimates for mid 2001, and the Census values. We are working with several of these to examine our explanation of the differences.

For the above reasons, I therefore do not feel it necessary to instigate any further inquiry into the accuracy of the 2001 Census and 2001 mid-year estimate figures.

Private Nursing Homes (VAT)

Mr. Walter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the charging of VAT on the material costs and fees associated with the development of private nursing homes. [83403]

John Healey: There is no VAT on the construction of a new nursing home because it is zero-rated. In contrast, extensions and other works to existing homes are subject to the standard rate of VAT, other than approved alterations to nursing homes in listed buildings which are zero-rated.

Redundancy Statistics

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men were made redundant between the ages of 50 and 65 in each year since 1996. [82542]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Brazier, dated 26 November 2002:

As the National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about redundancy levels. (82542)

The attached table gives estimates of redundancy levels for *(a)* men and *(b)* women between the ages of 50 and 65 in each twelve month period ending August, from 1996 to 2002. These estimates are from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Number of people aged 50 to 65 made redundant: United Kingdom 1996–2002, not seasonally adjusted

Thousands

September to August	*All persons*	*Men*	*Women*
1996	143	100	43
1997	144	100	44
1998	145	100	45
1999	171	113	58
2000	157	101	57
2001	150	109	40
2002	176	119	57

Source:
ONS Labour Force Survey.
Note:
These Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates are not seasonally adjusted (NSA) and have not been adjusted to take account of the recent Census 2001 results. ONS are working toward producing re-weighted LFS estimates based on the findings of the 2001 Census, which will be available from summer 2003.

Royal Mint

Ms Stuart: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will require the Royal Mint to publish financial information separately covering its three distinct business streams of *(a)* UK circulating coins, *(b)* overseas coin production and *(c)* non-coin products. [80652]

Ruth Kelly: The provision of the information requested would place the Royal Mint at a competitive disadvantage. Exemption 7 (Effective management and operations of the public service) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the Royal Mint informed his Department that it was to end its consortium agreement with the Royal Mint. [80653]

Ruth Kelly: It would be improper at present to comment on this issue, as it relates to the court case brought by the Birmingham Mint against the Treasury. Exemption 4 (Law enforcement and legal proceedings) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies.

Ms Stuart: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to meet *(a)* directors and *(b)* union representatives from the Birmingham Mint to discuss the policy decision by the Royal Mint to end its consortium with the Birmingham Mint. [80654]

Ruth Kelly: Because of the court case brought against the Treasury by the Birmingham Mint, Ministers should not meet Directors or Union representatives of the Birmingham Mint. Exemption 4 (Law enforcement and legal proceedings) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies.

Ms. Stuart: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what reporting procedures his Department puts in place to ensure that the Royal Mint is not using its monopoly position in UK coin production to cross subsidise its other business units. [80657]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has shareholder oversight of the Mint's sales and cost base, and sets demanding conditions for the UK coinage contract.

It would be improper at present to comment further on this issue, given that it may have a bearing on the case brought against the Treasury by the Birmingham Mint, which is currently before the courts. Exemption 4 (Law enforcement and legal proceedings) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies.

Ms. Stuart: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what return on capital the Royal Mint made in each year since 1990. [80658]

Ruth Kelly: The return on Capital made by the Royal Mint in each year since 1990 is included in the table below.

Return on average capital employed

	Actual return (percentage)
1990–91	27.9
1991–92	21
1992–93	23.1
1993–94	32.0
1994–95	28.3
1995–96	18.3
1996–97	14.1
1997–98	22.3
1998–99	9.1
1999–2000	0.5
2000–01	0.7
2001–02	26.4

Ms Stuart: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what return on capital the Treasury expects the Royal Mint to make in each year from 2002 to 2005. [80659]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury expects the Royal Mint to make a return on capital of 11 per cent. within the period from 2001/2 to 2005/6.

Tax Processing

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the underlying data for the basket of outputs referred to in his answer on tax processing of 5 November, *Official Report*, column 211W; and if he will make a statement. [80638]

Dawn Primarolo: I have done so today.

Voluntary Work

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates his Department has made of the value of voluntary sector work to the economy in each year since 1997. [80409]

John Healey: The contribution of general charities to GDP was £4.5 billion in 1997; £4.7 billion in 1998; £5.0 billion in 1999; £5.3 billion in 2000; and £5.8 billion in 2001.

The contribution of non-profit institutions serving households (NPISH) to GDP was £19.6 billion in 1997; £21.1 billion in 1998; £22.2 billion in 1999; £23.0 billion in 2000; and £24.3 billion in 2001.

Neither set of estimates takes into account the value of unpaid work to general charities.

ADVOCATE GENERAL

Devolution

30. **Angus Robertson:** To ask the Advocate-General what devolution issues have been raised since 23 October under the Scotland Act 1998. [81434]

31. **Mr. Alan Reid:** To ask the Advocate-General what devolution issues have been raised with her since 22 October, under the Scotland Act 1988. [81435]

33. **Mr. Weir:** To ask the Advocate-General what devolution issues have been raised since 23 October under the Scotland Act 1998. [81437]

34. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Advocate-General what devolution issues have been raised since 23 October under the Scotland Act 1998. [81438]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Lady, the Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), column 152.

32. **John Robertson:** To ask the Advocate-General how many devolution cases she has dealt with since September. [81436]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: Since 1 September, 65 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Welsh Language

54. **Mr. Simon Thomas** To ask the President of the Council if he will make statement on his plans for the presentation of evidence in the Welsh language to select committees. [81519]

Mr. Bradshaw: Select Committees may take oral evidence in the Welsh language. Written evidence must be submitted in the English language, though it is understood that the Welsh Affairs Committee frequently receives memoranda prepared in both languages.

Parliamentary Language

55. **Mr. Chris Bryant:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to propose reforms to the rules on parliamentary language. [81520]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans at present to reform the rules of parliamentary language, but hopes that the Modernisation Committee may look at this matter soon. He recognises the concern of many Members

about the more archaic elements of our parliamentary language and the impression they give to the public. 8/Parliamentary Calendar

58. **Sir Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the President of the Council, what assessment he has made of the public's reaction to the recently announced changes to the Parliamentary Calendar and timings of sittings of the House. [81523]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our impression is that the public's reaction to the recently announced changes has been generally favourable, and that the end to late evening sittings has been particularly welcomed. The YouGov poll in anticipation of the vote in the House on these matters showed a nine to one majority of the public in favour of the change to sitting hours and September sittings.

Westminster Hall

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the President of the Council what representations he has received on the seating arrangements in Westminster Hall. [81515]

Mr. Robin Cook: There have been four parliamentary questions on the seating in Westminster Hall since June 2001, three of them from my hon. Friend. I have also received letters from six hon. Members on this subject since the House returned in October, one of them from my hon. Friend.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Security

57. **Brian White:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what the cost and benefits were of the new security measures between Norman Shaw North and Portcullis House. [81522]

Mr. Kirkwood: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will understand, it is long-standing practice not to comment on the details of security expenditure or arrangements on the Parliamentary Estate

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts Central Council

40. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she last met representatives of the Magistrates' Courts Central Council. [81471]

Yvette Cooper: I last met with representatives of the Central Council of Magistrates' Courts Committees on 11 November 2002.

Domestic Violence

41. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action her Department is taking to help victims of domestic violence. [81472]

43. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will make a statement on further steps to tackle domestic violence that are under consideration by her Department. [81475]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government remain committed to tackling domestic violence.

An inter-Ministerial group set up last November is working across Government on five key areas for action. My Department is responsible for leading work on improving the interface between the criminal, civil and family law. We aim to identify ways to make the process less distressing for victims, by working with stakeholders and voluntary organisations at local and national level to develop a more integrated approach that tackles the impacts of domestic violence as part of the justice process.

In order to inform our work in this area, I set up an advisory group to bring together the full range of stakeholders involved in dealing with domestic violence and to act as a sounding board and reality check for our policy proposals.

This group will also assist the Department in its work, in liaison with the Home Office, on the Government's consultation paper setting out proposals for the prevention of domestic violence.

Magistrates Courts

42. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when she last met members of the lay magistracy. [81474]

Yvette Cooper: I last met members of the lay magistracy on 18 November 2002.

Courthouse, Colchester

44. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when she expects the new courthouse in Colchester will open. [81476]

Yvette Cooper: It is planned that the new courthouse in Colchester will be opened in early 2007.

Child Abduction

45. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the actions taken by the Government to prevent child abduction from the UK. [81479]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department works closely with the other UK jurisdictions, the Scottish Executive, the Northern Ireland Court Service and with other Government Departments, to prevent child abduction as far as possible. The Lord Chancellor's Department provides core funding to the charity Reunite—International Child Abduction Centre, which provides advice and support to parents in fear of, or who have suffered, the abduction of their child. The UK Government contribute towards the cost of their advice line, and are supporting initiatives for a prevention awareness campaign which will begin in England and Wales in March 2003.

LCD provides the Secretariat for the Child Abduction Co-ordinating Group in which other Departments and agencies participate. The group promoted the change in passport regulations which means that a child has to have a separate passport, reducing the risk of a forged entry on a parent's passport being used to remove the child from the UK. The group meets quarterly and is looking at other action to raise awareness and prevent child abduction.

Provisions of the Children Act 1989 allow the courts to prohibit the removal of the child from the UK.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Death Penalty

56. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on the role of the Privy Council in relation to the use of the death penalty in a number of overseas territories. [81521]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is the court of final appeal for 16 independent Commonwealth countries. When hearing appeals the Judicial Committee applies the law of the country from which the appeal comes. Most of the countries concerned retain the death penalty for certain offences and some cases that come before the Judicial Committee are appeals against conviction and/or sentence in capital cases. Over the years the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council has played an important part in developing constitutional safeguards in relation to the imposition and execution of the death penalty in these countries and in helping to uphold the integrity of the criminal process.

Ministerial Committee on Biotechnology

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on his work as Chairman of the Ministerial Committee on Biotechnology. [81509]

Mr. Robin Cook: I chair the Ministerial Committee on Biotechnology (SCI(BIO)). Details on the membership of the Committee can be found on my Department's website at www.pco.gov.uk/output/Page67.asp. The Committee is a sub-committee of the Committee on Science Policy (SCI). It considers issues relating to biotechnology—including those arising from genetic modification, biotechnology in healthcare and genetic issues—and their economic impact; and reports as necessary to the Committee on Science Policy. Policy responsibility for the issues raised in the Committee rest in the main with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

SCOTLAND

Northern Lighthouse Board

7. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she next intends to meet the commissioners of the Northern Lighthouse Board. [81446]

Mrs. McGuire: Neither my right. hon. Friend nor I have any current plans to meet the Commissioners of the Northern Lighthouse Board.

Drugs

9. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of Stat for Scotland what discussions she has recently had with the First Minister on the issue of drugs in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [81448]

Mrs. Helen Liddell: I meet regularly with the First Minister and discuss a range of topics.

Fishing Industry

10. **Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to whom she has made recent representations regarding the fishing industry in Scotland. [81449]

Mrs. Helen Liddell: I have discussed issues concerning the Scottish fishing industry with my Government colleagues and with the Scottish Executive.

20. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of prospects for employment in the Scottish fishing industry. [81459]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the prospects for employment in the Scottish fishing industry. [81441]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), column 145.

Voluntary Sector

11. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what steps she is taking to engage with the voluntary sector in Scotland regarding employment. [81450]

Mrs McGuire: The voluntary sector plays a major role in the Government's Welfare to Work agenda. I am delighted to say that around 8,000 people in Scotland have participated in the voluntary sector option within the New Deal for Young People. I recently addressed the Support Training Action Group on the voluntary sector's role in supporting the Welfare to Work programme.

Rural Poverty

12. **Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what policies she is promoting to end rural poverty. [81451]

Mrs. McGuire: The Government are committed to tacking poverty across all sectors of society, including those living in rural areas. We have introduced a number of measures, such as the Working Families Tax Credit, Children's Tax Credit, New Deal, National Minimum Wage and the Minimum Income Guarantee for pensioners, all of which complement rural initiatives taken by the Scottish Executive.

Inward Investment

13. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Scottish Executive to discuss inward investment in Scotland. [81452]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Lady, the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing), at column 149.

Scottish Parliament

14. **Mr. Mark Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will publish the results of her consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament. [81453]

21. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will publish the results of her consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament. [81460]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron), at column 143.

Scottish Economy

15. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the Scottish economy. [81454]

Mrs. Liddell: Despite uncertainty in the global economy the fundamentals of the Scottish economy are sound. The economy grew in the year to June 2002 in the face of an international downturn. Our labour market is healthy, while inflation and interest rates are low. Scotland shares the benefits of macroeconomic stability delivered by the Government while the Scottish Executive are able to exercise their devolved responsibilities to respond to local priorities and economic development opportunities.

19. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the Scottish economy. [81458]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave today to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner).

Antisocial Behaviour

16. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding ways of combating anti-social behaviour through United Kingdom-wide legislation. [81455]

Mrs. McGuire: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with the Scottish Executive on a wide range of issues. The Government and the Scottish Executive are committed to combating anti-social behaviour through a range of appropriate measures.

Postal Services

17. **Mr. Alan Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with Postcomm regarding deregulation of postal services in Scotland. [81456]

Mrs. McGuire: I recently attended and gave the closing address at a conference jointly organised by Postcomm and Postwatch, at which a wide range of postal matters affecting Scotland were discussed.

Media Industry

18. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to discuss the implications for diversity in the Scottish media industry of the Government's legislative programme. [81457]

Mrs. Liddell: I meet my right hon. Friend regularly for discussion on a wide range of issues, including the Government's proposals for broadcasting and print media, now reflected in the Communications Bill published last week.

Creative Industries

22. **Rosemary McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to promote Scotland's creative industries. [81461]

Mrs. Liddell: The creative industries are a dynamic and fast growing sector of the Scottish economy. I am therefore pleased to be able to co-host an event tomorrow with Lord Puttnam of Queensgate, Chairman of NESTA (the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts), which will provide an opportunity to highlight the wealth of Scottish talent in this sector.

Communications Bill

23. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to ensure that Scotland's interests are represented within Government in respect of the Communications Bill. [81462]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has worked closely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the DTI, and I am confident that the new regulator, Ofcom, has the capacity to take full account of the consumers and the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors in Scotland. Ofcom will have an overarching duty to take account of the needs of the nations and regions in all its activities. The Communications Bill makes statutory provision for specific Scottish representation on the Content Board and Consumer Panel to be established by Ofcom. Ofcom will also be required to establish an office in Scotland.

NETA

24. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultation she has initiated about the impact of applying NETA in Scotland. [81463]

Mrs. McGuire: The Government are committed to developing a single wholesale electricity market for Great Britain to ensure a long-term diverse and secure supply of energy for Britain.

The Department of Trade and Industry is continuing consultations with this Department, the Scottish Executive, Ofgem, industry and stakeholders in developing appropriate arrangements for the GB electricity market.

Economy

25. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action she is taking to consult Scottish business and trade union interests on economic issues. [81464]

Mrs. Liddell: Macro-economic policy makes an essential contribution to achieving a healthy and successful Scottish economy. As part of my on-going programme of meetings to discuss these issues with key stakeholders, I shall be meeting representatives of business organisations in Scotland and with the STUC General Council on 2 December following the release of the Pre-Budget Report to hear their views on Government macro-economic policy.

Postal Voting

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his policy is on the extension of postal voting for elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies. [81477]

Mrs. Liddell: I am responsible for the conduct of elections to the Scottish Parliament. Responsibility for the conduct of elections to the National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly lies with the Secretaries of State for Wales and Northern Ireland respectively. The extension of postal voting for elections to the Scottish Parliament was provided for in the Scottish Parliament (Elections etc) (Amendment) Order 2001; for elections to the National Assembly for Wales by the National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) (Amendment) Order 2002; and for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly by the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) Order 2001.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery Funding

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many ex-servicemen's welfare organisations in West Sussex applied for National Lottery funding last year. [83302]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer Monday 25 November 2002]:* One ex-servicemen's welfare organisation in West Sussex applied for National Lottery Funding last year through the Awards for All scheme: The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association Forces Help—Crawley and East Grinstead Division was awarded £4,928 on 16 May 2001.

Regional Arts Council Members

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of the *(a)* Regional Arts Council members and *(b)* National Council members of the Arts Council of England are *(i)* from ethnic minorities, (ii) disabled, (iii) male, (iv) female, *(v)* under the age of thirty and (vi) over the age of sixty, and if she will make a statement. [82770]

Dr. Howells:

Question	*Regional Arts Council members*	*National Arts Council members*
Percentage ethnic minorities	16.5	13.3
Percentage disabled	8.2	0
Percentage male	51	60
Percentage female	49	40
Percentage under 30 years old	0.9	0
Percentage over 60 years old	13.7	6.6

All appointments are made on merit.

School Sports

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* school sports co-ordinators and *(b)* school sports co-ordinator partnerships there are in *(i)* Jarrow constituency, (ii) South Tyneside, (iii) Tyne and Wear and (iv) UK. [82440]

Mr. Caborn: The position in September 2002 is laid out in the following table. No School Sport Co-ordinator partnerships have gone live since that date.

	School Sport Co-ordinator posts	*School Sport Coordinator Partnerships*
Jarrow Constituency	1. At Hedworthfield Comprehensive, part of the King George V partnership.	Partnerships align with LEA, not constituency, boundaries.
South Tyneside MBC	4	1. Centred on King George V School, comprising 4 secondary schools (including Hedworthfield) and 22 primary schools (9 of which are in Jarrow).
Tyne and Wear[1]	19	5. One in each LEA.
UK (England)[2]	765	149

[1] Gateshead Metropolitan Borough; Newcastle City Council; North Tyneside Metropolitan Council; South Tyneside MBC; Sunderland City Council.

[2] The School Sports Co-ordinator programme is being rolled out only in England.

Seabed Rentals

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what annual rental charges are paid to the Crown Estate for seabed rentals for ferry piers, ports and harbours operated by *(a)* Caledonian MacBrayne, *(b)* Shetland Islands Council, *(c)* Orkney Islands Council, *(d)* Lerwick Port Authority, *(e)* Scrabster Harbour Trust, *(f)* Ullapool Harbour Trustees, *(g)* Stornoway Pier and Harbour Commission, *(h)* Argyll and Bute Council, *(i)* Mallaig Harbour Authority, *(j)* Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, *(k)* Clydeport and *(l)* Aberdeen Harbour Board. [81964]

Ruth Kelly: *[Holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The Crown Estate cannot release figures relating to commercial leases without the prior consent of the Lessee. Consent is being sought and I will write to the hon. Member.

Sports Action Zone (Workington)

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money has been spent in Workington from the Sports Action Zone covering Allerdale, Copeland and Barrow; and on what projects. [82447]

Mr. Caborn: Projects in the West Cumbria and Barrow Sport Action Zone from which Workington benefits are as follows:

£

	Sport Action Zone investment	*Total project cost*
Workington Wards		
Salterbeck Sports Coordinator	54,000	110,000
Allerdale District		
Allerdale Baton Relay	2,500	6,000
Grassroots Sport SOS[1]	10,000	31,600
Allerdale Community Chest	21,000	21,000
West Cumbria		
Sport for Health Manager	30,000	70,000
Sport Directory	11,200	19,700
Zone-wide		
Monitoring the impact of sport social wellbeing of communities	7,320	14,640
County-wide		
Adults Other than Teachers Programme	7,500	24,800

[1] Three year project

In addition the following projects are currently being developed which impact on Workington:

Feasibility study to attract the world mountain marathon to the District of Allerdale (Sport Action Zone £3,000);

Three year dance project in partnership with Allerdale and Copeland Borough Councils and Keswick Theatre by the Lake (Sport Action Zone £9,000);

'Engaging in Football'—A five year programme in partnership with NACRO in West Cumbria. Workington target wards are Salterbeck, St. Michael's; Northside (Sport Action Zone £28,000);

Three year enhancement of passport in the Zone, in partnership with Cumbria Outdoors and Cumbria Sport. Workington target being the Leisure Centre (Sport Action Zone £9,000);

Two year pilot programme: Bridging the Gap through Sport in the Zone. Two year pilot programme with rugby union, rugby league and tennis. Aims to link the social inclusion agenda and National Governing Bodies of Sport (Sport Action Zone £36,000);

SAZ Newsletter to raise awareness of the Zone's progress (Sport Action Zone £2,000);

Education through Sport in the Zone. A three year programme aiming to develop five programmes linking education and sport agendas, to increase numbers of coaches; develop Top Tots; training community sports coaches; create opportunities for adult volunteers and increase community exercise instructors (Sport Action Zone £40,000).

DEFENCE

A400M

Mr. Donaldson:: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce pension provision for part-time soldiers in the Royal Irish Regiment. [83044]

Dr. Moonie: The employment rights of part-time soldiers serving in the Royal Irish Regiment are currently the subject of applications to the Industrial Tribunal. The right to a pension is one of the issues under consideration. It would be inappropriate to say more at this stage.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of BAE Systems' bid for the position of prime contractor for the new aircraft carrier; how many jobs will be dependent on this procurement; and if he will make a statement. [83229]

Dr. Moonie: The Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) programme is currently in the Assessment Phase, Stage 2 of which ended on 20 November. The procurement strategy for CVF does not rely on a 'bid' process, rather the two candidate prime contractors (BAE Systems and Thales) have been assessed on a continuous basis over the last three years. It is this continuous assessment that will form the basis of our forthcoming selection of preferred prime contractor. In terms of jobs, it is still too early to be definitive as to the numbers that will be involved but early indications suggest that the CVF programme could sustain and create some 10,000 jobs across the United Kingdom during the design and manufacture of the carriers; this would be true irrespective of which of the two candidate primes is eventually selected.

Mr. James Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with companies wishing to be the prime contractor for the procurement of the new aircraft carriers; and when the decision will be made. [83223]

Dr. Moonie: We have had close contacts with the two candidate prime contractors for the Future Aircraft Carrier (BAE Systems and Thales) throughout the second stage of assessment, which was completed on 20 November. We are currently in the process of compiling the results from our continuous assessment of both contractors and consulting with interested parties; we plan to announce our decision by 31 January 2003.

Apache Helicopter

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has plans to upgrade or replace the night-vision system on the Apache helicopter. [82124]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* An upgrade of Apache's night vision system has been identified as one of a range of possible enhancements to the helicopter during its service life. No decision has yet been taken on this specific element.

BAE Systems

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the names are of the secondees from BAE Systems working in his Department; and what work they are engaged in. [81326]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer Monday 25 November 2002]:* Alan Garwood's appointment as Head of Defence Export Services was announced on 16 September 2002.

I am withholding the names of the other five BAE Systems secondees, in accordance with Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. They are respectively engaged with training on Smart Acquisition; support chain management; logistics capability development; research in electronic warfare and warship support. Additionally, on 4 November, a secondee from BAE Systems began work on air logistics support.

Canberra PR9

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his procurement strategy for the replacement of the Canberra PR9s. [82215]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 753W, to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

Chatham Dockyard

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on refit network schedules at the former Chatham dockyard including removal and refurbishment of *(a)* the reactor/equipments and *(b)* associated pipework; and when these refits took place. [82523]

Dr. Moonie: Refit work undertaken on nuclear powered submarines at the former Chatham dockyard was subject to a rigorous production control system, which authorised repair work, including the removal and refurbishment of reactors/equipments and associated pipework, as identified in the overall refit network schedule programme. Refit work undertaken at the dockyard from 1970 until its closure in 1983 is shown in the table.

Dates	*Submarine*	*Refit work*
April 1970 to May 1972	Valiant	First refit and reactor refuel
June 1971 to October 1973	Warspite	First refit and reactor refuel
December 1973 to October 1975	Churchill	First refit and reactor refuel
May 1974 to October 1976	Dreadnought	Second refit, reactor refuel and first decontamination of Primary Loop
October 1975 to June 1977	Conqueror	First refit and reactor refuel
November 1976 to July 1978	Courageous	First refit and reactor refuel
April 1977 to January 1978	Sovereign	Reactor modification
January 1978 to February 1980	Valiant	Second refit and reactor refuel
August 1979 to March 1982	Warspite	Second refit and reactor refuel
October 1980 to May 1983	Churchill	Second refit and reactor refuel
March 1982 to March 1983	Dreadnought	Decommissioning and defuel

Due to the time elapsed since the closure of Chatham dockyard, further information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how nuclear waste was transported *(a)* within the former Chatham dockyard and *(b)* externally; and how it was identified. [82525]

Dr. Moonie: Within the dockyard, radioactive waste was moved in suitable containers, and under the supervision of an authorised person, in accordance with the Factories Act 1955 and the national regulations on ionising radiations that were in force at the time. Arrangements for the transportation of low-level waste took account of the route over which the waste had to be moved, and the nature of the waste itself. Waste was routinely moved from the Nuclear Complex to the Solid Waste Disposal Facility, a distance of about one mile, by motor vehicle. Within the Solid Waste Disposal Facility, waste containers were moved by fork-lift truck, although some very low-level wastes were moved over short distances by a hand-operated electrical lifting vehicle, where this was judged to be safe. Large items of intermediate level waste were usually transported within the dockyard under a police escort.

Very low-level waste for disposal by the local authority, and low-level wastes for delivery to the National Disposal Service at Harwell and to the national repository at Drigg, were usually transported by road vehicle, although on occasions waste was transported by rail. All transport of radioactive materials on the public highway or by rail was in accordance with the International Atomic Energy Agency's Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Materials.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether unclassified workers at the former Chatham dockyard received the same training in respect of radiation exposure as classified workers. [82526]

Dr. Moonie: Prior to first starting work involving radiation, all radiation workers, whether classified or unclassified, received a lecture on the hazards and standard procedures for radiation protection. They were also given a personal copy of a booklet on radiation protection, which reiterated the content of the lecture. In addition, classified workers were given specific instruction appropriate to the nature of their work.

Visitors making short, supervised, educational or familiarisation visits to radiation areas, at times when the risk was judged to be low, were not required to receive such standard training.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how *(a)* solid and *(b)* liquid nuclear waste at the former Chatham dockyard was stored *(i)* within the nuclear complex and (ii) within the wider dockyard environment. [82527]

Dr. Moonie: Solid radioactive waste was stored in the purpose-built Solid Waste Disposal Complex at the eastern end of Chatham dockyard. Other industrial buildings within the dockyard were also used as radioactive waste stores, as and when necessary. These buildings were monitored for radioactive contamination after use and, where necessary, decontaminated. Solid radioactive waste was stored in accordance with the Factories Act 1955, national ionising radiation regulations and Royal Naval instructions for radiological protection that were in force at the time. The arrangements were subject to inspection by the Factory Inspectorate.

Liquid nuclear waste was disposed of directly to the effluent treatment plant (ETP) in the nuclear complex, or transferred via liquid effluent tanks to the ETP.

Used resins, which were a mixture of solid and liquid material, were kept in specially designed resin catch tanks. They were stored at the Solid Waste Disposal Complex.

Deaths

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what statistical information he has collected concerning the deaths in or near military property since 1990. [80685]

Dr. Moonie: Information on deaths is routinely collected within the Ministry of Defence in a number of ways. Service casualty branches receive and hold information on injuries and deaths for next of kin and casualty purposes. The Armed Forces Pay and Administration Agency collects information on deaths for pay, pensions and manpower purposes. The Defence Analytical Services Agency collects information for statistical purposes. Detailed information on location is held by the Service casualty branches. However, this is not readily accessible, being held as free text fields in a mixture of databases and paper records.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many consultants there are in each faculty within Defence Medical Services. [80796]

Dr. Moonie: The number of consultants in each specialty within the Defence Medical Services, as at 1 July 2002, is set out in the following table:

Consultant specialty	*Current manning* [1]
General Surgery	18
Orthopaedic Surgery	11
General Medicine	20
Anaesthetics	23
Accident and Emergency	3
Dermatology	3
Paediatrics	2
Genito-Urinary Medicine	1
Neurology	0
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	0
Urology	3
Burns and Plastic Surgery	3
Psychiatry	10
Ophthalmology	3
Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery	7
Ear, Nose and Throat	3
Rheumatology and Rehabilitation	6
Radiology	10
Pathology	5
Chemical Pathology	0
Haematology	1
Histopathology	2
Microbiology	2
Aviation Medicine	1
Occupational Medicine	43
Public Health Medicine	8
Restorative Dentistry	2
Dental Public Health	2

[1] Including command and staff appointments

Fire Service Cover

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reserve forces are available *(a)* to assist in firefighting duties and *(b)* to replace regular service personnel engaged in firefighting duties during industrial action by civilian firefighters. [82908]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* There are currently no plans to call out reservists in response to the firefighters' strike. However, it is possible that volunteers may be used in supporting roles, but in such cases they would not be deployed as firefighters.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of the deployment of service personnel to provide fire cover on the ability of the Armed Forces to respond to a chemical, biologial, radiological and nuclear attack in the UK. [82952]

Mr. Ingram: Contingency plans, involving the Armed Forces, are in place for responding to a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack. This capability has not been affected by the deployment of Service personnel to provide emergency fire and rescue cover.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to sign a Queen's Order conferring rights to call up extra reserves in the event of military action being undertaken before the firefighters' dispute has been settled. [82910]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Reservists are called out under the legal powers conferred by the Reserve Forces Act 1996.

There are currently four extant call-out orders made under that Act, namely: An order made on 28 February 2002 under section 56 to support operations in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo;

An order made on 3 April 2002 under section 56 to support operations in the former Yugoslavia;

An order made on 3 April 2002 under section 54 for operations in the region of Iraq in support of the no fly zones and UNIKOM;

An order made on 14 October 2002 under section 54 for operations in support of the campaign against international terrorism.

As my right hon Friend the Secretary of State told the House on 4 November, call- out of reservists for any new operational commitment would be the subject of a separate call-out order at the appropriate time.

Firearms

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of each of Her Majesty's armed services have *(a)* died and *(b)* been seriously injured as a result of the discharge of firearms in *(i)* Great Britain, (ii) Northern Ireland, (iii) Germany and (iv) other overseas postings in each year since 1990. [80680]

Dr. Moonie: Between 1 January 1990 and 31 December 2001, 199 service personnel have died as a result of the discharge of firearms. These deaths are shown by location in the following table.

Deaths due to discharge of firearms since 1990, by location

	Year of death					
	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Great Britain	8	4	3	3	5	7
Northern Ireland	10	9	11	11	4	7
Germany	9	1	4	1	3	1
Other overseas postings	1	25	1	2	15	5
Grand total	28	39	19	17	27	20

	Year of death					
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*Grand total*
Great Britain	6	4	1	3	2	2	48
Northern Ireland	4	1	0	1	0	3	61
Germany	0	0	0	0	0	0	19
Other overseas postings	7	0	0	3	8	4	71
Grand total	17	5	1	7	10	9	199

Comprehensive information on firearm related injuries is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Firearms Deaths

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many firearms deaths since 1990 were perceived to be *(a)* suicide or self-inflicted deaths, *(b)* accidental deaths and *(c)* homicide or other deaths caused by other persons or persons unknown. [80681]

Dr. Moonie: Between 1 January 1990 and 31 December 2001, 199 service personnel have died as a result of firearms. The cause of these deaths are shown in the following table:

Deaths due to discharge of firearms since 1990

	Year of death					
	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Hostile action and assault	10	12	6	7	8	0
Suicide and open	12	7	11	5	12	14
Accidental/other	6	20	2	5	7	6
Grand total	28	39	19	17	27	20

	Year of death						
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*Grand total*
Hostile action and assault	5	1	0	3	2	1	55
Suicide and open	9	3	0	0	3	2	78
Accidental/other	3	1	1	4	5	6	66
Grand total	17	5	1	7	10	9	199

Notes:
1. The number of suicides and open verdicts is likely to rise for the later years as outstanding coroners' verdicts are confirmed.
2. As at 18 November 2002.

Frigate Sales

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which frigate the UK intends to sell to Thailand. [83014]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* No Royal Navy frigates are currently intended to be sold to Thailand.

Homeless Ex-service Men

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions his Department has had with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Homelessness Unit regarding homeless ex-service men; what welfare policies are in place to prevent young ex-service men becoming homeless; and what plans he has to introduce further policies. [83299]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Since my appointment as Minister for Veterans in March 2001,1 have had regular contact with ministerial colleagues in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) through the Veterans Task Force which normally meets every six months to give direction to the Government's Veterans Initiative. I have also agreed to become a member of the Ministerial Committee on Homelessness.

Officials from the Ministry of Defence and ODPM meet representatives of veterans' organisations regularly through the Ex-Service Action Group; in recent times there has been increased contact in order to develop a work placement programme which will be provided in partnership with the Prince's Trust "Business in the Community". The programme will be up and running next year.

Officials from ODPM are members of a working group on service resettlement established as part of the Veterans Initiative. I have tasked the group with enhancing processes to ensure a more successful transition to civilian life for the small minority of vulnerable service leavers who need support.

The MOD had a number of discussions with the ODPM earlier this year in order to assume financial responsibility for the housing advice staff provided by the English Churches Housing Group in Catterick Garrison and Shelter at the Military Correction and Training Centre in Colchester.

Officials from both Departments have also been discussing how best to make local authority housing officers around the country aware of the change in the 1996 Housing Act Priority Needs Categories, issued on 31 July 2002, which extends the groups of homeless people considered to be in priority need of housing to include the few armed forces personnel who are vulnerable to homelessness due to their institutional background. MOD has also been engaging with the appropriate authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure that the same issues are taken into account in their future legislative proposals for housing allocations.

More recently, my officials have been finalising arrangements with the ODPM's Homelessness Directorate and the local authority in Richmond, North Yorkshire, for a project to convert a disused art-gallery into 13 self-contained studio flats. The flats will be used to provide short-term accommodation (six to nine months being the norm) for service leavers who are most vulnerable to homelessness. I met the first residents on 25 November.

Military Equipment

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the average expected wear time is for a pair of standard issue *(a)* combat boots and *(b)* desert boots; and what the actual wear time was for *(i)* combat boots and (ii) desert boots in each year since 1997; [82537]

(2) what the average wear time was for a pair of infantry combat trousers in each year since 1996. [82541]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* We expect combat boots to last for about 24 months and desert boots to last for about six months. Combat trousers are expected to last for about 18 to 24 months for light use and about four to six months for heavy use. Central records are not held on actual wear times, but the life expectancy depends on the conditions in which they are worn and how the item is maintained.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints he has received in the last 12 months from infantry soldiers regarding the quality of *(a)* combat boots, *(b)* combat trousers, *(c)* sleeping bags and *(d)* tents. [82538]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* In the last 12 months the Ministry of Defence has received, from armed forces personnel, a total of 30 complaints regarding combat boots, 15 complaints regarding combat trousers, no complaints regarding sleeping bags and three complaints regarding tents. These comments provide valuable feedback as we continuously seek to improve the products we provide.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many infantry soldiers own their own *(a)* boots, *(b)* sleeping bags and *(c)* tents. [82539]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Service personnel are issued with the clothing and equipment required to carry out their jobs, whatever the environment. We do not maintain records on the number of infantry soldiers who have their own boots, sleeping bags and tents.

Mr. Brazier : To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times his Department has changed supplier for *(a)* combat boots and *(b)* combat trousers since 1997; and what the reasons were for the change. [82540]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Since 1997 the Ministry of Defence has made the following number of supplier changes:

Combat Assault Boots—Varied between two suppliers and one. Currently split between the two.

Cold Wet Weather Boots—No changes.

Desert Combat Boots—One change.

Combat Trousers—Consolidated from five supplies to one.

Desert Combat Trousers—One change.

The changes were made as part of the standard competitive tendering process.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many pairs of combat trousers were available to an infantry company every three months in each year since 1996; and how many are available now. [82543]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Each service man receives a standard issue of three pairs of combat trousers, and these are replaced as required. Units are issued with replacement stocks in line with the number of soldiers they have. Additional stocks can be ordered if this proves necessary.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to equip service men with suitable personal kit for deployment to the middle east in *(a)* winter months, *(b)* spring months and *(c)* summer months. [82614]

Dr. Moonie: The safety and well-being of all service personnel is paramount at all times and they are issued with the clothing and equipment required to carry out their jobs, whatever the environment.

Missile Defence

Mr. Tódd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a formal mechanism will be made available for the public to register their views on missile defence with his Department. [83126]

Mr. Hoon: Members of the public are welcome to write to the Ministry of Defence with their views on missile defence. I intend to publish shortly some discussion material as an aid to public debate.

Naval Vessels

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* RFA Wave Ruler and *(b)* HMS Bulwark will enter service. [82210]

Dr. Moonie: RFA Wave Ruler is expected to enter service in March 2003.

On the basis of current information HMS Bulwark is expected to enter service in 2004. However, the exact date is under review with the company, BAES Marine.

Parachute Accidents

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of each of Her Majesty's armed forces have died through parachute accidents in *(i)* Great Britain, (ii) Northern Ireland, (iii) Germany and (iv) other overseas postings in each year since 1990; and what rule procedural changes have been brought about as a result of Board of Inquiry reports. [80683]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1990, 11 members of the armed forces have died as a result of parachuting accidents. To ensure that Service personnel confidentiality is not compromised, it has been necessary to group the data by cause and year, and by location and year, in the following tables:

Deaths due to parachute accidents by location: between 1 January 1990 and 15 November 2002

	Great Britain	*Overseas*
Royal Navy	1	0
Royal Marine	0	2
Army	1	5
RAF	1	1
Total	3	8

Note:
No deaths have occurred in Northern Ireland or Germany.

Deaths due to parachute accidents by year: between 1 January 1990 and 15 November 2002

	All deaths
1990	1
1992	1
1994	1
1995	1
1996	2
2000	2
2001	1
2002	2
Total	11

Boards of Inquiry into military parachuting are conducted by the RAF, who have responsibility for conducting and regulating all military parachute training by members of the armed forces.

There have been six completed Boards of Inquiry into these deaths. One Board of Inquiry is not yet complete, one death is pending a decision as to whether a Board of Inquiry is appropriate and the status of one is unknown. As two deaths involved personnel who were parachuting while off duty, Boards of Inquiry were not conducted.

The following procedural changes have been introduced as a result of these Boards of Inquiry:

(a) Pre-sortie briefings given to the safety boat personnel have been amended to be more specific on the recovery of parachutists from the water.

(b) Regulations and advice governing carriage of knives by parachutists and safety boat personnel have been amended.

(c) Regulations have been amended to make it mandatory for all parachutists using square parachutes to carry hook knives.

(d) Regulations governing the preparation of the parachutist's personal weapon have been amended to reduce the possibility of rigging lines snagging on the weapon.

(e) Pre-descent briefings to parachutists have been amended to include an explanation of the reasons for adopting a good position on exit from the aircraft.

(f) Pre-descent emergencies briefing to parachutists has been amended to include actions to be taken in the event that the handle, which cuts away the main parachute and activates the reserve, becomes dislodged from its retaining pocket on exit from the aircraft.

(g) Guidance on writing air instructions has been amended to ensure that instructions reflect the full nature of the activity to be undertaken.

(h) Syllabus of training and pre-descent emergencies briefing to parachutists have been amended to warn parachutists that the harness may ride up on deployment of the main parachute.

(i) Syllabus of training and pre-descent emergencies briefing to parachutists have been amended to instruct parachutists to make visual identification of main parachute cut-away pad and reserve parachute handle before cutting away the main parachute and operating the reserve.

(j) The incident reporting system was amended to fall under the auspices of the Inspectorate of Flight Safety (now Defence Aviation Safety Centre).

(k) Syllabus of training and pre-descent briefings to parachutists have been amended to include action to be taken on encountering turbulence close to the ground.

(l) Pre-descent emergencies briefings to parachutists amended to include the possibility of turbulence when winds are at the higher end of the permitted range.

(m) Syllabus of training and pre-descent briefings to parachutists amended to emphasise the minimum operating height of the handle, which cuts away the main parachute and activates the reserve, through better use of visual stimuli.

Premature Voluntary Release

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have left the armed forces by premature voluntary release in each of the past 15 years; and what the 10 most commonly cited reasons given for premature voluntary release are. [82118]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]*: The number of trained UK regular personnel who have left the armed forces by premature voluntary release/ retirement is as follows:

Financial year	*Naval Service officers*	*Naval Service other ranks*	*Army officers*	*Army other ranks*	*RAF officers*	*RAF other ranks*	*Officer total*	*Rank total*	*Total*
2001–02	219	1,973	543	4,982	275	1,740	1,037	8,695	9,732
2000–01	167	1,327	531	5,311	241	1,690	939	8,328	9,267
1999–2000	238	1,676	442	5,314	213	1,757	893	8,747	9,640
1998–99	164	1,706	509	5,947	243	1,742	916	9,395	10,311
1997–98	170	1,754	458	5,744	216	1,555	844	9,053	9,897
1996–97	136	1,877	373	5,851	192	1,526	701	9,254	9,955
1995–96	118	1,404	353	6,513	167	1,838	638	9,755	10,393
1994–95	95	1,087	254	6,377	141	1,432	490	8,896	9,386
1993–94	47	1,328	191	5,571	178	1,273	416	8,172	8,588
1992–93	146	1,548	319	7,490	288	1,791	753	10,829	11,582
1991–92	209	2,289	590	8,740	293	2,632	1,092	13,661	14,753
1990–91	254	2,919	704	10,811	332	3,250	1,290	16,980	18,270
1989–90	233	2,654	769	12,058	400	3,891	1,402	18,603	20,005
1988–89	209	2,118	691	11,641	359	3,276	1,259	17,035	18,294
1987–88	203	2,454	723	10,610	336	2,264	1,262	15,328	16,590

There is no single reason why individuals decide to leave the services and reasons are not necessarily the same across all three services, but some common reasons can be gleaned. These are as follows:

Current and future job satisfaction;

Wish to take up another career;

Better employment opportunities outside;

Family stability;

Promotion prospects;

Separation from family.

For the Naval Service from the Ratings Notice Giving Survey 2001–02, the following are the most common reasons listed in order of importance as to why people leave the service:

The desire to live at home;

Wish to take up another career;

To marry/raise a family;

Ability to plan long term;

Time spent on mundane tasks;

Level of job satisfaction experienced;

Extent of family disruption;

Pay in general;

Always intended to leave after a number of years.

The Army routinely carries out a survey of leavers. The six most frequently cited reasons for leaving the Army given by leavers are identified below.

Lack of job satisfaction;

Amount of separation from spouse/partner;

Better civilian job opportunities outside the Army;

Effect of the Army lifestyle on marriage/relationship;

Staying longer will make it more difficult to start a new career;

Compassionate reasons.

For the RAF, the Command Scientific Support Branch (CSSB) compiles an annual leavers survey that examines why airmen, airwomen and airmen aircrew are leaving the service. They also administer a questionnaire to all officers who have actively decided to leave the RAF, either at an option point or on PVR terms. The findings from the 2000–01 administration show that there is no single prevailing reason for leaving the RAF. However, the main reasons (which are similar across all branches and trades) are as follows.

For officers the five most important individual items from the questionnaire were:

Future job satisfaction;

Employment opportunities outside the RAF;

Career prospects outside the RAF;

Current job satisfaction;

Service morale.

For other ranks the five issues found to account for the majority of airmen's reasons for leaving were:

Lack of job satisfaction;

Promotion prospects;

Staying any longer would make it difficult to start a second career;

Family stability;

Promotion does not appear to be related to abilities.

Retired Officer Scheme

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 19 November,

ref. 81662, which employment legislation is driving the abolition of the Retired Officer Scheme; what measures have been taken to recruit into military support posts; and how the terms and conditions of service of those that would have been recruited into the Retired Officer Scheme will be affected by the new arrangements. [82881]

Dr. Moonie: The EC Directive on fixed term work places restraints upon the use of fixed term appointments for retired officers, the current method of employment. Following agreement with all key stakeholders, preparations are in hand to make the first appointment by fair and open competition to a military support post in early 2003.

Normal civil service terms and conditions will apply with, exceptionally, a normal retirement age of 65 as an expedient to help to overcome the current manning deficit.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of the *(a)* RAF and *(b)* Army indicated when last questioned that they were *(i)* satisfied and (ii) dissatisfied with the standard of their accommodation; what percentage of those responding this represents; what percentage of actual strength this represents; and if he will make a statement; [82246]

(2) how many members of the Army indicated when last questioned that they were *(a)* satisfied and *(b)* dissatisfied with the standard of their service family accommodation; what percentage of those responding this represents; what percentage of actual strength this represents; what areas they indicated were in greatest need of improvement; and if he will make a statement. [82244]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Service Personnel

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of Service personnel went AWOL or deserted in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what the equivalent figures were *(a)* five, *(b)* 10 and *(c)* 20 years ago. [80648]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Service Personnel (Deaths)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of each of Her Majesty's armed forces have died through *(a)* combat or civil disturbance related incidents, *(b)* natural causes, *(c)* road traffic accidents and *(d)* accidental, self-inflicted and other causes in *(i)* Great Britain, (ii) Northern Ireland, (iii) Germany and (iv) other overseas postings in each year since 1990. [80682]

Dr. Moonie: Between 1 January 1990 and 31 December 2001, 2,481 serving members of Her Majesty's Armed Forces have died. 110 as a result of hostile action and assault; 326 with suicide or open verdicts, 777 due to natural causes; 762 deaths due to road traffic accidents; and 506 due to all other causes (including outstanding coroners verdicts).

Regular Armed Forces deaths by cause since 1 January 1990

		Year of Death												
		1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Grand Total
Deaths due to Hostile Action & Assault	Army	12	36	7	7	11	3	6	3	1	4	3	3	96
	Navy	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	8
	RAF	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6
Suicide and Open Verdicts	Army	21	25	20	22	19	25	18	17	13	11	16	7	214
	Navy	9	6	6	1	6	1	5	4	0	4	4	1	47
	RAF	14	8	7	9	5	3	3	4	3	2	7	0	65
Deaths due to Natural Causes	Army	48	40	50	39	29	24	16	25	28	21	23	20	363
	Navy	19	19	21	9	18	12	9	16	10	7	6	14	160
	RAF	36	28	29	24	21	25	15	17	17	16	14	12	254
Deaths due to RTA	Army	67	72	50	40	41	32	26	39	40	30	30	31	498
	Navy	13	13	17	22	8	7	9	9	5	8	7	11	129
	RAF	22	7	16	13	10	14	8	6	16	4	11	8	135
Other Causes	Army	27	20	28	25	30	30	19	9	15	19	22	21	265
	Navy	9	14	4	12	3	10	3	8	11	7	7	7	95
	RAF	23	17	12	18	16	20	8	6	6	9	2	9	146
Grand Total		320	311	267	241	219	207	146	165	165	143	153	144	2,481

Note:
Suicide and open verdicts for 1995 and later are subject to change as outstanding coroners verdicts are confirmed. This could lead to significant increases, particularly for 1999 and later.

Between 1 January 1990 and 31 December 2001, 1,701 members of Her Majesty's armed forces have died in Great Britain; 111 have died in Northern Ireland; 276 have died in Germany; and 393 have died in all other overseas postings. These figures are shown in the table.

Regular Armed Forces deaths by location since 1 January 1990

		Year of Death												
		1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Grand Total
Great Britain	Army	92	85	75	84	70	66	49	66	61	61	65	54	828
	Navy	45	47	44	32	34	27	25	34	20	20	20	31	379
	RAF	83	49	48	56	41	47	26	27	34	30	30	23	494

Regular Armed Forces deaths by location since 1 January 1990

		Year of Death												
		1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Grand Total
Northern Ireland	Army	15	14	18	13	6	11	4	5	3	1	5	5	100
	Navy	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	RAF	0	0	5	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	9
Germany (BAOR)	Army	39	44	37	21	25	15	14	8	10	9	7	10	239
	Navy	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	RAF	9	4	5		2	4	3	2	1	0	2	1	36
Other overseas postings	Army	29	50	25	15	29	22	18	14	23	14	17	13	269
	Navy	5	5	4	11	3	3	2	5	6	6	5	2	57
	RAF	3	12	6	5	8	11	4	4	6	2	1	5	67
Grand Total		320	311	267	241	219	207	146	165	165	143	153	144	2481

Strategic Sealift Programme

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what costs were incurred as a result of his ministerial direction regarding the Strategic Sealift programme. [82567]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* No net costs resulted from the ministerial direction. There were some associated management and legal charges, which would not otherwise have been incurred, offset by savings in the terms of the service contract. The shipbuilding contracts themselves had already been negotiated by the service provider and the Ministry of Defence assumed responsibility for contract payments. These will be recovered from the service provider when the ships are completed.

Suicides

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the result was of his recent review of the definition of a self-inflicted death; what actions he has taken in consequence; and what steps have been taken to compare the rate of suicides in each of Her Majesty's armed forces with information available from the Office for National Statistics from samples of the civilian population and appropriate comparator groups. [80686]

Dr. Moonie: The review of the statistical classification of deaths in the armed forces is still underway. Whilst this is going on, the category of "self inflicted deaths", which had been the basis of some Parliamentary Questions and some official statistics, will not be used. This category had included coroner confirmed suicides and open verdicts, broadly in line with the Office for National Statistics definition of suicide, but coroners' verdicts of accidental death and death by misadventure, together with unknown and outstanding verdicts, were also included. This wider "self inflicted" category was often misinterpreted as meaning suicide. One of the aims of the review is to remove such confusion by putting the definitions on the same footing as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) use. This will allow more meaningful comparison between military and civilian populations. Furthermore, in answering future questions specifically about the number of suicides, both coroner confirmed suicides and open verdicts will be shown. The Defence Analytical Services Agency are liaising with colleagues in the ONS, and intend to publish an analysis of trends and method of suicides among the armed forces compared to civilians in the first part of 2003.

UK Arms Industry

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the total Government subsidy of the UK arms industry in the last year for which figures are available. [81779]

Dr. Moonie: As set out in our recent defence industrial policy, our aim is to ensure that our industry is competitive in both the home and overseas markets. This is best achieved through exposure to fair and open competition and it is not our policy to use subsidies, although some limited support, such as the Export Credit Guarantee scheme, is available to the defence industry.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when British forces will be able to deploy weaponised unmanned aerial vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [82213]

Dr. Moonie: We currently have no plans to deploy weaponised unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). However, we are conscious of the need to exploit the significant potential offered by UAVs. The Joint UAV Experimentation Programme (JUEP) announced earlier this year as part of SDR New Chapter will therefore look at the operational utility of UAVs in a wide range of areas including the potential for weaponisation.

Water Containers

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to provide servicemen with personal back-carried water containers when deployed to warm weather theatres. [82615]

Dr. Moonie: Personal Hydration Sets are being procured for personnel deployed on operations in hotter climates.

West Freugh Airfield

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to restore access to West Freugh airfield for storage of private aeroplanes. [82591]

Dr. Moonie: There are no plans to do so. Following the cessation of full time air operations at West Freugh, the site operator, QinetiQ, decided that use of the airfield by private aircraft should be discontinued. This was on the grounds that it would have been uneconomic

for QinetiQ to provide the resources required to meet the attendant health, safety and other responsibilities, given the infrequent use of the site by private aircraft.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Corporate Parents

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what definition he uses of the term corporate parents. [83277]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

Corporate parenting refers to the parenting role that councils and therefore councillors take on when they look after a child or young person. Corporate parenting represents the amalgam of functions vested in councils with social services responsibilities by the relevant sections of Part IV of the Children Act 1989. The role does not apply only to the social services department but to the council as a whole on a corporate basis.

The then Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Frank Dobson), used the term when he wrote to all councillors at the launch of the Quality Protects programme in 1998. He said:

"For children looked after, your council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of support that any good parents would give to their children. ... the underlying message for you as a local councillor is straightforward: you should do your utmost to make sure that children in the public care get a good start in life. You need to be able to live up to the Government's expectations of local authorities as corporate parents."

Drugs Education

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what training teachers providing drugs education in secondary schools are required to undertake. [82933]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: : Funding is available to all local education authorities through the standards fund (£15.5 million in 2002–03) for drug education. Part of the funding, £1.3 million in 2002–03 was set aside to extend the drug, alcohol and tobacco education training package, which aims to support teachers in planning, delivering and monitoring effective drug education by learning from and with other teachers, through teacher observations and collaborative enquiry supported by teaching networks.

As drug education features within the National Curriculum Science Order, all initial teacher training courses for those preparing to teach science should address the appropriate aspects of drug, alcohol and tobacco education relating to each key stage. Through initial training newly qualified teachers acquire: an understanding of PSHE and Citizenship, through which drug education is usually delivered; working knowledge of their pastoral responsibilities as teachers; and a readiness to promote the well-being of pupils.

Education (Mining Communities)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will introduce measures to help children from mining communities who underachieve. [82427]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In January 2001, we jointly commissioned research with the Coalfield Communities Campaign that looked into patterns of educational achievement in the coalfields. Evidence showed that coalfield areas are benefiting from the literacy and numeracy strategies at primary level, but attainment declines by Key Stage 3 level (11–14 years olds) and is well below the national average by GCSE stage. The research also showed, however, that there is no particular 'coalfield effect' and that similar problems occurred in other comparable areas that had experienced industrial economic decline. The full research report is available on the Department's internet site (DfES research report 314) and in the House of Commons Library.

We have several strategies already helping to raise educational attainment in deprived areas, although we recognise there is still work to be done.

Coalfield areas are also benefiting from more localised targeted support which provides additional resources for schools serving disadvantaged areas. This includes Excellence in Cities, Excellence Clusters and Education Action Zones We are working with coalfield organisations to clarify issues characteristic to coalfield areas and to agree a joint agenda for action.

Engineering Trainees

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many companies employ *(a)* apprentices and *(b)* other recognised trainees within the engineering industry; what action he is taking about changes in the number of companies employing apprentices and other recognised trainees within the engineering industry; what action he is taking to encourage engineering companies to take on apprentices and other recognised trainees; and what incentives are available to young students who wish to start a career in engineering. [82044]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government are firmly committed to its Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme across all sectors. We value the contribution the engineering sector makes to providing high quality training and acknowledge the key role of EMTA in developing the new Sector Skills Council. Although we do not hold the information requested, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is currently working to obtain a picture of employers participating in apprenticeships as part of improved management information arrangements recommended by the MA Advisory Committee.

Responses to the LSC's recent national marketing campaign show that engineering MAs continue to be one of the most popular options for young people. In terms of numbers of young people pursuing them, the engineering manufacturing sector has the largest number of Advanced MAs in learning. A new campaign aimed at employers began last month. Engineering is also in the highest MA funding band. Engineering

employers are represented on the LSC group which advises on funding rates and 2002–03 funding increased for Engineering MAs aged 16 to 18.

Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the grants funded by his Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if he will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82192]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This Department works with over a 1,000 voluntary and private organisations to which grants are made directly. Organisations and individuals can apply to and receive grants via our NDPBs and other agencies, for which we hold no central records. We do not hold information centrally on all the organisations and individuals who apply for grants or the amounts paid. Therefore this question could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list non-governmental organisations receiving *(a)* up to £5,000 and *(b)* over £5,000 in grants from his Department; to which NGOs he plans to award grants in 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [82958]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This Department works with over a 1,000 voluntary and private organisations to which grants are made directly. Many more organisations receive grants via our NDPBs and other agencies, for which we hold no central records. Therefore this question could be answered only at disproportionate cost.

Outreach Programmes

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding from his Department has been provided to the Outreach programmes provided by ACFA in financial year 2001–02; what will be provided in *(a)* 2001–03, *(b)* 2003–04 and *(c)* 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [82961]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 25 November]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will provide a reply in due course.

Prisons (Education)

Mr Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much the Open University has spent on funding distance learning courses for prisoners in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [82459]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Students in prison follow the same courses as all other Open University students, although the Open University does incur additional costs in terms of tailoring the presentation of the course to prisoner students. These additional costs in England and Wales, for which assistance is provided by the Home Office and DfES, are shown in the following table:

OU Financial Years	*£000*
1 August-31 July	
1997–98	94,980
1998–99	105,291
1999–2000	84,455
2000–01	99,014
2001–02	108,000

This does not cover Open University staff time to manage provision of services to prisoners.

Students in prisons are not entitled to the standard student support arrangements for part-time students. However, the Open University offers fee waivers subject to certain conditions. The following table shows the cost to the Open University of fee waivers for prisoners in the United Kingdom:

OU Financial Years	*£000*
1 August-31 July	
2000–01	137,920
2001–02	149,150
2002–03	[1]100,648

[1] committed this year to date

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many prisoners were undertaking level 1 Open University courses during the last 12 months for which figures are available. [82460]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer November 2002]:* The following table shows the number of prisoners in each of the countries of the United Kingdom who are taking level 1 Open University courses in 2001–02. It also shows the total number of students in prison who are studying with the Open University.

	England	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*N.Ireland*	*Total UK*
Level 1	143	0	5	2	150
All levels	420	3	17	14	454

Targets

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of progress towards the targets for 2004 agreed between his Department and *(a)* HM Treasury and *(b)* the Prime Minister's Department. [81085]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 18 November 2002]*: There is ongoing assessment of progress against Public Service Agreement targets, which are agreed and published as part of the Spending Review.

The Department has published progress against targets due to be met in 2004 in its spring annual report and will shortly publish updates in its first autumn performance report.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how often and by what means assessments are made of progress towards his Department's targets with *(a)* HM Treasury and *(b)* the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. [81086]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* There is ongoing assessment of progress against PSA targets with both HM Treasury and the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit via correspondence and meetings. The Department publishes progress against these targets in its spring departmental report and will shortly publish updates in its first autumn performance report.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Leg-Irons and Cuffs

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstance export licences are granted for *(a)* over-sized cuffs and *(b)* leg-irons manufactured in the UK. [82941]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend, the then Foreign Secretary (Mr Robin Cook) announced on 28 July 1997 (*Official Report*, column 65W) a complete ban on the export or transhipment from the UK of electric-shock batons, stun guns, lasers, leg-irons, gang chains, shackles (excluding normal handcuffs) and electric-shock belts designed for the restraint of a human being. The necessary amendment to the Export of Goods (Control) Order came into force in December 1997.

All export licence applications for over-sized handcuffs are rigorously assessed on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria and other announced Government policies. This includes consideration of the risk of the over-sized handcuffs being used as, or converted into, leg irons or shackles.

Afghanistan

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information has been given to the United Nations over the killing of prisoners near Kunduz during the war in Afghanistan. [83178]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We cannot answer on behalf of the UN. However, it is in the public domain that an investigation by Physicians for Human Rights in January 2002 reported claims from captured Taliban that 1,000 men had suffocated on their journey to Shiberghan prison in late November 2001. Their bodies were allegedly buried in mass graves at Dasht-e-Leili.

A preliminary UN investigation into the alleged grave sites recommended in May 2002 that a full investigation be carried out, when the conditions for witness protection allowed. In order to protect witnesses the UN cannot release any detailed information at this stage.

We are concerned about the alleged human rights abuses at Shiberghan. The British embassy in Kabul has raised our concerns with the Afghan Transitional Administration, the UN, the US authorities and the Afghan Human Rights Commission (AHRC). The embassy also recently raised the issue with Afghan Interior Minister Wardak. He agreed the matter was serious and undertook to co-operate in a UNAMA/AHRC investigation. We also welcomed the Transitional Administration's announcement on 21 August that they would fully co-operate with human rights organisations in the investigation of these alleged mass graves.

Eritrea

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards the demobilisation of soldiers in Eritrea. [82821]

Mr. Rammell: Over 8,000 soldiers have been demobilised since the IBRD programme became effective on 8 August 2002.

EU General Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held on 18 to 19 November; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [83152]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Secretary of State for International Development, the Secretary of State for Defence and I represented the UK at the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels on 18 and 19 November 2002. Conclusions were agreed by consensus and no formal votes were taken.

General Affairs Session

Progress of work in other Council formations

The Council took stock of the Presidency report on the work of other Council configurations (doc. 14057/02), noting decisions reached at the ECOFIN meeting of 5 November on modifications to the EIB's statute and the increase to the ECB's capital and foreign exchange reserves, in the context of enlargement.

Preparation of the European Council in Copenhagen

The Council endorsed the draft annotated agenda (doc. 14257/02) for the European Council, which lists two items only: enlargement and the functioning of the Council in view of enlargement. The European Council will also be updated on the work of the Convention by the Presidency of the Convention and will have its customary meeting with the Presidency of the Parliament.

The European Council is expected to take all necessary decisions to conclude all negotiations with the 10 candidate countries as identified at the Brussels European Council in October.

Enlargement

The Council discussed the way ahead with a view to concluding accession negotiations with 10 of the acceding countries in time for the Copenhagen European Council on 12 and 13 December 2002. The Council decided that their accession would take place on 1 May 2004, allowing acceding countries to participate in European Parliament elections of 2004. The Commissioners from the new Member States will join the Commission upon accession and will fully

participate in the forthcoming Inter-governmental Conference, while candidates that are still negotiating will participate as observers.

Reform of the Council Presidency

The Council held a broad debate on reform of the Council Presidency, in advance of a report by the Presidency to be given to the European Council. While some Member States indicated a preference for maintaining the features of the present rotating Presidency and extending co-operation between successive presidencies, others underlined that it would be necessary to consider measures going beyond that.

The Presidency also proposed that the role of the High Representative should be strengthened to help overcome Presidency weaknesses in the area of external relations. Proposals include chairing specific Council meetings, representing the Union in international organisations or in meetings with third countires, negotiating international agreements in the areas of CFSP/ ESDP and supervising EU special envoys.

Commission's legislative and work programme

The Council took note of a presentation by the Commission on its legislative and work programme for the year 2003, following the Annual Policy Strategy presentation in February 2002.

The Commission's work programme is built around three priorities: making enlargement a success; security and stability (fight against terrorism, immigration policy, the new neighbours initiative); and a sustainable and inclusive economy.

Terrorism: follow-up to the Action Plan

The Council took note of the roadmap, outlining progress made in the fields identified by the Action Plan on the fight against terrorism, (doc. 13909/02)

External Relations Session

Middle East

Ministers discussed the situation in the Middle East, international efforts and work on the road map. Concern was expressed at the continued violence and further development of settlements.

Iraq

The Council welcomed the unanimous adoption of the UN Security Council resolution 1441 on 8 November 2002, which paves the way for weapons inspectors to return to Iraq. The EU's objective on Iraq is clear: disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions. The EU will whole-heartedly support the UN on this.

Cyprus

The Council noted the UN Secretary General's presentation on a plan for settlement, regarding the initiative as timely. The Council expressed the hope that the UNSG's proposals would form the basis for a negotiated agreement. The Presidency reiterated its desire to see negotiations reach a conclusion prior to the Copenhagen European Council in December, to allow a re-united island to be welcomed into the EU.

Belarus

The Council re-examined the situation in Belarus, following its 21 October declaration expressing concern. It urged the authorities to avoid disruption of the activities of the OSCE Advisor and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Minsk. The Council noted that most Member States planned to implement measures to prevent entry to their territories by the President of Belarus, the Head of Presidential Administration, the Prime Minister, four government ministers, and the Chairman of the Committee of State Security.

Korean Peninsula

The Council reiterated its grave concern at the North Korean revelations concerning a uranium enrichment programme for nuclear weapons. It expressed deep concern that such a programme violated North Korea's international obligations via the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the IAEA safeguard agreement, the North-South Joint Declaration on Denuclearization and the Agreed Framework. The Council urged North Korea to immediately dismantle its programme in a verifiable manner and comply fully with its international commitments. Future international co-operation with the international community would be conditional on this. The Council stressed the EU's commitment to act in consultation with all relevant partners to resolve the situation peacefully.

Western Balkans

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The Council welcomed the agreement reached by political leaders in Serbia on 5 November 2002 and urged them to ensure political stability, including a conclusive result for the forthcoming Serbian Presidential election, to allow all vital reforms to continue. The Council recalled that further strengthening of democracy in the FRY and Serbia requires prompt solutions to pending issues. It called on FRY political leaders to abide by democratic principles to ensure the effective functioning of institutions. It also called on them to rapidly adopt the Constitutional Chart and Action Plans on the internal market, trade and customs, to make progress towards the EU.

FRY/Kosovo

The Council welcomed the recent free and fair municipal elections in Kosovo and regretted that, following its boycott of elections, the Serb population of Mitrovica had no democratic representation. The Council welcomed the successful Donor Co-ordination Meeting of 5 November 2002 which underlined the need for continued engagement with the international community.

Arms sales

The Council expressed its deep concern at recent reports concerning illegal arms sales from FRY, Bosnia and Herzegovina to Iraq and Iran, in clear breach of UN sanctions. Such illegal sales tarnished the international reputation of the countries concerned and complicated their progress toward the EU. Measures had to be introduced to ensure such violations do not recur. The Council called upon all potential candidates for EU membership to adhere to the EU code of conduct on arms exports without delay.

The international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

The Council reaffirmed the high importance it attaches to co-operation with ICTY. It expressed disappointment and growing concern at the insufficient co-operation by the FRY, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and in some cases, Croatia. The Council reiterated that failure to comply would seriously jeopardise further movement toward the EU.

Stability pact for South Eastern Europe

The Council expressed full support for the Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact, Dr. Erhard Busek. It invited the Special Co-ordinator to present a report on this ahead of the June 2003 'Zagreb Process' Summit in Thessalonika.

ESDP

The Council underlined the importance of ensuring co-ordination of the EU's civilian and military crisis management instruments in order to be able to respond effectively when needed. The Council welcomed the Action Plan on this and the intention to complete the strengthening of civil-military co-ordination by the end of the Greek Presidency.

Military capabilities

The Council considered all relevant aspects of EU military capability development, including the Rapid Response elements of the Headline Goal, common training and the Mediterranean Dimension. It welcomed the High Representative's report on efforts to reach agreement between the EU and NATO and invited him to pursue his contacts and report back at its next meeting on 9 December. The Council welcomed the PSC's progress report on Military Capabilities and noted that the overall assessment is encouraging. 19 panels are considering the shortfalls to be remedied and will issue final reports, evaluating the military implications of each proposed option, examine ways of filling potential gaps, study possible solutions and identify whether remaining shortfalls impose constraints on the delivery of the Headline Goal, by 1 March 2003. The Council agreed to task the PSC and EUMC to finalise the work on rapid response elements as soon as possible.

Civilian capabilities

The Council endorsed the declaration adopted by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs at their meeting in Brussels on 19 November 2002 at a Civilian Crisis Management Capability Conference. The declaration notes that an EU police planning capability already exists and that an appropriate EU planning and mission support capability should be established within the General Secretariat of the Council for the other areas of civilian crisis management as a matter of priority. As a result of the commitments made so far the EU has been able to set up a European Union police mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will take over from the UN International Police Task Force (IPTF) on 1 January 2003. Ministers stressed that the development of the EU's civilian crisis management capacity is an ongoing process. They stressed that a solution to the financing of civilian crisis management operations under title V of the Treaty in European Union would have to be found as a matter of priority in order to meet the EU's ambitions in the field.

International trade in coffee

The Council held an exchange of views and expressed serious concern about the situation. Although there were no quick, short-term solutions, initiatives needed to be taken. The issue needed to be looked at in a broader context, including with a view to sustainable development. The Council noted the Commission's willingness to explore possible solutions for the general commodities situation.

Trade and development

Trade and poverty reduction

The Council welcomed the Commission's communication on Trade and Development and recalled the joint Council-Commission Statement on the European Community's Development policy of November 2000, which highlights Trade and Development as a priority of poverty- reducing Community development activities. The Council reiterated that trade liberalisation in itself is not sufficient to combat poverty in developing countries, but must be part of a wider, country-owned poverty reduction strategy combining trade and development objectives with sound domestic policies, including good governance and anti-corruption measures.

Integrating trade and development strategies

The Council recalled the Doha Declaration objectives and its commitment to placing development at the heart of the work programme through: better market access for developing countries; balanced trade rules that developing countries can apply progressively and flexibly; willingness to solve the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) problem; and through strengthening the capacity for developing countries to adhere to technical standards and regulations.

The Council welcomed the outcome of the 2002 Monterrey Financing for Development conference, underlined its strong commitment to the Cotonou Agreement and welcomed the initiation of negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the ACP countries in September 2002. The Council emphasised that the "Everything But Arms" (EBA) initiative demonstrates the EU's leadership on trade and development and calls on other industrialised countries to emulate this.

Enhancing trade-related assistance

The Council invited the Commission to ensure that trade-related assistance is stepped up as part of a coherent assistant strategy within Country and Regional Strategy Papers (CSPs and CRSPs). It also endorsed the Commission's proposal to focus trade-related assistance in three main areas: assistance for WTO accession, multilateral and other trade negotiations; support for implementation of WTO commitments; and strengthening capacity to adhere to Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). It invited the Commission to pursue all initiatives that ensure trade, development and environment policies are mutually supportive and urged

the Commission to work to ensure an ambitious outcome for the Doha Development Agenda. The Commission will present a comprehensive report on further trade and development recommendations in the first half of 2005.

Untying of aid

The Council heard a Commission presentation, based on a recent communication on untying aid. The Commission proposed that all aid should be untied on two conditions: the agreement of the recipient country would be required and full untying would take place only on the basis of reciprocity between donors.

Follow-up to international conferences

Monterrey

The Council held an exchange of views on commitments made at Monterrey (March 2002) and Johannesburg (September 2002) and stressed the need for adequate monitoring of implementation of these in order to meet the Millennium Development goals.

Humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa

The Council reviewed the humanitarian situation crisis affecting Southern Africa, and in particular, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Council called on the Commission and Member States to consider offering further aid in response to UN appeals. The Commission was requested to make a more detailed needs assessment prior to the Council's meeting in December.

New Neighbours initiative

The Council adopted conclusions without debate, expressing its wish that the EU put in place further conditions which would allow it to enhance its relations with its Eastern European neighbours: Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. It recognised the need for the EU to formulate an ambitious, long-term and integrated approach towards each of these countries, with the objective of promoting democratic and economic reforms and sustainable development and trade. The Commission and High Representative were invited to prepare more detailed proposals on how to take this initiative further.

Sri Lanka

The Council adopted the conclusions on Sri Lanka, undertaking to strengthen the EUs engagement in the peace process in Sri Lanka and participate in the Oslo donor conference on 25 November 2002 and contribute to the donor fund to be established.

Chile

The Council adopted a Decision on the signature and provisional application of certain provisions of the Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States and Chile.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Council adopted conclusions on intensifying cooperation on the management of migration flows with third countries, to ensure that an integrated, comprehensive and balanced approach to tackle the root causes of illegal immigration remains the European Union's constant long-term objective.

International Cocoa Agreement

The Council adopted a Decision on the signing and conclusion on behalf of the Community of the International Cocoa Agreement, 2001.

Liability and compensation for damage in connection with the carriage of hazardous and noxious substances by sea

The Council adopted a Decision authorising the Member States, in the interest of the European Community, to ratify or accede to the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea 1, 1996 (the "HNS Convention").

Protection of the Communities' financial interests and the fight against fraud

The Council adopted conclusions taking note of the annual report 2001 from the Commission on the protection of the Communities' financial interests and the fight against fraud. In particular it reiterated the importance it attaches to the participation of third countries, and especially the candidate countries, in action to fight fraud, and to their co-operation with OLAF. It invited the Commission to present a full summary of activities and actions undertaken in this field in the 2002 annual report.

North Korea

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made *(a)* directly and *(b)* through the United Nations Security Council to the North Korean Government on its nuclear weapons. [83250]

Mr. Rammell: We have made clear to the North Korean Government our deep concern at their nuclear weapons programme, which breaches a number of international agreements. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary issued statements to the press concerning North Korea's nuclear programme on 18 October and 15 November. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials made representations to the DPRK Chargé d'Affaires in London on 7 November, and the British embassy in Pyongyang made further representations to the DPRK Government on 11 November. No representations have yet been made through the UN Security Council. The International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors meeting in Vienna on 28 November 2002 will discuss the North Korean nuclear programme.

Roma

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on securing the rights of Roma people residing in Eastern European countries; and how their rights will be affected by European Union enlargement. [83664]

Mr. MacShane: States that wish to join the EU have to sign up to the Copenhagen Criteria. Only countries that meet the criteria, ensuring the basic human rights of all their citizens, can be invited to join. The EU reports

annually on the candidate countries' performance against the criteria and these reports are taken into account in the accession process.

The UK, other member states and the Commission have all put a high priority on Roma minority issues in their pre-Accession support for candidate states. And most countries have initiated separate national strategies for Roma.

New member states will have to implement the new EU anti-discriminatory directives on accession.

Sussex Wreck

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with *(a)* the Junta de Andalucia, *(b)* the Spanish Government and *(c)* the Government of Gibraltar in relation to the proposed salvage operations on the wreck believed to be the 17th century warship, Sussex. [82979]

Mr. MacShane: None.

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the European Commission regarding *(a)* the role of Zimbabwe in the forthcoming meeting of the ACP-EU, and *(b)* the presence there of Zimbabwean ministers who are on the travel ban list. [80603]

Mr. Rammell: The forthcoming meeting of the European Union-African Caribbean Pacific (EU/ACP) Joint Parliamentary Assembly is a matter for the respective Parliaments. Invitations were made by the co-Secretariat of the EU/ACP.

Those attending from ACP countries are entitled to certain privileges and immunities under the Lome and Cotonou Agreements. The EU' s Common Position 2002/145/CFSP imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe specifically allows member states to grant exemptions where travel is justified on grounds of attending meetings of international bodies.

On 7 November Belgium alerted EU partners to the request from Christopher Kuruneri, Zimbabwe's Deputy Minister for Finance and Paul Mangwana, Minister of State for State Enterprises, for visas to attend the EU/ACP meeting. Both are on the EU travel ban list. Under the terms of the Lomé and Cotonou Agreements, Belgium had a legal obligation to grant these visas, since these agreements override Council decisions on sanctions. The Belgian Government undertook to attach maximum restrictions. The banned individuals were granted visas only for the period 19–29 November, restricted to the territory of Belgium.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ACP-EU

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the European Development Fund paid for Zimbabwean Government officials to attend the forthcoming meeting of the ACP-EU. [80604]

Clare Short: Following our inquiries the European Commission have made it clear that there was no cost to the European Development Fund.

Aid Underspend

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what volume of aid in *(a)* Africa, *(b)* Central America, *(c)* Caribbean, *(d)* South America, *(e)* middle east, *(f)* Asia and *(g)* European countries has been unallocated in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement on underspend in each of these budgets. [80606]

Clare Short: DFID's entire budget has been fully allocated over the past five years. Each year our initial budget includes a modest Contingency Reserve, and in some years we have initially allocated funds for separate reserves for geographical divisions, but these reserves have always been re-allocated to specific programmes in the course of the year.

The budget and outturn figures for each of the named seven regions for the past five years are (in £000s):

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*		*2001–02*	
	Budget	*Outturn*	*Budget*	*Outturn*	*Budget*	*Outturn*	*Budget*	*Outturn*	*Budget*	*Outturn*
Africa	306,148	297,250	422,655	398,426	440,527	402,025	589,772	585,930	637,500	501,466
C. America	3,850	3,931	3,600	3,554	4,440	4,282	3,820	3,313	4,328	4,208
Caribbean	66,850	70,432	60,813	60,062	68,635	60,424	58,182	58,596	61,956	59,551
S. America	19,950	19,072	19,667	18,896	19,310	20,106	19,563	20,086	31,646	27,848
Middle east	19,675	13,873	22,250	18,560	26,550	32,686	44,300	42,567	49,900	53,990
Asia	274,688	290,960	324,621	323,301	330,250	311,569	343,847	337,508	461,845	439,276
Europe	40,150	38,238	37,955	30,254	42,100	35,287	40,878	36,673	49,250	44,370

These figures are on an indicative basis only, as there may be inconsistencies in data recording and there have also been changes in boundaries between divisions.

Central African Republic

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on efforts to distribute food aid in the northern provinces of the Central African Republic. [82662]

Clare Short: It is difficult to obtain precise information on the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic particularly in the areas of the country under rebel control. Inter-agency missions to assess the situation further than 30km north of Bangui have not been able to take place due to security concerns. We do know that the World Food Programme (WFP) has sent 45 metric tonnes of food to Northern Bangui and that nine tonnes of this has been distributed in the area directly to the north of the capital, to those

most seriously affected by the recent fighting. We are also aware of World Health Organisation and CAR Red Cross society reports indicating that hospitals and health centres in the country's northern provinces are short of medicines.

Congo

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in the Ituri district of the Democratic Republic of Congo. [82756]

Clare Short: The humanitarian situation in Ituri remains a major cause for concern. We continue to monitor it as closely as possible.

Some of the civilians displaced by the fighting have reached areas where access is possible. DFID have contributed £500,000 to the UN OCHA Emergency Response Fund established to help deal with this kind of contingency.

We continue to work with the UN to explore options on how to strengthen the presence of MONUC in Bunia. We have also supported UN and EU statements condemning all the violence but especially the ethnic violence in Ituri.

Eritrea

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on bilateral aid to Eritrea following the agreement between the Government of Eritrea and the European Commission on 15 November. [82759]

Clare Short: We do not have a significant bilateral programme in Eritrea but make our major contribution through the EC. We have, however, provided support for humanitarian efforts, the peace process and small projects administered by the recently opened British Embassy in Eritrea. We also fund nearly 20 per cent. of EC assistance. Early next year we will investigate with the Government of Eritrea the scope for support to their Poverty Reduction Strategy process.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to improve the transport infrastructure in Eritrea. [82760]

Clare Short: We are not providing any direct support to improve the transport infrastructure in Eritrea. The European Commission agreed a Country Strategy Paper with the Government of Eritrea on 15 November. This provides for support to the transport sector, including support for roads under the short-term rehabilitation programme and preparation of the transport sector study. Previous EC assistance included the rehabilitation of the Massawa-Asmara road. In addition the World bank is providing support under its emergency reconstruction project for transportation, including roads. With the Italian Government, they are also supporting a ports rehabilitation project.

Ethiopia

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much *(a)* funding for humanitarian assistance and *(b)* food her Department is providing to Ethiopia *(i)* bilaterally and (ii) through the World Food Programme. [82076]

Clare Short: So far we have made food and non-food humanitarian commitments of some £12.3 million in calendar year 2002 for Ethiopia. The food aid element of this figure is £2.4 million, which is made up of a £1.4 million bilateral contribution through Save the Children UK and £1 million through the World Food Programme. In addition we have contributed to the ICRC 2002 Appeal, which is delivering food aid in Afar region. We have also contributed to a GOAL intervention to provide supplementary food to malnourished children in Afar and are supporting Medecins sans Frontieres in similar work in Amhara region.

In October the EC made available €23 million for 97,000 metric tonnes of food aid to cover food needs until the end of 2002. In addition to the food aid provision the EC has approved a €4 million programme of humanitarian aid for the victims of drought. Nearly 20 per cent. of the EC support is funded by the UK.

We are keeping under close review the need to provide more food aid in coming weeks.

EU Aid

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what volume of aid in the EU's aid budget has been unallocated in each of the last five years for *(a)* Africa, *(b)* Central America, *(c)* the Caribbean, *(d)* South America, *(e)* the Middle East, *(f)* South Asia, *(g)* the Far East, *(h)* the Central Asian Republics, and *(i)* Europe; and if she will make a statement on underspend in the EU aid budget. [80605]

Clare Short: The European Commission organises its budget through annual commitment and payment appropriations. Regional budget lines for these funds are set out in the following table. Unallocated funds refers to any part of the initial budget that has not been committed to a project within the financial year.

The first of the following tables gives information about all overseas development assistance from the European Commission Budget for the areas requested. This information has been taken from the reports of the European Court of Auditors and appears as in the reports.

The second table gives information regarding payments from the European Development Fund (EDF). This is a non-budget voluntary fund for development programmes in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries which operates on a multiannual basis. The information provided has been taken from the 2001 Court of Auditors Report.

The Commission has recognised the importance of resolving the problems caused by outstanding commitments in Category 4 of the budget. It is taking steps to progressively reduce this backlog within the

overall reform context. This is proving to be a difficult task. We expect improvements to show once the deconcentration process has reached the majority of delegations. It is important that increased rates of spend are matched with evidence of improved effectiveness and impact.

Amounts and proportion of total European Commission aid unallocated between 1997 and 2001

	1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
Budge line and description	*Amount unallocated*	*% of total*	*Amount Unallocated*	*% of total*	*Amount unallocated*	*% of total*	*Amount unallocated*	*% of total*	*Amount unallocated*	*% of total*
B7—3 Co-operation with developing countries in Asia, Latin America and southern Africa, including South Africa	4.6	1	37.2	5	190.0	22	103.3	11	75.3	8
B7—4 Co-operation with Mediterranean third countries and the Middle East	22.7	2	73.3	6	65.0	6	137.2	12	0.0	0
B7—5 Co-operation with countries of central and eastern Europe, the new independent States and Central Asia	31.3	2	46.3	2	0.0	0	0.0	0	38.7	3

Note:
This table gives figures for external aid from the European Commission Fund. This does not include the EFF.
Amounts in the table are given in millions of euros for all years from 1999–2001. For 1998 and 1997 amounts are given in millions of Ecu.
Source:
European Court of Auditors Report annual reports for the financial years 1997–2001.

Primary and secondary commitments from the EDF from 1997–2001 (euro million)

Year	*Primary commitments*	*Secondary commitments*	*Amount unallocated*	*Percentage of total*
1997	600	950	0	0
1998	2,300	2,050	250	11
1999	2,700	1,400	1,300	48
2000	3,750	2,350	1,400	37
2001	1,550	2,250	0	0

Note:
Figures have been rounded to the nearest 50 million.
Source:
European Court of Auditors Report for the financial year 2001

EU Aid Projects

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the European Union plans to issue calls for projects in 2002 for budget line B7–6312 Aid for Population and Reproductive Health in Developing Countries. [82807]

Clare Short: Calls for proposals for budget line B7–6312 will be issued by the end of January 2003.

Sierra Leone

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she has allocated for *(a)* police training, *(b)* investment in security communications equipment, and *(c)* police vehicles in Sierra Leone. [82659]

Clare Short: We assist the Sierra Leone Police through the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project (CCSSP), which has been carrying out extensive police reform since August 2000 with the aim of improving safety and security and respect for the rights of people, especially the poor, by re-establishing the Sierra Leone Police as an effective and accountable civilian police service. This project has allocated £1.5 million to provide training for over 9,000 officers. Two senior officers have successfully completed the Strategic Command Course at Bramshill Police Staff College, and 28 officers will have successfully completed the International Commanders Programme there by the end of 2002. With the exception of these two courses, all training has been carried out within Sierra Leone.

We have provided £1.25 million for an extensive nationwide police communications network to be installed based on VHP and HF technology. Major cities and towns are linked over HF radio. Over 1,000 personal and vehicle radios are in use, and a modern command and control centre has been developed in Freetown. The system is supported by expert advice and training, spares supply and maintenance procedures.

We have allocated £3.5 million for 155 Land Rovers, 158 motor cycles, 47 medium carriers, 24 large carriers, 10 ambulances/closed vans and 10 cars for the Sierra Leone Police. In addition spare parts for these vehicles and extensive support has been given in areas of fleet management, fuel control and mechanical training.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to tackle the funding shortfall of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone. [82660]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

We are concerned by the shortfall in funding for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The UK has contributed some £500,000, including £250,000 in set-up costs.

We have pressed other donors to support its work; at the World Bank Consultative Group Meeting on Sierra Leone in Paris on 13–14 November.

PRIME MINISTER

Honours

Andrew George: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will list the names of people within the Honours Nomination and Ceremonial Units who *(a)* make

decisions, *(b)* make recommendations, and *(c)* are regularly consulted in respect of gallantry and honours awards; [80757]

(2) who appoints members of *(a)* the Honours Nomination Unit and *(b)* the Ceremonial Unit; [80760]

(3) what efforts the Government makes to assure the country of the accountability and balance of the numbers and decisions made by *(a)* the Honours Nomination Unit and *(b)* the Ceremonial Awards Unit. [80759]

The Prime Minister: I am responsible for recommending civilian gallantry and honours awards to Her Majesty The Queen. The George Cross Committee recommends gallantry awards to me. The Committee is chaired by the Head of the Home Civil Service; its other members are The Queen's Private Secretary and my appointments Secretary. The Secretary of the Committee puts forward recommendations to the Committee.

For honours, I am assisted by assessment committees, whose members include outside experts as well as civil servants. The membership of these committees has remained confidential as under successive administrations. These committees make careful and informed judgements on the merits of all cases put to them. Lists of awards made are published in the London Gazette and are usually fully described in the media.

The Ceremonial Secretariat incorporates both the Honours Unit and the Nominations Unit. The Secretariat is headed by a senior civil servant, Gay Catto, who is supported by a team of civil servants within the Cabinet Office.

TRANSPORT

A24

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has made concerning West Sussex county council's bid for funding to improve the A24 between Horsham and Capel; when he will announce his decision on funding; and how many accidents there have been on this road in each of the past five years. [82731]

Mr. Spellar: As with all major local transport scheme bids my officials have discussed the proposal with the promoters, West Sussex and Surrey county councils, prior to the bid's submission. We will announce our decisions on all major local transport scheme bids in December as part of the local transport capital settlement for 2003–04. The accident figures on this road, in each of the last five years for which figures are available, are set out in the table.

All accidents on A24 Horsham-Capel, between Great Daux Roundabout and Clark's Green (1997–2001)

	Number of accidents
1997	22
1998	24
1999	26
2000	24
2001	20

Aircraft Noise

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment and research has been made by his Department or is planned of the past and potential future impact of *(a)* changes in noise level permitted from individual aircraft and *(b)* changes in the size of aircraft upon *(i)* past increases and future total passenger and freight numbers and (ii) past and future (A) economic (B) environmental and (C) social impacts; and if he will place copies of related documentation in the Library. [81425]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 20 November 2002]*: The appraisal of options for the future of UK aviation contains information on economic, social and environmental impacts. This information is set out in the national airport consultation documents published in July 2002. A complete set of those documents and supporting material is already available in the Libraries of the House.

Highways Agency

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people work for the Highways Agency in the south-east of England and London. [81257]

Mr. Spellar: The Highways Agency employs 235 civil servants in its London office, 180 civil servants in its Dorking office and 30 civil servants in its Hemel Hempstead office.

London Underground

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains per hour it is safe to run on the Central Line on the London Underground. [81250]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground.

Proposed Airport (Cliffe)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) in which local authority areas his Department has initiated *(a)* public meetings, and *(b)* exhibitions as part of the public consultation in respect of locating an airport at Cliffe; [82497]

(2) for what reason he has not held public *(a)* meetings and *(b)* exhibitions in Thurrock as part of the public consultation on locating an airport at Cliffe. [82787]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has not initiated any public meetings about the Cliffe option, or any other option, as part of the current consultation. We considered that public exhibitions about the options where the public could view large scale maps and ask questions of officials and consultants would be the most effective way to inform the consultation.

Public exhibitions on the Cliffe option were held over four days at different locations. These were on 5 and 7 September at Chatham and Basildon, and on 4 and 5 October at Cliffe and Hoo St Werburgh. The main criteria applied in identifying suitable venues were proximity to the airport option and affected areas, venue capacity, accessibility, and availability.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will rank in order the closeness by proximity of each district local authority area within a 20 mile radius of prospective airport at Cliffe. [82790]

Mr. Jamieson: The following list ranks, in order, the proximity of local authorities which are within a 20 mile radius of the central point of the Cliffe option. Only authorities whose central land point is within the 20 miles radius have been included.

Medway Council
Castle Point District Council
Southend Unitary Authority
Rochford District Council
Gravesham District Council
Thurrock Unitary Authority
Basildon District Council
Swale Borough Council
Dartford Borough Council
Maidstone Borough Council
Tonbridge and MallingBorough Council
Havering Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Maldon District Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Bexley Council

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he wrote to local authorities in Kent and Essex formally as part of the consultation exercise, inviting them to submit representations in respect of the proposal to locate an airport at Cliffe; and if he will list the authorities concerned. [82791]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the launch of the consultation on 23 July, local authorities in the South East and East of England were sent copies of "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East" main consultation document and questionnaire. The authorities in Kent and Essex are listed as follows:

Kent:
Kent County Council
Medway Council
Ashford Borough Council
Canterbury City Council
Dartford Borough Council
Dover District Council
Gravesham Borough Council
Maidstone Borough Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Shepway District Council
Swale Borough Council
Thanet District Council
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Essex:
Essex County Council
Thurrock Unitary Authority
Southend Unitary Authority
Basildon District Council
Braintree District Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Castle Point District Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Colchester Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council
Harlow District Council
Rochford District Council
Tendring District Council
Uttlesford District Council

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what coordination he has organised between different Government regional offices on consultation relating to the proposals for a new airport at Cliffe; and if he will make a statement. [83368]

Mr. Spellar: The Government offices for London, the South East and the East of England were members of the reference and steering groups for the South East and East of England Regional Air Services (SERAS) study. Both groups met quarterly for the duration of the study.

Following completion of the SERAS study in May 2002, my Department held regular meetings with the three Government offices in preparation for the consultation on the options for airport capacity in the South East. We continue to meet regularly. Government office officials were also present at the public exhibitions that have been held on the consultation options.

Rail Projects

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when a decision is expected on the proposals being put forward for *(a)* Crossrail and *(b)* Central Railway; what steps would then follow; and when legislation will be introduced. [81748]

Mr. Spellar: We expect Cross London Rail Links Ltd. to put forward proposals for consideration in the new year. What steps would then follow will depend on the nature and content of those proposals.

The SRA has now delivered to the Government its advice on Central Railway's proposals. We are considering its conclusions carefully.

Uckfield Line (Electrification)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the reasons why he has placed a summary of the Booz Allen Report on the electrification of the Uckfield line through Edenbridge in the Library and not the entire report. [81104]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The full report has not been placed in the Library of the House because it contains commercially sensitive material. The summary of the report includes all the key costs and benefits relevant to the Strategic Rail Authority's decision, as well as outlining the effects on passengers.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Age Discrimination

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures his Department is taking to encourage companies to employ older people. [81677]

Mr. McCartney: We have made a pledge to tackle age discrimination and we are committed to introducing age legislation covering employment, vocational training and guidance by 2006.

We are already encouraging employers to adopt non-ageist employment practices through our Age Positive Campaign. The campaign raises employers' awareness of the business benefits of an age diverse work force and encourages a flexible approach to retirement to open up choice and opportunity for individuals to stay in work longer.

In 1999 we published the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment which sets out the standards for non-ageist approaches to recruitment, training, promotion, redundancy and retirement. The code was developed with leading organisations including the CBI, TUG, the Employers Forum on Age and Age Concern. Evaluation shows that from 1999 to 2001 the number of companies using age in recruitment had already fallen from 27 per cent. to 13 per cent. and the number of companies having a policy against employing older workers had dropped from 14 per cent. to 7 per cent.

Older workers have a wealth of skills and experience that can benefit individual businesses and the economy as a whole. Our policies will help to improve further the employment rate of people over 50, which has risen considerably since 1997.

Dangerous Incidents

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many dangerous incidents were investigated by the HSE in the last year. [82052]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* It is not possible to separately identify dangerous incidents. However, in 2001–02, the Health and Safety Executive investigated 13,421 incidents reported under the Reporting of injuries, Diseases and dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR)1995.

Housing Benefit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received on the extension of housing benefit to cover water charges; and if he will make a statement. [81046]

Malcolm Wicks: Housing benefit is an income-related benefit designed to help tenants on low incomes meet their reasonable housing costs. These include rent and any compulsory charges that are clearly related to the provision of adequate accommodation. Charges relating to personal needs, such as those for water and other utilities, are ineligible for housing benefit.

We have received no recent representations on extending housing benefit to cover water charges.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80768]

Mr. McCartney: Security of IT systems is under constant review and a procedure is in place to log, investigate and analyse all recorded incidents.

The number of cases of digital attack recorded was *(a)* 8 in October and *(b)* 122 in 2002.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the evidential basis was for his decision not to increase the earnings disregards for jobseeker's allowance; when this disregard was last increased; and what it would be worth if it had been uprated. [83242]

Malcolm Wicks: Our policies are giving everybody who can work the opportunity to do so, and providing security for those who are unable to work. We have introduced the national minimum wage, working families tax credit and, from April 2003, the new tax credits to ensure that people are better off in work than on benefits.

Any decision on increasing the earnings disregard for jobseeker's allowance is a question of fine judgment. We need to balance the benefits of encouraging people into part-time work and maintaining contact with the labour market, against any possible disincentives to full-time work. If the earnings disregard is set too high, then the gap between in-work income and out-of-work benefits becomes so narrow as to discourage people from taking up full-time work.

We keep the earnings disregard under review, but there is no set mechanism or formula for increasing it. There is, therefore, no basis on which to calculate an uprated value. We have, however, targeted extra help where it is most needed. For example, for lone parents and certain disabled people the earnings disregard was increased from £15 to £20 from April 2001.

New Deal

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents have found and retained work for more than four weeks on the New Deal for Lone Parents. [83513]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: By the end of June 2002, 152,230 lone parents had found work through the New Deal for Lone Parents.

We do not record the status of lone parents four weeks after they have started work. Sustainability of employment is one of the issues that is being examined as part of the evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents, which is due to be published in spring 2003.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the number of

employees who are *(a)* contracted out and *(b)* not contracted out of the state pension; and what the corresponding figures were *(i)* one year earlier, (ii) two years earlier and (iii) five years earlier. [81049]

Mr. McCartney: The available information is in the table:

Thousands

	1990–91	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Number of people belonging to contracted-out pension schemes	14,758	14,659	14,566	14,817
Number of people belonging to the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme	7,161	6,555	7,115	7,496

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions' analytical services division.

Owing to the implementation problems with the NIRS2 computer system, the 1995–96 tax year is the latest year for which precise information is available.

When more up-to-date information is available I shall write to the hon. Member and place my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many companies are registered to sell stakeholder pensions to individuals and which companies have *(a)* entered the market, and *(b)* left the market, since the product first became available. [81948]

Mr. McCartney: There are 47 companies registered as stakeholder pension providers offering a total of 51 registered stakeholder pension schemes. The majority of companies registered to sell SHPs before the product first became available on 6 April 2001. Details of companies that have entered the market and left the market since stakeholder pensions first became available on 6 April 2001 are in the table.

	Address
Companies entering the stakeholder pension market after 6 April 2001	
AIG Life (UK)	Alico House, 22 Addiscombe Road, Croydon
Direct Line Life Insurance Company Ltd.	3 Edridge Road, Croydon
James Hay Trustees Ltd.	Rowanmoor House, 46–50 Castle Street, Salisbury
Personal Retirement Account Ltd.	Oxford House, Oxford Road, Aylesbury
Capital Cranfield Trustees Ltd.	Harcourt House, 19a Cavendish Square, London
Companies leaving the stakeholder pension market after 6 April 2001	
St. Andrew's Life Assurance plc	PO Box 10, Walton Street, Aylesbury, Bucks
James Hay Trustees Ltd.	Rowanmoor House, 46–50 Castle Street Salisbury

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish his Green Paper on pension policy. [82439]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government plan to publish their proposals in a Green Paper on 17 December.

Reported Deaths

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many reported deaths were investigated by the HSE in the last five years. [82053]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The following table shows the number of deaths investigated by the HSE in the last five years.

Year	*Members of the public*	*Worker*
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	124	258
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999	126	236
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	146	205
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	148	267
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002		243

Note:

The data for members of the public for 2001–02 are not available for release as the information is due for publication on 10 December 2002 and is therefore subject to exemption 10 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason the number of winter fuel payment recipients is lower than the total population aged 60 years and over. [81949]

Mr. McCartney: The number of winter fuel payments issued is less than the total population aged 60 and over because, although most people aged 60 and over who normally live in Great Britain in the qualifying week are entitled to a winter fuel payment, there are some exceptions. These are people who, in the qualifying week, have been in hospital for more than 52 weeks; or have been in residential care for more than 13 weeks and receive income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance; or are in custody under sentence. Also, people subject to immigration control who are not eligible for help from the Department for Work and Pensions are not entitled to a payment.

In addition, where a couple is receiving the minimum income guarantee or income-based jobseeker's allowance, the claiming partner receives a £200 winter fuel payment for them both.

Where a person needs to make a claim for their winter fuel payment, it is up to that person whether they choose to claim.

HEALTH

Female Genital Mutilation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that female genital mutilation is not carried out in the UK. [82207]

Ms Blears: To support our continuing work to educate the practising communities to abandon female genital mutilation (FGM), we increased funding for Forward, the leading organisation working in this field, from April 2002 to an annual total of £90,000.

We have also been exploring how we might strengthen the legislation governing FGM.

Agency Fees

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on agency fees in the transfer of temporary agency staff to permanent NHS contracts in each of the last five years, broken down by health authority and primary care trust. [80402]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is on seeking to deal with alcohol abuse among young people. [81669]

Ms Blears: The Government are determined to tackle alcohol misuse among young people and measures to tackle misuse will form a key part of the national alcohol harm reduction strategy. The Government are currently conducting a consultation exercise on the strategy, and the consultation period will run until 15 January 2003. Copies of the consultation document have been placed on the Department's website (www.doh.gov.uk/alcohol/alcoholstrategy.htm) and on the Strategy Unit website (www.strategy.gov.uk/2002/alcohol/consultationdocument.shtml). The strategy itself will be published in summer 2003.

British Medical Association

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Chairman of the BMA; and how many meetings he has had with him in the last 12 months. [83263]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health meets the Chairman of the British Medical Association and other representatives of the medical profession, including the medical Royal Colleges, on a regular and frequent basis.

Clinical Negligence Reform

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the White Paper on clinical negligence reform. [83282]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Potential reforms to the way clinical negligence claims are handled raise complex issues and need to be considered in tandem with the review of the national health service complaints procedure, and my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor's consideration of possible changes in the basis on which compensation is paid. We hope to publish proposals for reform shortly.

Framework Agreement

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, when he was informed of the contents of slide 9 of the 'A New Consultant Contract—The Framework Agreement' presentation given by Mr. Andrew Foster Director of Human Resources for the NHS. [81946]

Mr. Hutton: I became aware of this slide following publication of the British Medical Association referendum result on 31 October 2002.

GPs (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners over the age of 65 are working in medical practices in the London Borough of Wandsworth. [81665]

Mr. Hutton: Figures for the London Borough of Wandsworth are not held centrally. Figures are held for Wandsworth Primary Care Trust and are shown in the table:

General Medical Practitioners aged over 65 in Wandsworth Primary Care Trust as at 31 March 2002 (boundaries as at 1 April 2002)

	Wandsworth PCT
All Practitioners [1]	209
of which:	
Aged 66 and over	8

[1] All Practitioners include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para. 52 SFA), PMS Other and GP Retainers.

Health Action Zones

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated *(a)* date, *(b)* cost to his Department and *(c)* cost to other government bodies is of the mainstreaming of health action zones; and if he will make a statement. [81702]

Ms Blears: Since April 2002, health action zones (HAZs) have been aligning locally with primary care trusts (PCTs) and local strategic partnerships (LSPs), and supporting PCT and LSP development. This process is reflected in the recommendations made by the regional co-ordination unit in their action plan for area based initiatives.

Information is not held centrally about the costs associated with the alignment process.

Licence Fees

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures have been put in place to ensure correct billing of licence fees by the HFEA; [80691]

(2) what measures have been put in place to ensure that the National Audit Office can establish satisfactory audit procedures to confirm the accuracy of the licence fee income which should be collected by the HFEA. [80692]

Ms Blears: From April 2002 the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) changed from an annual to a monthly invoicing system for the fees paid by licensed centres. Under this new system the invoices issued each month are based on the number of patient treatment cycles reported to the HFEA in that month, making the reporting and the invoicing easier to reconcile. In addition, the HFEA will visit all licensed centres by the end of 2002–03 to ensure that the centres are recording all the treatments they have undertaken in their monthly returns to the HFEA. The National Audit Office is continuing to monitor developments, working with the HFEA to establish how it will be able to rely on the results of these visits in order to draw conclusions on the accuracy and completeness of income due to the HFEA.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospital trusts provide parking spaces for their employees; and whether they are provided *(a)* free of charge and *(b)* subject to a charge. [80804]

Mr. Hutton: No central record is kept of whether national health service trusts provide car parking spaces reserved for employees. Where car parking is provided it is a matter for the NHS trust whether or not to make a charge using their powers to generate additional income to better provide the health service.

LIFT Scheme

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the additional capital expenditure that will be generated by the LIFT scheme. [82283]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The Department estimates that the initial investment from the 'first tranche' of schemes across the 42 local improvement finance trust (LIFT) areas will be in excess of £850 million.

Major Accidents (Fire Strike)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's preparation to deal with major accidents occurring during the industrial action by the FBU. [83307]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* All national health service organisations have major incident plans, which are regularly updated and tested. They are also responsible for ensuring that adequate fire precaution measures are taken and that arrangements are put in place to guard against identified risks. In view of the planned strike action by firefighters, the Department reminded Chief Executives and their Boards of their responsibilities, provided good practice guidance, and asked them to review their local procedures in the light of the changed circumstances during the firefighters strike.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times he has visited East Lancashire in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82400]

Mr. Lammy: My right hon. Friend has not yet visited East Lancashire in his official capacity as Secretary of State for Health.

Oncology Nursing

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is allocated to address shortages in oncology nursing within the NHS. [81924]

Ms Blears: By 2003–4 we will be making an additional £570 million available to support the implementation of the NHS Cancer Plan. These increased resources will enable primary care trusts to decide where National Health Service resources are best spent in line with local priorities in providing high clinical standards and good value for money.

The Government is implementing a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention of all staff, including nurses. Since 1997, the nursing workforce has grown by 31,520. Between September 1999 and September 2001 there was a net increase in nurses working in the NHS of 20,740—the NHS Plan target has been reached two years early. The increase in nurse numbers will enable the recruitment of additional cancer-site specific nurse specialists, chemotherapy nurses, district nurses, palliative care nurse specialists and additional nurses on wards caring for cancer patients.

Paediatric Oncology

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many paediatric oncology units there are within the NHS; [81932]

(2) if he will make a statement on NHS funding for pediatric oncology units within the NHS. [81934]

Ms Blears: Specialist cancer care for children is concentrated in a national network of paediatric oncology centres, under the umbrella of the United Kingdom children's cancer study group (UKCCSG). There are 16 National Health Service paediatric oncology centres in England. These are:

St James's University Hospital, Leeds
Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool
Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, Manchester
Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle
Sheffield Children's Hospital, Sheffield
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Birmingham
Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge
Leicester Royal Infirmary, Leicester
Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham
St Bartholomews & The Royal London NHS Trust, London
Great Ormond Street, London
University College, London
The Royal Marsden, Surrey
John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
Bristol Royal Hospital for Children, Bristol
Southampton General Hospital, Southampton

Paediatric oncology centres provide specialist and complex treatment for children with cancer. In addition, there are paediatric oncology shared care units around the country that can provide support, including certain

investigations and treatment, nearer to the child's home. This reduces travelling and disruption to families, without compromising quality of care or outcome and provides support to the paediatric oncology centres. The Department does not hold details of this type of unit.

The Cancer Plan set out the Government's commitment that an extra £570 million would be made available for cancer services by 2003–4. The Department does not collect figures on the cost of services provided by the NHS in a way that enables an accurate estimate of funding for paediatric oncology to be calculated.

Pain Management

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review his policy regarding the parallel use of opiate pain killers and strong sedatives with older people. [80116]

Mr. Lammy: The older people's national service framework (NSF), which was developed with input from front-line staff and patients and published in March 2001, describes how the use of medicines for and by older people can be improved. The aim is to ensure that older people:

gain maximum benefit from their medicines to maintain or improve their quality and duration of life;

do not suffer unnecessarily from illness caused by excessive, inappropriate or inadequate consumption of medicines.

The NHS Plan set a target for all primary care trusts to have schemes in place so that, by 2004, people get more help from pharmacists in using their medicines.

Opiates are liable to abuse and diversion. They are subject to the controls required by the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1985. Some painkillers, for example diamorphine, are classified as schedule 2 controlled drugs. Accordingly there are strict controls over prescription, requisition, storage and supply.

The general principles for the safe and secure handling of medicines are covered, for primary and secondary care, by the Department's controls assurance standard. The systems for clinical and cost effective use of medicines are covered by the Department's medicines management performance management framework.

Local treatment guidelines, including those for strong opiates and sedatives, should be in place and overseen by local drug and therapeutics committees.

Public Health Laboratories

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what cost benefit analysing has been carried out of the transfer of public health laboratories to host NHS trusts. [82141]

Ms Blears: The benefits of transferring laboratories of the Public Health Laboratory Service to national health service trusts include:

it is essential to create a comprehensive, coherent surveillance system, as described in the Chief Medical Officer's strategy, "Getting Ahead of the Curve";

it will broaden the number of clinical staff required to report the occurrence of infectious diseases;

it will place a duty of care on all microbiology laboratories to report for public health surveillance purposes; and

generally, the transfers will bring public health activities within the mainstream of the NHS.

The transfers are being implemented at no overall cost.

Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will give a breakdown by unit of NHS funding allocated to the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital, Brighton; [81920]

(2) if he will make a statement on dedicated cancer funding for the paediatric oncology unit at the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital, Brighton. [81921]

Ms Blears: I am advised by Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals National Health Service Trust that the budget for the Royal Alexandra Hospital for 2002–03 is £9.69 million. The breakdown of funding is as follows:

£3.77 million, paediatric medicine,

£3.42 million, paediatric surgery,

£1 million to neonatology at the hospital, plus a further £1.8 million allocated to the Trevor Mann Baby Unit at the Royal Sussex County Hospital,

£0.64 million, paediatric intensive care,

£0.4 million, dentistry,

£0.36 million, clinical support.

These are rounded figures so the combined total will not match the total budget.

The total budget for paediatric oncology for 2002–03 is £664,000. This represents an increase of 8.85 per cent. on the budget for 2001–02.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on nursing and medical staff vacancies at The Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital, Brighton; and what measures are being taken by his Department to fill them; [81922]

(2) if he will make a statement on vacancies within the paediatric oncology unit at The Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital, Brighton; and what measures are being taken by the Department to fill them. [81923]

Ms Blears: I am advised by Surrey and Sussex Strategic Health Authority that Royal Alexandra hospital, part of Brighton and Sussex University Hospital's National Health Service Trust, currently has a vacancy rate of 11 per cent.. Of staff working specifically in oncology, the vacancy rate is currently 17 per cent.

Recruitment to staff vacancies is undertaken locally, building on the Government's national recruitment campaign and other initiatives to improve recruitment and retention. Local recruitment measures include advertisements in the professional nursing press targeted at paediatric specialist staff. Furthermore, extra places in the staff creche are soon to come on stream, increased rates of pay for bank nurses are being examined and more flexible working patterns are being introduced. Additionally, the Royal Alexandra hospital is due to run a recruitment fair on 5 December.

Smoking

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department will adopt rules for the use

of *(a)* colour photographs and *(b)* other illustrations to depict and explain the health consequences of smoking, in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 10 (2) of the EU Tobacco Directive. [81681]

Ms Blears: Article 11 of the European Union Directive on the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products requires the European Commission to adopt rules concerning the use of pictorial health warnings on tobacco products by 31 December 2002. The Department is working with the European Commission to develop the use of these warnings.

St. George's Hospital

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled at St. George's Hospital, Tooting, in the last 12 months. [81679]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons by quarter—St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust.

Year	*Quarter*	*Last minute cancellations*
2001–02	Q3	282
2001–02	Q4	256
2002–03	Q1	37

Source:
Department of Health form QMNG /QMCO

A last minute cancellation is one that occurs on the day a patient is due to go into hospital or after they have arrived in hospital or on the day of their operation.

TB Action Plan

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish an action plan on TB. [81773]

Ms Blears: In the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO's) recent report, "Getting Ahead of the Curve", tuberculosis was identified as a key infectious disease problem requiring intensified control measures to reduce illness and death.

A new updated and targeted action plan will be submitted to the CMO by the end of 2002.

Tobacco Products

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department expects to have received from manufacturers and importers of tobacco products a list of all ingredients, and quantities thereof, used in the manufacture of those tobacco products by brand name and type, in accordance with the proposals laid down in the EU Tobacco Directive. [81682]

Ms Blears: The European Union Directive on the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products requires manufacturers and importers of tobacco products to supply the Secretary of State with a list of all ingredients per brand, together with their known health effects. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State will make and lay regulations shortly before Parliament to transpose the Directive. The Department will write to manufacturers once the regulations are laid, asking that the information be supplied in accordance with the timetable specified in the regulations.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department sent a list of approved testing laboratories to test the tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide yields of cigarettes to the European Union in accordance with the proposals in the Tobacco Directive. [81680]

Ms Blears: The European Union Directive on the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products was due to be transposed into United Kingdom law by 30 September 2002. The UK is slightly late in implementing the Directive and has notified the European Commission of this delay. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make and lay regulations before Parliament shortly and the Department will then send a list of approved laboratories to the Commission.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Housebuilding

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many persons were employed in the house-building profession in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002 [82808]

Mr. Wilson: In 2001, 91,400 persons were employed by firms registered for VAT and classified as house builders. Information for 2002 is still being collected and will be published during summer 2003 in the Construction Statistics Annual.Separate figures for house-builders are not available for 1999 and 2000.

BAE

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance she has given to BAE to help it export to Thailand. [83015]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The Department, through British Trade International including the commercial section of the British embassy in Thailand, have assisted BAE Systems in their efforts to do business in Thailand.

Representative from BAe Systems attended an Investment Seminar in the United Kingdom and the British Tai Business Group Meeting, in Bangkok, in 2001. Both events were co-sponsored by the Department.

BAE Systems have not participated in any Outward Trade Missions or the Support for Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad Scheme to Thailand in the past two years.

On 18 October the ambassador signed a Joint Minute on Defence Co-operation with the Thai Deputy Prime Minister in Bangkok.

The Joint Minute referred to a commercial agreement between BAe System and the Royal Thai Government, the details of which are to be worked out between BAE Systems and the Royal Thai Government.

Ballistic Missile Proliferation (Code of Conduct)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what additional measures she proposes to

take to implement the restraints in the *(a)* development, *(b)* testing and *(c)* spread of *(i)* missiles and (ii) space launch vehicles, in the new Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation. [83461]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom subscribed to the International Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (ICOC) on 25 November, which I announced to the House by means of a written Ministerial Statement today. Her Majesty's Government are already well placed to implement the undertakings in the Code. We already have strong measures in place for tackling the proliferation of ballistic missiles. The United Kingdom scrutinises export licence applications for any possible diversion of the goods to a missile programme of concern. We play an active part in the Missile Technology Control Regime, that co-ordinates national export controls on missile-related technology. Bilaterally, the United Kingdom encourages countries to show restraint in missile programmes and testing, emphasising the adverse effects they have on regional stability.

In implementing the ICOC, in line with Part 4 of the Code, the United Kingdom will exchange with other subscribing states pre-launch notifications on ballistic missile and space launch vehicle launches and test flights. Also, in line with the Code we will share annual declarations on the United Kingdom's ballistic missile and satellite vehicle policies and launches.

BNFL

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps she takes to ensure that BNFL's engagement with US political parties and their representatives is consistent with *(a)* the national interest and *(b)* the interests of public funds; [80843]

(2) if she will take steps to prevent donations by BNFL to US political parties or lobbyists. [80872]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* BNFL is a public limited company and its Board is free to run the company day-to-day within the overall strategic framework set by HMG. Its activities are funded from its commercial activities, and not from public funds. I have raised this issue with the company and it has assured me that it has no intention of making any further political donations to US political parties.

Competitiveness Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Competitiveness Council held in Brussels on 14–15 November; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [82242]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I represented the UK at the Competitiveness Council on 14 November in Brussels.

Following on from the Nyborg Informal Council held in October, there was a debate about the structures needed to bring together the internal market, industry and research elements of the new integrated Competitiveness Council.

There was a presentation by the Commission covering Better Regulation and its plans to improve the quality of European legislation.

There was a presentation by the Commission on the Internal Market Scoreboard, which shows progress towards achieving a single market. In particular, it reports member states' performance on transposing European single market directives into national law. The UK has a good record, being one of only five member states to meet the target that 98.5 per cent. of directives should be transposed on time.

A presentation on the joint work programme of three presidencies (Danish, Greek, and Italian) covered the internal market elements of the Competitiveness Council's work. Greece explained that in December they would present an integrated plan of their entire programme to the General Affairs Council.

Discussions on the Community Patent proposal, which aims to create a single EU-wide patent, continued but no conclusion was reached.

There was broad agreement for a common approach on a proposal to harmonise conditions under which computer programmes may be patented. The presidency concluded that the text should now await the European Parliament's first reading.

The Commission presented its new proposal for a Takeovers Directive.

There was an initial debate on the Free Movement Of Citizens Directive.

All member states welcomed the recently published Winter report on corporate governance.

The council welcomed the proposal for a directive on Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications as part of the Lisbon agenda and there was considerable support for improved mobility within labour markets and more efficient recognition of qualifications. Delegations endorsed the consolidation, simplification, and rationalisation of current structures and legislation, a freer system for the cross-border provision of services, and improving information and support for migrants. Delegation also recognised the need to balance consumer protection and consumer choice. Discussions will continue at official level.

The Commission presented a proposal for a Consumer Credit Directive to replace and update the 1987 Directive. The Council welcomed the dossier and called for a thorough examination at official level.

The Commission gave a progress report on the consultation and work to date following the follow-up Communication to the Green Paper on Consumer Protection.

The following agenda items were approved with little discussion: conclusions for the Competitiveness Council's contributions to Sustainable Development, the Internal Market Strategy for Services, and the proposed Motor Insurance 5th Directive.

Consignia

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial assistance was allocated to *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* England and *(d)* Scotland as part of Consignia's Urban Network Reinvention Programme; and if she will make a statement. [83655]

Mr. Timms: Unlike the schemes to improve and sustain post offices in deprived urban areas for which separate funding provision has been made for England and for each of the three devolved Administrations, Post Office Ltd.'s Urban Network Reinvention Programme is a single UK-wide programme. Neither the Government nor Post Office Ltd. have pre-allocated funds for the Urban Reinvention programme to countries or regions within the UK.

East Midlands Development Agency

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the grant given to the East Midlands Development Agency. [82353]

Alan Johnson: The East Midlands Regional Development Agency has been allocated a net budget of £101,247,000 for expenditure on the agency's Single Programme in 2002–03. Grant in aid paid to the agency by the Department of Trade and Industry includes contributions from four other Government Departments.

EC Energy and Industry Council

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what matters in respect of nuclear power policy are on the agenda for the EC Energy and Industry Council on 25 to 26 November. [83248]

Mr. Wilson: The Council agenda states that the Commission intends to make a presentation on their package of measures for a Community approach to nuclear safety in the European Union. The Commission proposals were published on 6 November and include a directive on the safety of nuclear installations during operation and decommissioning, a directive on spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste and a draft decision authorising the Commission to negotiate an Agreement between Euratom and the Russian Federation on trade in nuclear materials. Discussion of the proposals at the Council is not envisaged. The Commission will need to seek the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee and the group of experts established under Article 31 of the Euratom Treaty before taking the directives forward in the Council.

Further information on the proposals can be found on the Commission website at http://europa.eu.int/comm/nuclear/new—package.htm

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on preparations for a major incident at *(a)* chemical plants, and *(b)* nuclear installations during the period of industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union. [82413]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* Chemical Industries Association (CIA), member companies and operators of nuclear installations have been carrying out contingency planning since strike action by the firefighters became a real possibility, and keeping the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) informed.

The CIA has discussed with member companies the need to review the adequacy of existing plans and procedures, and to consider any additional steps they might take in the absence of emergency assistance from the Fire Brigade. The nuclear operators are likewise acting in the light of their responsibilities for safety on their sites and for emergency preparedness, and are keeping under review the implications of possible further strike action for their day-to-day activities.

The Health and Safety Executive has offered advice to employers operating onshore major hazard sites and nuclear licensed sites. In essence, this advice is for businesses to review their risk assessments in the light of the changed circumstances and consider what additional actions might be necessary. Overall, the HSE view is that the existence of a strike should not, of itself, cause the vast majority of legitimate industrial or commercial activities to be curtailed, since emergency plans and evacuation should not be dependent on the presence of the fire brigade. The HSE's advice, and other advice to relevant industries, is available on HSE's website: www.hse.gov.uk/firefighters.htm

Insurance

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will provide assistance to small businesses who are *(a)* finding it difficult to obtain insurance and *(b)* being charged premiums that are substantially higher than before; and if she will make a statement; [82827].

(2) what plans she has to meet representatives from the Association of British Insurers to discuss recent increases in the cost of insurance cover for business; and if she will make a statement; [82831]

(3) what assessment she has made of the impact of the rise in public liability and employers' liability insurance premiums over the last year on the competitiveness of UK businesses; and if she will make a statement. [82826]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answers 25 November 2002]:* The ABI has not specifically requested a meeting on this topic.

Officials have had discussions with the Federation of Small Businesses as well as with the Association of British Insurers and the British Insurance Brokers Association to explore how affordable cover can be provided. The DTI, Treasury and the Department of Work and Pensions are closely monitoring the effect of insurance premium rises on UK firms of all sizes.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the effect of the events of 11 September 2001, on insurance requirements for small and medium sized architecture businesses. [83350]

Nigel Griffiths: A number of businesses—particularly small businesses—are experiencing increases in liability insurance premiums, and in some cases difficulties in obtaining cover. Insurance premiums are rising across the board at present for a variety of reasons, not least the tragic events of September 11 last year, which had a severe effect on the global insurance market.

The DTI, Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions are closely monitoring the effect on SMEs of insurance premium rises. We are exploring with Association of British Insurers and the British Insurance Brokers Association ways to ensure that affordable cover is available.

Nuclear Industry

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much financial support has been given to *(a)* the nuclear generating sector, *(b)* the nuclear waste sector, *(c)* nuclear fusion and *(d)* other parts of the nuclear industry in each year since 1972. [80863]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* Funding to the UK nuclear industry has been provided primarily in the form of grant and grant-in-aid to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. Over the period in question, the funding enabled UKAEA to undertake civil nuclear research programmes and to discharge liabilities arising from past programmes.

£ million

	Grant and grant-in-aid
1971–72	43
1972–73	48
1973–74	61
1974–75	62
1975–76	87
1976–77	122
1977–78	118
1978–79	131
1979–80	144
1980–81	158
1981–82	164
1982–83	215
1983–84	204
1984–85	196
1985–86	169
1986–87	163
1987–88	148
1988–89	247
1989–90	196

Funding for UK nuclear fusion research was not shown separately from UKAEA funding prior to 1990:

£ million

	Grant and grant-in-aid	*Nuclear fusion*	*Other nuclear*
1990–91	94.3	26.9	—
1991–92	68.7	20.7	—
1992–93	[1]126.2	16.7	—
1993–94	[1]128.7	16.3	—
1994–95	[1]131.3	15.7	—
1995–96[2]	199.3	15.9	—
1996–97	166.5	12.1	—
1997–98	174.5	16.6	8.5
1998–99	285	12.6	5
1999–2000	194.4	14.4	3.3
2000–01	223.4	14.3	3.5

[1] Grant payment.

[2] Prior to 1995, UKAEA was a trading fund with a negative external financing requirement.

Note:

Grant-in-aid to the UKAEA includes provision for its running costs.

Source:

Government Expenditure Plan Reports.

In the nuclear waste sector, costs of Nirex are met by subscriptions from its members (UKAEA, BNFL and British Energy).

Funding for the nuclear generating sector was provided under the NFFO (Non Fossil Fuels Obligation) and the Non Fossil Fuels Levy (NFFL).

£ million

	Premium income
1990–91	1,265
1991–92	798
1992–93	864
1993–94	895
1994–95	892
1995–96	699

At the time BNFL acquired Magnox Electric in 1998, Magnox Electric benefited from the NFFO and NFFL. Any sums received by Magnox Electric under the NFFO and NFFL were received as part of its trading revenues in the ordinary course of business. Magnox Electric applied these sums in the ordinary course of funding its business of the generation and wholesale supply of electricity, and the de-fuelling and decommissioning of closed Magnox nuclear generating stations.

The NFFL and NFFO also applied in Scotland and had implications for Scottish Nuclear. In 1996, following the flotation of British Energy, the premium payments from SP and SHE under the Nuclear Energy Agreement were ended. The price controls were modified to remove the 'Nuclear Premium'. In 1996–97, the Nuclear Premium for Scotland was £50 million.

BNFL, as a commercial company, does not receive support from Government. However, the Secretary of State announced last November HMG's intention for a Liabilities Management Authority to be established to take responsibility for those BNFL and UKAEA civil nuclear liabilities and associated assets that are properly the responsibility of the State.

The Government are providing British Energy with a credit facility of up to £650 million in respect of the period up to 29 November, and has taken security for the loan over the company's assets. The facility has been provided in respect of the company's working capital requirements and cash collateral for trading in the UK and North America.

Nuclear Safety Directorate

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether the Nuclear Safety Directorate has formal contingency arrangements in the event that a site operator is declared insolvent or put into administration; and if she will place a copy of these arrangements in the Library; [82506]

(2) whether the licence agreements that the Nuclear Safety Directorate negotiates with site operators contain provisions to deal with a site operator being declared insolvent or being put into administration; and if she will place a copy of the relevant clauses in the Library. [82507]

Mr. Wilson: Nuclear site licences contain no provisions regarding the insolvency of a site operator and HSE does not have formal contingency arrangements in the event that a site operator is declared insolvent or put into administration. I understand that HSE is considering how it might increase its surveillance of the safety of nuclear operations and monitor developments on affected sites in such circumstances. My officials are continuing to work closely with the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate to ensure the overriding priority of the safe operation of British Energy's nuclear power stations.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the licence agreements that the Nuclear Safety Directorate negotiates with site operators contain provisions to deal with the accumulation and storage of nuclear waste material; and whether renegotiation of a licence agreement would be required where a site operator implemented a change of policy on nuclear waste material. [82505]

Mr. Wilson: A "licence agreement" is not a recognised instrument of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 (as amended). However, the Act does allow the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to attach conditions to nuclear site licences in the interests of safety or with respect to the handling, treatment and disposal of nuclear material and within the arrangements made by licensees under those conditions the HSE does use formal "agreements" to effect its permissioning role. Any activity on a licensed site requiring HSE's permission is subject to there being an adequate safety case.

Any changes, on the part of a licensee, relating to the storage of nuclear waste at the site would be subject to the acceptance of a revised safety case by HSE. Such changes would need to meet Licence Condition 32, which specifically addresses the accumulation of radioactive waste within the standard set of 36 conditions,. In enforcing this and other licence conditions, HSE's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate takes into account Government policy on radioactive waste management, as set out in Cm2919.

Additionally the licensee's policy on the management of radioactive waste is reviewed through the quinquennial review process, as required by Government policy. Changes in licensee's policy will be identified by this process and assessed by HSE. The results of HSE's assessments and the full set of licence conditions are available on the HSE website http://www.hse.gov.uk/nsd/index.htm.

Offshore Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made by the offshore oil and gas industry in implementing the requirements of the Working Time Directive for the sector, with particular reference to the issues of *(a)* holiday pay, *(b)* annual leave, *(c)* paid travel time, *(d)* work cycles, and *(e)* health and safety for offshore workers. [82769]

Alan Johnson: The Horizontal Amending Directive (HAD) (2000/34/EC) entitles workers in the offshore sector to the full provisions of the Working Time Directive (93/104/EC). The HAD was formally adopted on 1 August 2000 and is required to be implemented by 1 August 2003.

The Government is consulting on its proposals to implement the HAD through amendments to the Working Time Regulations. The consultation which can be found on the DTI website: http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/work time regs/handconsulthtm began on 31 October 2002 and will run until 31 January 2003.

Priority Areas

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 20 November, reference 81766, which wards in Sittingbourne and Sheppey have been selected as priority areas. [83463]

Mr. Timms: For its investment in broadband provision SEEDA prioritises those parts of the region where provision is relatively poor. In general terms, these are areas, including Kent, in the eastern part of the region and rural areas across the region as a whole. The investment is not prioritised on a ward basis.

Small Firms Loans Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what conclusions she has reached as a result of her review of the small firms loans guarantee scheme; and whether it will be extended to *(a)* services and *(b)* those with limited work or credit records. [83462]

Nigel Griffiths: I am considering improvements to the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme. A review of this scheme has been completed and an announcement will be made shortly.

Tear Gas Exports

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent export licences have been granted to *(a)* Paines Wessex and *(b)* other companies for the export of tear gas to Zimbabwe. [82260]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend, the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) on 14 November 2002. A copy of my letter was placed in the Libraries of the House.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Coffee Imports

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that coffee products sold in the UK are labelled to indicate coffee quality. [80946]

Ms Blears: Specific quality claims are not required for coffee products and there are no plans to make them so. Where voluntary claims are made they must comply with the provisions on misleading or false descriptions or claims set out in the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

"Don't Bring Back More Than You Bargained For" Campaign

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent on the "Don't Bring Back More Than You Bargained For" publicity campaign since 8 July 2001, broken down by country. [82409]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* Approximately £421,000 has been spent on the "Don't Bring Back More Than You Bargained For" campaign, launched on 8 July 2002. Some of this money was spent on preparatory work and research prior to the launch.

The campaign deliberately targeted British travellers and holidaymakers, and was not aimed at specific third countries. Therefore there are no costs broken down by country. Our posts abroad have been helping, for example by displaying some posters and distributing leaflets with visa applications.

20-day Rule

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on the 20-day rule. [82221]

Mr Morley: Industry organisations and individual farmers have made a number of representations about the impact of the 20 day standstill. Ministers and officials regularly meet industry representatives to discuss their views on the current animal movement controls.

Air Pollution

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the Government spent in the last year for which figures are available, on monitoring air pollution. [80849]

Alun Michael: Spending by Government in 2001–02 was divided between ambient air quality monitoring (£4.79 million) and air quality monitoring in relation to regulated industrial processes in England and Wales undertaken by the Environment Agency (£2.40 million). Around £2.09 million was recovered by the Agency from process operations in 2001–02.

Airport Security

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which *(a)* seaports and *(b)* airports are being targeted by her Department for additional checks on passenger baggage and freight for illegal imports; and what assessment she has made of the work done in the last 12 months. [82411]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* Additional checks began at two major seaports at the beginning of October this year, and at a third seaport at the beginning of November. Teams have been recruited and are currently in training at two major airports. They are expected to be operational before the end of November. One of these teams will also operate at other airports around the country.

Specific details of staff and ports of operation could benefit potential smugglers.

It is too soon to make an assessment of the impact of these additional checks.

Animal Welfare Bill

Mr. Alan Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the organizations which *(a)* departmental officials and *(b)* ministers are meeting to discuss details of the proposed Animal Welfare Bill, and what matters will be discussed. [83017]

Mr. Morley: The consultation on the proposed Animal Welfare Bill commenced in January 2002. Since that time I have met a wide range of individuals and animal welfare organisations. These meetings are continuing.

We have also organised a series of stakeholder meetings on the Bill. The following organisations have already attended stakeholder meetings:-

British Egg Industry
British Poultry Council Ltd.
National Pig Association
Soil Association
National Farmers Union
Farmers Union of Wales
Meat & Livestock Commission
Royal Agricultural Society of England;
Country Land & Business Association (CLA) Countryside Alliance
Compassion In World Farming
British Association for Shooting and Conservation
Game Conservancy Trust
Game Farmers Association
National Gamekeepers Organisation
Union of Country Sports Workers
Association for the Study of Reptilia and Amphibia
Barnet Association of Responsible Dog Owners
Pro Dogs
Cat Association of Britain
Governing Council of the Cat Fancy
National Mouse Club
Rabbit Welfare Association
British Koi-Keepers' Society
International Herpetological Society
British Goat Society
National Association of Registered Petsitters
Sustainable Users Network
Society for the Protection of Aviculture
Hawk Board

Heythrop Zoological Gardens Ltd
Association of Circus Proprietors of Great Britain
Rona Brown and Associates
RSPCA
Animal Defenders
Captive Animals1 Protection Society
Born Free Foundation
Pet Care Trust
Cage and Aviary Birds
Arkgroup
Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association
Professional Koi Dealers Association
Companion Animal Welfare Council
Farm Animal Welfare Council
Greyhound Rescue Wales
National Canine Defence League
British Greyhound Racing Board
National Greyhound Racing Club
Retired Greyhound Trust—Lincoln
Greyhounds—UK
British Veterinary Association
British Small Animal Veterinary Association,
British Equine Veterinary Association
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
British Veterinary & Zoological Society
Society of British Greyhound Veterinarians

The following have been invited to future meetings:
British Horse Society
International League for the Protection of Horses
Friends, Families & Travellers Advice & Info Unit
Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Centre British Horse Industry Confederation
The Gypsy Council
National Equine Welfare Council
Anti-docking Alliance
Council of Docked Breeds
The Kennel Club
Cat Association of Britain
Association of Chief Police Officers
Police Federation of England & Wales
Mike Radford (UoA)
LACORS
Chartered Inst of Environmental Health
Home Office (SOU & PLPU)
Lord Chancellors Department
Trading Standards Institute
Association of Port Health Authorities
HM Customs & Excise
National Animal Sanctuary Alliance
National Federation of Badger Groups
Safewings
British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council
Mayhew Animal Home
The Monkey Sanctuary
Federation of Zoos
National Association of Cats andDogs Homes
Animal Aid
Birds First
League Against Cruel Sports

CAP Subsidies

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations her Department has received concerning the average payment per hectare from the common agricultural policy's production subsidies for *(a)* organic farmers and *(b)* non-organic farmers within the UK. [81830]

Mr. Meacher: We have received no such representations recently.

Cod

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library the figures which demonstrated that landings of cod did not increase in line with landings of nephrops. [80637]

Mr. Morley: I have placed in the Library a graph which summarises the data which we submitted to the Commission last year on the relationship (or lack of it) between landings of cod and landings of nephrops.

Community Supported Agriculture

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the benefit of community supported agriculture to local communities. [82788]

Mr. Morley: In response to the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food's report, a local food working group, made up of officials from the Department of Health, the Food Standards Agency, the Countryside Agency, the Regional Development Agencies and Defra has been set up. This group is considering the evidence relating to the impacts of local food initiatives, including community supported agriculture, and the wider issues relating to local food so that Government policy in this area can be developed as appropriate. The working group expect to report their findings in spring 2003.

Dairy Farmers (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the financial impact of the 20 day movement standstill on Lancashire dairy farmers. [82201]

Mr. Morley: We have commissioned independent researchers to carry out a detailed cost-benefit analysis into the 20 day standstill in order to gain a better understanding of the economic impact of the current rules. We expect the researchers to examine the impact of the rules both on the livestock industry in aggregate and on individual sectors and sub-groups, including those facing special difficulty. This may include regional impacts, but will not necessarily be broken down by county.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the size was of the average dairy herd in Lancashire in each of the last five years. [82202]

Mr. Morley: Number of holdings, number of cows in dairy herd and average number of these dairy cattle on holdings in Lancashire 1997–2001.

Year	*Holdings*	*Cattle*	*Average*
1997	1,386	89,687	64.7
1998	1,358	88,571	65.2
1999	1,292	89,015	68.9
2000	1,186	84,600	71.3
2001	1,116	85,092	76.3

Notes:
1. Years 2000 and 2001 refer to main and minor holdings. 1997–99 refer to main holdings only.
2. A dairy cow is defined as a cow or heifer in the dairy herd that has calved.

Source:
June Agriculture and Horticultural Census

Dangerous Wild Animal Licences

Mr. David Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when the Government intends to publish the results of its review of Dangerous Wild Animal Licences; [80458]

(2) if she will make it her policy not to require a Dangerous Wild Animal Licence to be held for wild ruminants kept for agricultural purposes. [80457]

Margaret Beckett: We expect to publish proposals early in the New Year on making the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 more effective. These proposals will draw on the findings and recommendations of independent consultants who were commissioned to examine the Act's effectiveness, and the views of the public who were invited to comment on the consultant's report.

The results of the New Year public consultation exercise will help us to decide which animals should be subject to control.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many employees work on matters formerly within the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. [82896]

Alun Michael: There are approximately 5,170 employees (excluding casuals) that work in policy areas formerly within the responsibility of MAFF. This figure excludes staff that work in central service areas that support the entire Department.

In addition, there are approximately 5,760 employees in the Department's executive agencies which were sponsored by the former MAFF.

Diet and Lifestyle

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent efforts have been made to educate the public about promoting *(a)* a balanced diet and *(b)* a healthy lifestyle. [81061]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Standards Agency is engaged in a wide range of activities to promote the uptake of a healthy, balanced diet. Details of these are available from the agency's nutrition action plan on the agency's website (www.food.gov.uk). This encompasses work in schools, information and advice to consumers, including through the agency website and funding research and surveys on barriers to uptake of a balanced diet and how these can be overcome.

The Department's initiatives, as highlighted in the "NHS Plan" (2000), address both access and information. Actions on the latter include generating awareness on breastfeeding, a Five a Day programme to promote fruit and vegetable consumption, support for healthy weight maintenance and initiatives in schools and elsewhere to promote a balanced diet and physical activity.

Farm Animals (Health)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent representations her Department has received concerning *(a)* the health of farm animals in the United Kingdom and *(b)* the need for revised regulations governing the health of farm animals in the United Kingdom; [81904]

(2) what plans she has to revise regulations governing the health of farm animals in the United Kingdom. [81905]

Mr. Morley: The two FMD inquiries commissioned by the Government made a number of recommendations relevant to the health of farm animals and regulation in this area, and the Government's response to the inquiries was published on 6 November 2002.

The suggestion that there might be a general review of animal health legislation is being taken forward by the Department in partnership with the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government in the development of a comprehensive animal health and welfare strategy for Great Britain in consultation with stakeholders. The scope and nature of future legislation will be addressed next year following the publication of the strategy.

Farmers' Markets

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of *(a)* benefits to local farming communities of farmers markets and *(b)* the impact that farmers markets have on retailers. [82789]

Mr. Morley: The most recent assessment of farmers' markets in England and Wales was a business survey carried out by the NFU in July 2002. This reported that the 450 regular farmers' markets currently operating have an annual turnover of approximately £166.3 million with the average earnings of each stallholder being around £8,700. With average farm incomes for 2001 of £7,861, the economic benefits for local farmers participating in farmers' markets are clear.

The business survey did not specifically consider the impact of farmers' markets on retailers but it did report that 80 per cent. of locations had seen increases in trade for neighbouring businesses. This supports the findings of an earlier study carried out on behalf of the Countryside Agency in 2001 on farmers' markets in the South East. This reported that in the opinion of those market organisers and town centre managers that responded most considered that local shops had benefited.

Flood Defence (Shrewsbury)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the reasons underlying her assessment of the likelihood of a further flood defence scheme in Shrewsbury. [82872]

Mr. Morley: Both DEFRA and the Environment Agency have a responsibility to all taxpayers to ensure that value for money is obtained for investment in flood alleviation schemes. My understanding that there is little likelihood that a further flood alleviation scheme could be justified in Shrewsbury is based on the Agency's judgement that the costs of providing such schemes would outweigh the benefits, using the currently agreed methodology. However this methodology is subject to review next year and the Agency will consider any impact on the viability of defence measures for parts of Shrewsbury.

Food Imports

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the value of *(a)* all foodstuffs and *(b)* temperate foodstuffs *(i)* exported from and (ii) imported into the United Kingdom. [80448]

Margaret Beckett: The following table shows the value of UK trade in indigenous and non-indigenous food, feed and drink between 1992–2001. Exports of non-indigenous foods are mainly exports of processed foods manufactured from imported non-indigenous ingredients.

£ million

	Exports			*Imports*		
Year	*Indigenous*	*Non-indigenous*	*Total exports*	*Indigenous*	*Non-indigenous*	*Total imports*
1992	6,322	1,055	7,378	7,705	5,603	13,308
1993	6,913	1,254	8,167	7,836	5,917	13,754
1994	7,620	1,443	9,063	8,222	6,620	14,842
1995	8,473	1,598	10,071	9,130	7,227	16,357
1996	8,378	1,669	10,046	9,921	7,848	17,769
1997	8,233	1,740	9,973	9,574	7,680	17,255
1998	7,511	1,691	9,202	9,732	7,322	17,055
1999	7,276	1,604	8,880	9,923	7,291	17,214
2000	7,216	1,486	8,702	10,088	6,740	16,828
2001	6,943	1,494	8,438	10,952	7,030	17,983

Note:
The above data include an estimate of below threshold data, but exclude an estimate for non-response
Source:
H M Customs and Excise
Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities & Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on plans to review her policy on compensation and slaughter premium payouts during the foot and mouth outbreak. [80139]

Mr. Morley: The Department has reviewed the position and has recently written to those who inquired about compensation and slaughter premium, to confirm that the subsidy itself is not payable in respect of animals culled due to foot and mouth disease because the scheme criteria were not met, and that no adjustment is needed to compensation which was based on market value.

Foxes

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has of the fox population in urban areas in England. [80871]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The Department does not routinely collate data on the levels of urban fox populations, but commissions research into the subject from time to time. A report issued in 1997 estimated the UK urban fox population at 33,000.

Illegal Imports

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations on and discussions she has had with television companies and airline companies about showing her Department's information videos on illegal imports. [82360]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The Central Office of Information (CoI) is responsible for arranging for the distribution of the information videos on behalf of Defra.

CoI have in the past few weeks, telephoned all major UK broadcast media and major airlines operating out of the UK, and sent copies of the information videos to them. Discussions are on-going with the broadcasters and airlines. We will get reports on usage on a quarterly basis.

The videos have been produced as "fillers" which are used when broadcasters do not have enough paid advertising. They are shown on a goodwill basis. Airlines usually prepare their in-flight programming up to three months in advance.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what extended powers have been granted to enforcement authorities to search and seize illegal imports of animal products in commercial consignments and personal baggage; and when those powers were granted. [82410]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* Enforcement officers were granted extended powers under Regulation 8 of the Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports)(England) Regulations 2002, which came into force on 22 May. Enforcement officers were given the power to:

enter any border inspection post or premises (except houses) to inspect anything.

open any bundle, package, packing case or item of luggage.

inspect any product or equipment.

take samples.

Ivory

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on the CITES agreement reached in November on the sale of stocks of ivory. [81822]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The agreement provides South Africa, Botswana and Namibia with the prospect of a one-off sale of legal stocks of raw ivory after May 2004 provided that a number of strict conditions have first been met. These include verification of trading partners by the CITES Secretariat (to prevent illegal ivory entering legal markets), a requirement that baseline data on population and poaching levels is available from the MIKE system (Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants) and any funds raised must be used for elephant conservation. If any of the conditions are not met, the sale will not take place.

The Government believe that the agreement strikes the right balance between meeting the legitimate expectations of the southern African states that they should be able to engage in sustainable utilisation of their natural resources, whilst establishing strict controls to secure the conservation of wider elephant populations.

Mapping

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the accuracy of *(a)* digital mapping and *(b)* Ordnance Survey maps. [83386]

Alun Michael: Digital mapping is an electronic version of Ordnance Survey (OS) large scale maps. These maps are produced to a very high standard.

The accuracy of digital mapping, as in the case of paper maps, depends on the scale and the quality of the original survey and the methods employed.

Statistical information about the accuracy of Ordnance Survey mapping is published on the Ordnance Survey website at www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk.

Meat Inspection

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what consultations she had with meat producers in the North of Scotland prior to the authorising of meat inspection contracts; [80781]

(2) what criteria were used to decide to award a contract for meat inspection in Northern Scotland to a company based in York; [80783]

(3) what assessment she has made of the impact on veterinary practices in Northern Scotland of the decision to award the contract for meat inspection in Northern Scotland to a company based in York; [80782]

(4) what consultations she undertook with the Scottish Executive prior to the award of the contract for meat inspection services in Scotland. [80780]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Meat inspection in Scotland is a devolved matter and Ministerial responsibility rests with Scottish Ministers.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many times she has visited east Lancashire in her official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82397]

Alun Michael: The Secretary of State was in Lancashire on 20 September 2002 this year to officially open the Millennium Ribble Link on behalf of British Waterways.

Mobile Slaughtermen

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many licensed mobile slaughtermen operate in England and Wales. [80461]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised on food safety issues by the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The licensing of slaughtermen in Great Britain is carried out by the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), an Executive Agency of the Food Standards Agency, who took over this task from some 300 local authorities on its establishment in 1995.

No separate licence is issued for mobile slaughtermen.

As at 19 November 2002, there are 7,014 valid slaughtermens' licences in Great Britain.

Oil Seed Rape

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many acres of oil seed rape were grown in England and Wales in 2002. [82733]

Mr. Morley: Defra is able to provide data for England only. Figures for Wales are a matter for the devolved authority. In England 404 thousand hectares (997 thousand acres) of oil seed rape were grown for harvest in 2002. This includes 79 thousand hectares (195 thousand acres) grown for industrial use on set-aside land.

Source:
June Agricultural and Horticultural Census.

Parrett Catchment Project

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the salary is of the chairman of the Parrett Catchment Project for 2000–01 and 2001–02; and whether his salary has been agreed for 2003. [83389]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett Catchment Project is an independent body. I am advised that no salary is paid by the project to the chairman. He is currently entitled to a fee of £150 per day for his work on the project.

He received no fees or expenses at all from the project up to June 2001. From June 2001 to the end of June 2002, he was paid £3,000 in fees, a £1,000 honorarium for extra-contractual work on the successful Intereg 3 bid for EU funds, and £724 in expenses. He has received no payments for fees or expenses since 1 July 2002.

Pet Travel Scheme

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many pet owners used the pet travel scheme in the past 12 months. [82370]

Mr. Morley: Figures are not kept on the number of owners using the scheme. Between 1 October 2001 and 30 September 2002, the most recent 12 months for which figures are available, 38,603 dogs and cats entered England under the pet travel scheme.

Prestige Sinking

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what early assessment she has made of the long-term environmental impact of the sinking of the Prestige off the Spanish Atlantic coast. [83003]

Mr. Morley: It is too early to assess the long term impacts of this oil pollution. Much will depend on the fate of the oil still in the holds of the wreck, and wind and sea conditions in the area. The primary responsibility for assessing the impact will rest with the Spanish authorities. Defra's Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science has contacted the scientists working on impactassessment and has offered any technical assistance they may find helpful Our current assessment is that it is extremely unlikely any oil from the Prestigewill reach the British coast.

Public Bodies

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who is serving on the *(a)* Advisory Committee on New Foods and Processes, *(b)* Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committee, *(c)* Apple and Pear Research Council, *(d)* British Potato Council, *(e)* Consultatative Panel on Badgers and Bovine Tuberculosis, *(f)* Environment Agency Board, *(g)* Farm Animal Welfare Council, *(h)* Food Advisory Committee, *(i)* Food from Britain, *(j)* Harbour Commission, *(k)* Home Grown Cereals Authority, *(l)* Horticulture Research International, *(m)* Meat and Livestock Commission, *(n)* Plant Varieties and Seeds Tribunal, *(o)* Regional Floods Defence Committee and *(p)* Sea Fisheries Committee; and what remuneration they receive. [82344]

Alun Michael: Information on *(a)* The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes and *(h)* the Food Advisory Committee is available from the Food Standards Agency, who report to Parliament through Health Ministers.

Responsibility for appointments to Harbour Commissions was transferred to the Department for Transport in October 2001.

The information requested on the remaining bodies has been placed in the Library of the House.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the second progress report on the Rural White Paper. [82786]

Alun Michael: We now publish a quarterly update on implementation of the Rural White Paper. The most recent update reported progress up to 31 August 2002. The next update will report progress as of 31 December 2002 and will be published in January.

The Rural White Paper Implementation plan is available at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/ruralwp/rwpttable/

Science and Regulatory Agencies

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place copies of the reviews of her Department's science and regulatory agencies in the Library of the House; and if she will make a statement. [81165]

Mr. Morley: We plan to announce the outcome of the Agency Review before the Christmas recess when copies of the report will be placed in the Library of the House.

Seals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to improve reporting and monitoring practices in respect of seals; [80855]

(2) how many seals have been killed *(a)* deliberately and *(b)* accidentally by humans in each year since 1972; and of those killed deliberately, how many were despatched pursuant to section 9 of the Conservation of Seals Act 1970; [80857]

(3) if she will make a statement on the discharge of her responsibilities in relation to seals under *(a)* the EU Habitats Directive, *(b)* Article 8 of the Berne Convention and *(c)* the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; [80853]

(4) what steps she is taking to encourage *(a)* fishermen and *(b)* fish farmers to adopt the use of non-lethal means of seal deterrence; [80854]

(5) what plans she has to review section 9 of the Conservation of Seals Act 1970. [80856]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The Department has no current plans to amend the reporting practices in respect of seals. The status of seal populations in the UK is reported annually by the National Environment Research Council (NERC) based on data produced by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), University of St. Andrews. The activities of SMRU include seeking improvements in the methods used to collect information about seals.

The Department does not keep a record of the total number of seals killed deliberately or accidentally by humans each year.

Article 3 of the EU Habitats Directive requires the UK to identify and select special areas of conservation (SAC) for common seals and grey seals that will make a significant contribution to conserving these species in their natural range. Regulations prohibit certain indiscriminate methods of killing seals, including the use of devices capable of killing or stunning, explosives, crossbows, semi-automatic or automatic weapons with a magazine capable of holding more than two rounds of ammunition.

The obligations of Article 8 of the Bern Convention are implemented by the Conservation of Seals Act 1970 and the Conservation of Seals (England) Order 1999.

Under the Wildife and Countryside Act 1981, it is an offence to use a snare to trap any mammal, including seals.

The Department has no plans at present to influence what methods fishermen or fish farmers should use when deterring seals from their nets.

There are currently no plans to review section 9 of the Conservation of Seals Act 1970.

Second-hand Machinery

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make it her policy to allow second-hand machinery to be bought with processing and marketing grants; [80446]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact on the competitiveness within the EU of British farmers, of the policy of not allowing processing and marketing grants to be used for the purchase of second-hand machinery. [80447]

Margaret Beckett: EU Commission Regulation 445/2002, in the detailed rules on processing and marketing grants, restricts expenditure eligible for aid to new machinery and equipment.

Slaughter Premium Scheme Payments

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Scottish Executive during her review of slaughter premium and compensation. [80140]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA officials have been in regular touch with colleagues in the Scottish Executive about FMD compensation, including the treatment of slaughter premium.

South-East Asia (Exports)

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from British companies seeking to assist South East Asia countries export farm produce to the UK. [83013]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* None. The Government are keen to promote exports of agriculture and food products from the United Kingdom. Promotion of exports to the United Kingdom is a matter for the authorities of the country or countries concerned.

Sustainable Farming and Food Group

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Sustainable Farming and Food Group last met; and if she will lay a copy of the minutes of that meeting in the Library. [81157]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, Chaired by Sir Donald Curry, published its report "Farming and Food—a sustainable future" on 29 January. The Commission last met on 22 January, when it agreed the final text of its report and details of its publication launch.

The formation of an Implementation Group, chaired by Sir Donald Curry, was announced on 25 October. The group will oversee the delivery of the Governments' Strategy on Farming and Food. The Implementation Group will work with the farming and food industries and Government to drive forward those changes.

The group had its first meeting on 28 October at which it discussed a draft of the Governments' forthcoming Farming and Food Strategy, and agreed timings of future meetings and work plans. The group also agreed to establish a website. Summaries of the outcome of meetings will be posted on this once it is established.

Water Buffalo

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which abattoirs in the United Kingdom are licensed to kill water buffalo. [80456]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Any abattoir licensed under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 (as amended) to slaughter bovine animals may slaughter water buffalo, provided it has the capability to handle these animals.

The list of abattoirs licensed to slaughter bovine animals has been placed in the Library. Those known to slaughter water buffalo are shown in bold type.

Wild Mammals (Urban Areas)

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations and discussions she has had regarding the protection of wild mammals in urban areas. [82422]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The Department has not received representations about the general protection of wild urban animals, including urban species, which occur in urban areas on a regular basis. However, we have recently received a number of representations about a licence granted under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 for the purpose of preventing damage to property in East Sussex.

Species are protected by a number of pieces of legislation. The Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996 protects all mammals from indiscriminate methods of killing or taking. In addition certain species, including all birds, are protected from intentional killing by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Badgers, which can occur in urban and suburban areas, are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the number of wild mammals in urban areas by species. [82423]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* At present there is no comprehensive, standardised national monitoring of British mammals that embraces the full range of important species. However, this is being addressed by a GB-wide research contract, "Design and pilot a multi-species terrestrial mammal monitoring project". The overall aim will be to design and pilot, using a volunteer network, a winter monitoring project involving both visual recording of mammals and recording their signs. It is intended to form a building block for an integrated mammal-monitoring system.

In addition Defra has sponsored research into fox populations (report issued in 1997), which estimated the UK urban fox population at 33,000 and an assessment of the level of mice and rats in domestic properties. The results from the last survey, undertaken in 1996, showed that 1.8 per cent. of properties had house mice; 1.7 per cent. of properties had rats outside; 0.4 per cent. of properties had rats inside.

The latest survey was conducted in 2001 and the data from this will be examined shortly. However, due to the vast amount of data collected results are not anticipated until late 2003.

In addition to research carried out by Government, the Mammal Society also runs national surveys looking at the population and distribution of mammal species through the UK and is currently running a "Mammals in Your Garden?" Survey. This survey is looking at the number and variety of mammals seen in gardens. This survey will be annual and will give information about urban mammal populations; the results from the first year should be available early next year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers purportedly from Afghanistan and granted permanent settlement in the last 12 months have subsequently been found to have originated in Pakistan; and if he will make a statement] [82548]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that information is not available on the number of asylum applicants claiming to be from Afghanistan who have been granted asylum (and therefore settlement), and are subsequently found to have originated from Pakistan. The information could only be obtained by examination of individual case files, which would incur disproportionate cost.

Asylum applicants are subject to screening processes designed to test the accuracy of the information that they supply as the basis of their claim, including their origin.

Where a person has obtained leave to enter by deception, they are an illegal entrant and liable to removal under the powers contained in the 1971 Immigration Act. Where someone has obtained leave to remain by deception, they are liable to removal under section 10 (1) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it is his policy to remove Afghan asylum seekers who have failed to gain asylum. [82081]

Beverley Hughes: Under the Tripartite Agreement on voluntary return to Afghanistan signed by the Government, the Transitional State of Afghanistan and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) on 12 October 2002, it was agreed that those found not to be in need of international protection, following proper consideration of their asylum claim would be offered a two month window to choose voluntarily to return to Afghanistan.If they choose not to return voluntarily they will be subject to removal to Afghanistan at a later date.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications are awaiting an initial decision after more than *(a)* six and *(b)* 12 months at the latest date for which figures are available. [82088]

Beverley Hughes: As at the end of June 2002 the number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision for more than six months is estimated to be 19,600, of which 15,800 cases were outstanding after more than 12 months. This includes cases that are currently under consideration and compares with 34,000 and 20,400 such applications as at the end of June 2001.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers whose cases are outstanding or whose appeals have failed, and who are in detention or prison, are pregnant women. [82093]

Beverley Hughes: Pregnant women are not normally detained under the Immigration Acts unless there is a clear prospect of early removal from the United Kingdom and medical advice suggests no question of confinement prior to this. In addition, women in the early stages of pregnancy may be detained briefly at Oakington Reception Centre as part of the fast-track asylum process.

The latest available information on persons detained solely under Immigration Act powers relates to 29 June 2002. As at that date, there were less than five women in detention who were known to be pregnant, all of whom were asylum seekers at Oakington Reception Centre.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers whose cases are outstanding are *(a)* detained and *(b)* detained in prison; and what proportion of each category has been charged with or convicted of a crime. [82094]

Beverley Hughes: The latest available information on the number of people detained solely under Immigration Act powers is for 29 June 2002 and is contained in the table.

	Number as at 29 June 2002[1]
Asylum seekers[2] detained	1,440
Of whom, detained in prison establishments	105

[1] Figures are rounded to nearest 5.

[2] Persons recorded as having sought asylum at some stage.

I regret that information on those detained under Immigration Act powers that have been charged with or convicted of a crime is not available. Information on whether a case is outstanding would be available only by examination of individual case files at disproportionate cost.

The next quarterly information on detainees will be published in "Asylum Statistics: 3rd quarter 2002" on 29 November 2002 on the Home Office website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Car Parking

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81854]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Within the proposed central London charging zone there are:

97 car parking spaces available to employees of the Department, and

33 car parking spaces available to visitors to the Department.

A further 124 spaces are available for use by either staff or visitors as required.

CBRN Incidents

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* firefighters have been trained in dealing with a CBRN incident in each local authority. [82553]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The ability of police forces to respond to a terrorist attack involving the use of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials is being strengthened through the increased provision of specialist police training. Home Office funding is being made available to meet the full running and equipment costs involved. Information about specific numbers of trained police officers in each local authority area is not at present held centrally, but in each police force, four senior officers have so far received training to Gold and Silver Command level. The total number of CBRN trained officers in London to date is approximately 1,100, with approximately 1,250 further officers CBRN trained in police forces in the United Kingdom. The training programme is on-going and I will update these figures on a regular basis.

I understand from my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister that individual records for firefighters training are not available centrally. Interim guidance on dealing with contaminated casualties following a CBRN attack was issued in December 2001. The majority of Fire Service personnel will have received training in these interim procedures, and approximately 120 of the Services' senior commanders have received multi-agency training, which is on-going.

All sides in the current firefighters dispute have agreed to provide cover for large scale terrorists or other civil contingency incidents.

Drug Offenders

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time residential treatment places are available for drug offenders; and how many were available in each of the last three years. [82095]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Residential places within the drug and alcohol sector are not set aside for specific groups of drug misusers such as offenders. However, they will have access on the same terms as anyone else with a drug misuse problem to the approximate 3,100 residential places that were available in 2001. We do not hold central figures for the previous two years.

European Arrest Warrant

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the European Arrest Warrant. [81501]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: A draft Extradition Bill, containing provisions to give effect to the Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant, was contained in a consultation paper published on 27 June. Copies of the responses that were received have been placed in the Library and on the Home Office website.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights produced a report on the draft Bill (Twentieth Report of Session 2001–02, HC 1140) and a number of members of the public have written about the European arrest warrant.

The Extradition Bill was introduced on 14 November 2002.

Illegal Immigration (East Sussex)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal immigrants have been apprehended in East Sussex in the last 12 months. [80716]

Beverley Hughes: I am sorry but this information is not readily available and could only be obtained by examination of individual records at disproportionate cost.

Illegal Immigration (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to deal with illegal immigrants to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland. [82710]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* A common travel area exists between the UK and the Republic of Ireland which, in general, allows free movement between the two countries. There is legislation which imposes conditions of stay on certain categories entering the UK from the Republic of Ireland, but no passport control at the border to physically prevent the entry of any who might be inadmissible.

There are measures to deal with those who do enter orremain unlawfully. As with the rest of the UK, the UK Immigration Service (UKIS), takes enforcement action to remove persons who are in Northern Ireland unlawfully. The Belfast UKIS office regularly receives intelligence from various sources indicating the whereabouts of potential offenders, and after evaluation, such intelligence is often acted upon. In the past 12 months, UKIS staff have removed a total of 94 persons who were in the province unlawfully. (Some of these were illegal workers, others had overstayed their permission to remain). No detailed statistics exist revealing how many of these entered via the Irish Republic but it is known that a significant number did.

In addition UKIS staff routinely liase with the Irish authorities over these and other immigration problems. The Irish authorities do regularly refuse entry to foreign nationals arriving at their ports in transit to Northern Ireland (or the rest of the UK) who are not acceptable here. As an example in the past year they have refused entry to a number of Lithuanians at Dublin Airport who would otherwise have come to Northern
Ireland to work illegally.

I am aware of a recent BBC documentary highlighting cases of illegal workers in Northern Ireland who have entered via Dublin Airport. UKIS officials are in discussion with the Irish authorities to identify ways of ensuring that fewer offenders gain entry to the UK via Dublin Airport.

UKIS staff also liase closely with the Police Service for Northern Ireland with a view to apprehending offenders, disrupting and prosecuting those who facilitate the entry of immigration offenders.

An investigation involving the IS National Criminal Intelligent Service (NCIS) and police officers from two constabularies led last December to the closure of the ABT college in Bristol. This week the individual behind the fraud was sentenced to three and a half year's imprisonment. The investigation provides a good example of the government's determination to stamp out such activity.

Entry Clearance Officers overseas and immigration officers at UK ports ensure that those seeking entry as students meet the relevant criteria as set out in the Immigration Rules (HC 395). During 2001 some 150,600 applications were received at UK missions for student visas. Of these, some38,400 were refused. In addition, 1,945 individuals were refused entry at UK ports having unsuccessfully sought entry as students.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up an inquiry into the trafficking of illegal immigrants into Northern Ireland for the purpose of slave labour. [82784]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The Government have set out its strategy for tackling organised immigration crime: trafficking and smuggling in the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven", published in February. New criminal offences and penalties for trafficking and smuggling were introduced by the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, carrying heavy terms of 14 years imprisonment.

We have established Reflex as a multi-agency response to organised immigration crime into the UK, including Northern Ireland. Reflex is led by the National Crime Squad and engages all the key agencies involved in combating organised immigration crime, including police, immigration services, security and intelligence agencies and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), in building up intelligence and planning operations against the traffickers. Reflex feeds into the Organised Crime Strategy Group, chaired by the Home Office, on which Northern Ireland Office officials sit, and in turn into the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force, established by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, which co-ordinates multi-agency activity against organised crime in Northern Ireland.

The scale of illegal immigration into Northern Ireland does not appear to reflect national trends. While the number of applications for asylum have increased significantly in recent years, they are very small in comparison with the rest of the UK. However, a strategic project to examine organised immigration crime in Northern Ireland is currently being undertaken by Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in co-operation with a number of other Government and law enforcement agencies through the offices of the Organised Crime Task Force. This aims to provide a baseline understanding of the scale and potential growth of the problem.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal immigrants have been intercepted on entering Northern Ireland since 2000; and what action he proposes to take to deal with illegal immigration. [82838]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* A common travel area exists between the UK and the Republic of Ireland which, in general, allows free movement between the two countries. There is legislation which imposes conditions of stay on certain categories entering the UK from the Republic of Ireland, but no passport control at the border to

physically prevent the entry of any who might be inadmissible. Accordingly it is not surprising that no illegal immigrants have been intercepted on entering Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland since 2000.

There are however measures to deal with those who have entered or remained unlawfully. As with the rest of the UK, the UK Immigration Service (UKIS), takes enforcement action to remove persons who are in Northern Ireland unlawfully. The Belfast UKIS office regularly receives intelligence from various sources indicating the whereabouts of potential offenders, and after evaluation, such intelligence is often acted upon.

In the past 12 months, UKIS staff have removed a total of 94 persons who were in the province unlawfully. (Some of these were illegal workers, others had overstayed their permission to remain). No detailed statistics exist revealing how many of these entered via the Irish Republic but it is known that a significant number did.

In addition UKIS staff routinely liaise with the Irish authorities over these and other immigration problems. The Irish authorities do regularly refuse entry to foreign nationals arriving at their ports in transit to Northern Ireland (or the rest of the UK) who are not acceptable here. As an example in the past year they have refused entry to a number of Lithuanians at Dublin airport who would otherwise have come to Northern Ireland to work illegally.

I am aware of a recent BBC documentary highlighting cases of illegal workers in Northern Ireland who have entered via Dublin airport. UKIS officials are in discussion with the Irish authorities to identify ways of ensuring that fewer offenders gain entry to the UK via Dublin airport.

UKIS staff also liaise closely with the Police Service for Northern Ireland with a view to apprehending offenders, disrupting and prosecuting those who facilitate the entry of immigration offenders.

Immigrants (Health Checks)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of health checks at ports of entry to identify those seeking leave of entry who are suffering from infectious diseases. [82563]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Under the Immigration Act 1971, immigration officers are able to refer persons seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom (UK) to Medical Inspectors at ports of entry.

The immigration rules state that immigration officers should refer anyone who mentions health or medical treatment as a reason for coming to the UK, or who appears not to be in good physical or mental health.

In addition, those seeking leave to enter the UK for a period of more than six months should normally be referred. Immigration Officers also have discretion to make referrals in any other cases.

This action at ports of entry is complemented by work done by the national health service (NHS) at local level. The NHS follow up any cases of infection that are identified by the Medical Inspector and arrange any necessary testing which is unavailable at the port.

It is also intended that asylum induction centres will provide basic health screening. To evaluate the specification and benefits of this service, a pilot commenced at Dover Induction Centre during the summer of 2002. The results of the pilot have yet to be evaluated.

Immigration (Shoreham Harbour)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which ships entering Shoreham Harbour in each of the last two years had immigration crew lists which were submitted by Shoreham Port Authority acting as agents. [83312]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* We do not collect the information requested.

Crew lists for commercial vessels using Shoreham are submitted to the UK Immigration Service at Newhaven by the United Kingdom based shipping agents. Shoreham receives no passenger services, but between 10 to 15 commercial vessels arrive each week originating in the United Kingdom, Ireland and elsewhere in Europe. Crew lists for vessels using Shoreham and Newhaven are retained alphabetically by name of vessel for those ships starting their journey in Europe.

Language Schools

Mr. Oliver Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the level of student visa fraud; [82561]

(2) what checks there are in place to prevent the facilitation of illegal immigrants by language schools; [82560]

(3) what action is taken against language schools found to be issuing certificates of enrolment in exchange for cash payments. [82562]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The Immigration Service (IS) is developing an intelligence-led strategy to deal with abuse of the United Kingdom's immigration laws. Where such intelligence suggests that immigration offences are being committed by any college or language school, the IS will pursue, with other agencies as appropriate.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is provided, and how long members of the emergency services will be trained to operate under full NBC protection. [82552]

Mr. Blunkett: All three emergency services have officers equipped and trained in the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) suits. These suits allow them to attend an incident where there has been a release of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) material, and to proceed to carry out their jobs without becoming contaminated themselves.

Since their roles at a CBRN incident vary, the emergency services carry different specifications of PPE suits. The Fire Service, who work in the area of highest contamination, carry the highest grade of PPE suits, which include breathing apparatus. The precise length of time during which the emergency services can operate in a CBRN contaminated environment depends on the nature, volume and method of dispersal of the contaminant, as well as the location of the incident and other environmental factors.

All three services are continuing to increase their numbers of CBRN trained and equipped officers. The Government do not reveal precise details of our response capabilities for reasons of security.

All sides in the current firefighters dispute have agreed to provide cover for any large-scale terrorist or other civil contingency incidents.

Marie Star Cafe

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations have been conducted by the Home Office regarding the issuing of work permits, before 1 September, to workers at the Marie Star Cafe, Belfast; whether the Department of Employment and Learning followed Home Office practice with respect to work permits issued to workers at the Marie Star Cafe before 1 September; and whether the application for work permits specify that they would be lap-dancers and pole-dancers at the Marie Star Cafe, Belfast. [82442]

Beverley Hughes: Before 1 September 2002, the Department of Employment and Learning held responsibility for the issuing of work permits for Northern Ireland. Therefore, the Home Office did not carry out any investigations regarding work permits in Northern Ireland relating to permits issued before that date.

I understand from the Department of Employment and Learning that they followed the same work permit criteria as that used by Work Permits (UK) in the Home Office.

The applications from the Marie Star Café specified the job title as "Professional Stage and Pole Dancers".

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the paperwork relating to the issuing of and re-applications for work permits for workers at the Marie Star Cafe has been passed from the Department of Employment and Learning to the Home Office. [82443]

Beverley Hughes: Yes. Northern Ireland's Department of Employment and Learning transferred all available paperwork relating to work permit applications made in Northern Ireland to Work Permits UK in early September 2002. However, the work permits for the Marie Star Cafe had by that time already been issued by the Department of Employment and Learning.

National Asylum Support Service (Liverpool)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many private landlord properties in *(a)* Leeds and *(b)* Leeds West are used by NASS; and if he will make a statement. [81489]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is as follows:

Leeds: 501
Leeds West: 20.

Prison Visitors (Drug Smuggling)

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on progress in the initiative to ban visitors found smuggling drugs into prisons; and how many visitors were banned during the last six months; [82146]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of introducing CCTV in visits areas on the amounts of drugs smuggled into prisons; [82145]

(3) what assessment he has made of the effect on drug availability in prisons of passive and active drug dogs; [82144]

(4) what assessment he has made of the effect of the low furniture initiative in prison visits areas on the amount of drugs being smuggled into prisons. [82181]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service is taking a number of steps to stifle the availability of drugs in prisons. These measures, which include mandatory drug testing, operate alongside a comprehensive treatment framework and the provision of voluntary drug testing. The overall impact on drug use is demonstrated by the reduction in the positive rate of random mandatory drug tests from 24.4 per cent. (1996–97) to 11.3 per cent. (year to date). The complementary nature of some supply reduction measures, e.g. drug detection dogs, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and low furniture in visits areas, and the complex nature of drug supply make it difficult to determine the impact of any single factor in reducing the availability or use of drugs.

Prisons continue to use the visit bans initiative to take firm action against visitors suspected of smuggling drugs. In 2001–02 (the latest period for which figures are available) a total of 2,815 visitors received a ban.

Prisoner Data

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to collect centrally information on where prisoners served previous sentences. [82824]

Hilary Benn: Prisoner records are held locally at each establishment and, since 1988, this information has been held on the computerised 'Inmate Information System' (US) which provides a central view of prisoners held in England and Wales. Although some pre-1988 records have been placed on the US, 'historical' information remains largely paper-based but is still accessible if required, subject to the normal disposal regime for obsolete files.

Programmes are being developed to extend centralised, electronic record keeping in the Prison Service and other parts of the Criminal Justice System.

Probation Service (Surrey)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of Government grants to the Surrey Probation Service was in each of the last five years. [82091]

Hilary Benn: Home Office Grant to Surrey Probation Service (Surrey local area from April 2001) for the financial years 1997–98 to 2001–02 is in the following table.

£

	Home Office grant	*Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*	*Total grant*
Revenue grant			
2001–02[1]	*6,533,000*	*Nil*	*6,533,000*
2000–01[2]	*5,065,608*	*1,256,402*	*6,322,010*
1999–2000[2]	*4,735,765*	*1,183,941*	*5,919,706*
1998–99[2]	*4,605,734*	*1,151,433*	*5,757,167*
1997–98[2]	*4,673,058*	*1,168,264*	*5,841,322*
Capital grant			
2001–02[1]	374,293	Nil	374,293
2000–01[2]	43,307	10,827	54,134
1999–2000[2]	37,482	9,370	46,852
1998–99[2]	85,009	21,252	106,261
1997–98[2]	34,882	8,720	43,602

[1] he National Probation Service was established on 1 April 2001 and 100 per cent. grant funding was provided by the Home Office to local probation areas.
[2] Prior to April 2001, the Home Office provided 80 per cent. grant funding to probation services. Local authorities funded the balance of 20 per cent. from grant provided by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

Public Enquiry Office, Lunar House

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were dealt with at the PEO at Lunar House on Monday 11 November. [81502]

Beverley Hughes: There were 1,129 callers to Croydon's Public Enquiry Office on 11 November 2002.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Authorities (Fraud)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* local authority staff and *(b)* members of the public were found to have been involved in fraudulent activities against local authorities in each year since 1997; and at what financial cost. [83270]

Mr. Leslie: Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission have been instructed to report to the commission all cases of fraud over £1,000 in value. Benefit frauds of up to £5,000 can be reported jointly, but those over £5,000 are reported individually. The number of fraud cases arising from staff actions (some of which involved more than one member of staff) were:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Total value (£)*	*Including number of benefits cases*	*Value of benefits cases (£)*
1997–98	1,372	5,093,871	729	1,126,680
1998–99	936	3,409,833	369	809,039
1999–2000	877	4,212,967	405	762,907
2000–01	1,304	4,378,461	722	1,838,833
Totals	4,489	17,095,132	2,225	4,537,459

Figures on the exact number of members of the public involved in fraudulent activities against local authorities are not held centrally. The number of fraud cases arising from actions outside of local authorities (for example members of the public, suppliers etc.) were:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Total value (£)*	*Value of benefits cases (£)*
1997–98	231,540	83,605,802	76,792,355
1998–99	229,826	100,985,614	93,891,266
1999–2000	145,302	96,258,275	91,683,235
2000–01	111,890	100,005,357	92,948,383
Totals	718,558	380,855,048	355,315,239

Local Government Finance

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what proportion of the standard spending assessments in each local authority in England and Wales was financed by total external support in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 2002–03; and if he will make a statement; [82816]

(2) what the level of *(a)* total external support and *(b)* standard spending assessment was in each individual local authority in England and Wales in *(i)* 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 2002–03. [82812]

Mr. Raynsford: The figures for the proportion of the standard spending assessments in each local authority in England that was financed by total external support in 1996–97, 1997–98 and 2002–03 have been placed in the House Library. Figures for Welsh authorities are the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government.

The figures for the level of total external support and standard spending assessment for each individual local authority in England in 1996–97, 1997–98 and 2002–03 have been placed in the House Library. Figures for Welsh authorities are the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Total external support consists of revenue support grant, redistributed national non-domestic rates, central support protection grant, SSA reduction grant, principal formula police grant and GLA general grant.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services in North Devon; and if he will make a statement. [83780]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce the new system for distributing Formula Grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be around the start of December. Once the Government has allocated its grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the level of central funding by his Department of *(a)* Cheshire county council, *(b)* Chester city council, *(c)* Vale Royal borough council and

(d) Crewe and Nantwich borough council in each of the last five years; and what the average funding of county, city and borough councils in England was in those years. [81263]

Mr. Raynsford: The available information on funding provided by my Office for the local authorities for which figures were requested is given in the tables.

The figures included in the tables exclude funding provided by the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions for areas of work that are now the responsibility of the Department for Transport and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Cheshire county council

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Revenue funding					
Revenue support grant	245,586	156,322	160,037	152,227	166,347
Redistributed business rates	190,219	136,007	148,064	168,034	163,467
Beacon council grant	—	—	—	—	39
Invest to save budget[1]	—	—	—	235	235
Total revenue funding	435,805	292,329	308,101	320,496	330,088
Capital funding					
Basic credit approvals issued	6,515	6,160	6,831	6,554	4,237
Reorganisation costs SCA[2]	2,169	1,980	—	—	—
Capital challenge—non-housing SCA[2]	1,285	1,525	550	—	—
Social housing grant	—	—	—	—	13
Total capital funding	9,969	9,665	7,381	6,554	4,250

[1] 25 per cent. is capital funding
[2] SCA = supplementary credit approvals

Chester city council

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Revenue funding					
Revenue support grant	3,430	3,390	3,381	3,223	3,458
Redistributed business rates	3,812	3,824	4,082	4,521	4,412
Central support protection grant	—	—	100	—	—
Housing revenue account subsidy[1]	4,989	4,341	3,807	2,220	72
Supporting people grant	—	—	—	—	20
Total revenue funding	12,231	11,555	11,370	9,964	7,962
Capital funding					
Basic credit approvals issued	—	—	2,163	2,628	624
Capital challenge—non-housing SCA[2]	1,218	491	—	—	—
Capital receipts initiative—non-housing SCA[2]	—	159	—	—	—
Capital receipts initiative—housing SCA[2]	310	1,090	964	—	—
Cash incentive scheme SCA[2]	140	65	—	—	—
Social housing grant	53	20	235	—	321
Housing defects grants—loan charges: repurchase[3]	2	2	2	2	2
Single regeneration budget[4]	672	912	897	745	706
Total capital funding	2,395	2,739	4,261	3,375	1,653

[1] HRA subsidy figures for 2001–02 are estimates, as payments have yet to be completed. Chester city council has been given permission to close its housing revenue account, but has not yet done so.
[2] SCA = supplementary credit approvals.
[3] Eligible for housing defects grant in 2000–01 and 2001–02, but not claimed.
[4] Paid to Chester city council as the accountable body for the regeneration of West Chester project. This excludes any SRB funding paid to the council as project deliverer.

Crewe and Nantwich

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Revenue funding					
Revenue support grant	3,107	3,258	3,166	2,996	3,289
SSA reduction grant	284	—	—	—	—
Redistributed business rates	3,606	3,646	3,924	4,359	4,289
Central support protection grant	—	—	98	—	—
Housing revenue account subsidy[1]	3,781	3,379	3,044	2,520	5,677
Supporting people grant	—	—	—	—	20
Total revenue funding	10,778	10,283	10,232	9,875	13,275

Crewe and Nantwich

£000

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
Capital funding					
Basic credit approvals issued	914	650	752	2,747	447
Capital receipts initiative—non-housing SCA[2]	—	50	—	—	—
Capital receipts initiative—housing SCA[2]	256	900	747	—	—
Social housing grant	24	—	41	44	206
Housing defects grants for loan charges: reinstatements[3]	52	52	52	52	52
Housing defects grants for loan charges: repurchase[3]	2	2	2	2	2
Total capital funding	1,248	1,654	1,594	2,845	707

[1] HRA subsidy figures for 2001–02 are estimates, as payments have yet to be completed.
[2] SCA = supplementary credit approvals.
[3] 2001–02 housing defects grant figures are provisional.

Vale Royal

£000

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
Revenue funding					
Revenue support grant	1,936	1,935	1,819	1,557	1,809
SSA reduction grant	30	—	—	—	—
Redistributed business rates	3,640	3,696	4,014	4,485	4,442
Central support protection grant	—	—	132	—	—
Housing revenue account subsidy[1]	2,978	2,268	1,721	1,321	4,953
Neighbourhood warden team	—	—	—	—	23
Supporting people grant	—	—	—	—	20
Invest to save budget[2]	—	—	—	48	—
Total revenue funding	8,585	7,899	7,686	7,411	11,247
Capital funding					
Basic credit approvals issued	697	193	603	2,570	707
Capital receipts initiative—housing SCA[3]	303	1,048	901	—	—
Cash incentive scheme SCA[3]	17	—	—	—	—
Total capital funding	1,017	1,241	1,504	2,570	707

[1] HRA subsidy figures for 2001–02 are estimates, as payments have yet to be completed.
[2] 25 per cent. is capital funding.
[3] SCA = supplementary credit approvals.

The following table gives information on the combined total of revenue support grant and redistributed businesses rates paid to shire county councils and shire district councils in each of the last five years.

Revenue support grant and redistributed business rates

£ million

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
Shire counties	6,478	10,048	10,545	11,036	11,524
Shire districts	1,348	1,346	1,377	1,430	1,496
Average amount per authority					
Shire counties	190.5	295.5	310.1	324.6	338.9
Shire districts	5.2	5.7	5.8	6.0	6.3

Planning (Surrey)

Sue Doughty: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received concerning Surrey County Council's Spatial Strategy; and if he will make a statement. [83446]

Mr. Raynsford: Since the publication of the draft Spatial Strategy in July, the First Secretary of State has received almost 250 representations from Surrey residents about possible housing development north east and north west of Guildford and south of Woking. We will consider what representations to make on the Deposit Draft Structure Plan, if any, when it is issued for public consultation.

Population Estimates

Ann Winterton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the population of each standard region of England; and for what reasons the standard region is being used as the basic unit for elected regional assemblies. [82727]

Mr. Raynsford: Annex A of the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511) includes the most recent population figures for each region at the time of the publication of the White Paper in May 2002. These figures were drawn from "Regional Trends 36" (Office for National Statistics, 2001). The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics, as published in "Regional Trends 37", will be placed in the Library.

Chapter 6 of the White Paper makes clear that these regions represent the existing administrative boundaries used by the Government Offices for the regions, the regional development agencies and other parts of central Government, as well as being the standard statistical regions used by the Office for National Statistics. These regions have existed for various planning and statistical purposes since the Second World War, with minor changes over time. They are also a credible size to support a regional assembly and to differentiate the assembly from local government in the region.

Regional Assemblies

Ann Winterton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the ways in which elected regional assemblies will increase democratic accountability; what proposals he has to encourage voter interest in regional assembly elections; and if he will make a statement. [82726]

Mr. Raynsford: A detailed assessment of the ways in which elected regional assemblies will increase democratic accountability is set out in the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511), particularly in chapters 1 and 3.

Publicity about voting in elections for regional assemblies will be a matter for the Electoral Commission. More generally, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has embarked upon an ambitious programme of electoral modernisation pilot schemes, of which the aim is to make voting more straightforward, efficient, secure and above all readily accessible to all electors.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 27 November 2002

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

BBC

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the organisations that have made representations to her about the commercial effect on their business of the BBC's activities. [80434]

Dr. Howells: A number of organisations have made representations, as part of the consultation process on new BBC public services and on an ad hoc basis, including broadcasters, educational software publishers, independent producers and platform operators.

BBC Freeview

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many advertisements for Freeview have been broadcast on *(a)* BBC television and *(b)* BBC radio; and if she will make a statement. [81778]

Dr. Howells: The BBC has not broadcast any advertisements for Freeview on either its radio or television services, but between 4 November and 20 November, it broadcast 70 information trails about its digital services on BBC One and BBC Two and around 170 on its five national radio networks. These trails inform viewers that the BBC's digital services can be accessed on Freeview, but also make clear that they are available on the digital satellite and digital cable platforms.

Correspondence

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when she will reply to letters from Mr. Borthwick of Workington and the hon. Member for Workington to the Department of 13 April, 12 June, 26 July and 20 September. [80695]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts (Baroness Blackstone) has today replied to the letter of 26 July from the hon. Member for Workington which covered those of 13 April and 12 June from his constituent Mr Borthwick.

I apologise for the delay in the handling of correspondence both from Mr. Borthwick and the hon. Member for Workington. My Department aims to reply to Members' correspondence and correspondence from the public within 18 working days of receipt. I regret that this did not happen here.

Creative Industries

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent assessment she has made of her Department's involvement in facilitating and promoting competitiveness of British creative industries *(a)* at home and *(b)* abroad; and if she will make a statement. [83745]

Dr. Howells: The Department is working in partnership with other Government Departments and representatives of the creative industries to enhance their economic performance at home and overseas. More recent figures from official sources suggest that in 2000 the creative industries:

generated revenues of £76.6 billion

provided jobs for 1.95 million

account for 7.9 per cent. of GDP

Film Council

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the objectives of the Film Council; and if she will make a statement. [83757]

Dr. Howells: When the Film Council was established in April 2000, it was set 13 goals for film which had been identified in the course of the Film Policy Review (1998). These goals have formed the basis of the funding agreement with my Department. Progress against the funding agreement is reviewed regularly.

Lottery

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of *(a)* the effectiveness of her Department's transfer of functions from the Director General of the Office for National Lottery to the National Lottery Commission and *(b)* the relationship between her Department and the National Lottery Commission; and if she will make a statement. [83781]

Dr. Howells: The National Lottery Act 1998 made provision for the replacement of the office of Director General of the National Lottery by the National Lottery Commission; and I am satisfied that Parliament made the right decision in approving this change. Schedule 1 to the 1998 Act set out the transitional arrangements for the transfer of functions, which worked as intended. The relationship between the commission and the Department is as it should be. However, we published earlier this year a consultation document reviewing the way in which the National Lottery is now licensed and regulated, and seeking views on options for further change. We will announce our conclusions in due course.

Sports Funding

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list Sport England's Exchequer and Lottery-funded programmes and initiatives. [80965]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England's current programmes are as follows:

Space for Sport and Arts

New Opportunities Fund PE and Sport

Club Development—not started

Community Capital Fund

Governing Bodies Facilities strategies

Quest
Benchmarking
PPP and PFI
Best Value
Talent camps
Clubmark
Sporting Champions
Sports Sponsorship Advisory Service
Sports Gateway
Sport England Direct
Sports Aid
Governing Bodies Awards
English Institute of Sport Services
Sports Science/Medicine
World Class programmes
Commonwealth Games
National Centres
English Institute of Sport facilities funding and development
Active Communities Development Fund
Sport Action Zones
Awards for All
Positive Futures
Active Communities Projects
Active Communities Infrastructure Posts -regional
British Heart Foundation,
National Association of Clubs for Young People
Kids Club Network
Local Exercise Action Pilots (LEAP)
Football Foundation
National Strategy for Education and Training
Step Into Sport
Volunteer Investment Programme (VIP)
Coaching Development
National Association for Sports Development—funding and liaison
National Sports Development Seminar— funding and liaison
Sport Development Professionals Regional Induction initiative
Sport Development Professionals Supporting Infrastructure—Regional Training Units
Running Sport
Active Sports
Child Protection in Sport Unit
School Sport Coordinators
Sportsmark and Activemark
Sportsearch
Panathlon
Education infrastructure and Sport Alliances
Coaching for teachers
Adults other than Teachers
Playing Fields and Green Spaces
Statutory Planning
Strategic Planning—Facility Planning Model
Safer Sports Ground
National projects
Sportsmatch
CCPR Funding
Football Youth Development

As part of its modernisation process, Sport England is reviewing all the programmes that it funds based on its new business strategy; it expects the review to be completed by the end of the year.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the sustainability strategy is for her Department; and if she will make a statement on how it has changed since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [83496]

Dr. Howells: As part of our long-term objective to maximise the Department's contribution to the Government's agenda on sustainable development and regeneration policy, we promised last April at a conference for our sectors held at the Science Museum to produce a sustainable development strategy. We are on target to fulfil this obligation.

Since the World Summit, my Department has identified among its strategic priorities; the aim of enhancing access to a fuller cultural and sporting life of children and young people, giving them the opportunity to develop their talents to the full; and of improving the productivity of the tourism, creative and leisure industries. These are in line with one of the main programmes for activity agreed at the World Summit, that of eradicating poverty.

Travel Budget

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total budget is for *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies for official travelling in 2002–03. [83030]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The DCMS budget for official travelling and subsistence for 2002–03 is £934,894. In addition, the budget for the Royal Parks Agency is £37,700.

Works of Art (Restitution)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress concerning the restitution of works of art looted by the Nazis. [82955]

Dr. Howells: The Spoliation Advisory Panel received two new claims this year, following its Report on the first claim which was published in January 2001. The Panel met in October 2002 to consider these new claims and will meet again in early 2003 to continue its discussions, when other claims which have been intimated may also be considered.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aid (Poorest Countries)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to press other EU countries to *(a)* apply the EU Procurement Directive regarding tied aid and *(b)* increase the proportion of aid given to the poorest countries. [83192]

Clare Short: We support the Commission's efforts to ensure that member states' aid programmes comply with Community law. The Commission has recently presented to the Council of Ministers a Communication

on Untying which reiterates member states' obligation to apply the Procurement Directives to their bilateral programmes.

Poverty elimination is the stated objective of EU development programmes. Nine of the fifteen member states provide more than 70 per cent. of their aid to the poorest countries. The record for Commission-managed aid is much less poverty focused and is 45 per cent. We continue to press in the Council and in annual budget discussions with the European Parliament for higher priority to be given to poor countries in allocating EC development funds.

Developing Countries

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to help Governments in poorer countries in their efforts to provide targeted support and protection for local producers. [82911]

Clare Short: My Department provides support to Governments of developing countries that are designed to meet the different circumstances and needs of a broad range of producers living in those countries. These include efforts to make Government policy more responsive to the demands of poor producers, activities to strengthen the operation of local institutions, interventions designed to improve food security as well as support designed to lead to improved delivery of rural goods and services. We also provide support to a range of international organisations that work closely with Governments in developing countries and seeks to enhance the effectiveness of any interventions agreed between these parties.

East Timor

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what discussions her Department has had with *(a)* the Government of Indonesia, *(b)* the Government of East Timor and *(c)* the UNHCR to ensure the return of children being held illegally in West Java to their families in East Timor; [80569]

(2) what assessment her Department has made of the number of East Timorese children being held illegally in West Java; and what assessment her Department has made of the number of children that have been returned to their families in East Timor. [80568]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

The violence and confusion surrounding the 1999 referendum on East Timor's status and the subsequent Indonesian withdrawal led to some children becoming separated from their families. There are no reliable figures for the number of children that were separated but the UNHCR estimates around 800 cases remain unresolved, mostly in West Timor.

We are in regular contact with the UN Mission in East Timor and UNHCR on this sensitive issue, most recently, on 4 October 2002. We have also encouraged the Governments of Indonesia and East Timor to find a solution to this problem.

Ethiopia

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* international organizations about providing debt relief to Ethiopia. [83155]

Clare Short: We support international efforts to reduce Ethiopia's debt burden. Ethiopia qualified for interim debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) at Decision Point (DP) in November 2001. Irrevocable relief will be provided at HIPC Completion Point, which is expected within the next two years. Savings resulting from HIPC assistance will amount to around US$ 96 million per year on average until 2021. Ethiopia owes the UK £15.4 million. Provided Ethiopia remains on track with its programme of economic reform, Ethiopia will not be required to make any further payments on its debt to the UK after DP.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what long term plans she has to provide Ethiopia with development aid to help that country develop *(a)* irrigation system and *(b)* food storage facilities; and if she will make a statement. [83158]

Clare Short: An important component of our long-term development assistance to Ethiopia is work on improving food security. As one aspect of their food security strategy the Government of Ethiopia plans to increase access to irrigation and so help boost agricultural productivity. DFID is supporting the establishment of the Eastern Nile Technical Regional Office in Addis Ababa, which in coordination with Sudan and Egypt, plans to improve use of Nile waters for a range of users including irrigation. We have funded improvements in the food storage facilities of the Ethiopian Food Security Reserve Administration, which now has expanded capacity and a more efficient stock management regime. The EFSRA plays a vital role in ensuring the stability of food supplies to organisations distributing food relief to those in need.

Good Governance

Mr. Caton: Mr. Martin Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what criteria her Department employs in assuring good governance in other countries. [83364]

Clare Short: Our strategy to support developing and transitional countries build the institutions of an effective, inclusive, modern state is outlined in the document "Making Government Work for Poor People", which was published in September 2001 and placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

We encourage poor countries to take the lead in improving the quality of governance in developing countries. To this end we have helped the development of the governance assessments that will form part of the peer reviews of African countries in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). We are also working with the World Bank and other international development agencies to ensure that

governance issues are properly reflected in poverty reduction strategies beingprepared for decisions on debt relief and for World Bank and IMF lending

These objectives and indicators are included in DFID's Service Delivery Agreement of its Public Service Agreement.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the sustainability strategy is for her Department; and how it has changed since the Earth Summit in Johannesburg. [83445]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 651W.

My Department does not have a free-standing sustainability strategy. We focus on improving the effectiveness of the international development effort to reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including the goal of ensuring environmental sustainability. This continues to be our focus following the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

My Department works to promote economic growth that is equitable and environmentally sustainable, and works with developing countries to ensure that their poverty reduction strategies reflect the need to manage environmental resources sustainably. The World Summit gave an impetus to this work by integrating sustainability into the international agenda agreed at the Doha meeting of the World Trade Organisation and the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development.

TRANSPORT

No-fly Zone (Scotland)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what process is required to introduce a no-fly zone of *(a)* commercial and *(b)* military flights over towns and cities in Scotland; [83528]

(2) if he will assess the no-fly zone status of commercial and military flights over areas in Scotland that contain petro-chemical plants; [83527]

(3) what plans there are to review the no-fly zone status for both commercial and military flights over towns in Scotland; [83526]

(4) what *(a)* commercial and *(b)* military no-fly zones have been in operation in Scotland since *(i)* January 2001 and (ii) 11 September 2001; and what locations have been covered. [83529]

Mr. Spellar: Following a request from the appropriate Government Department or, in some cases, the local police force, the Civil Aviation Authority drafts a Statutory Instrument (SI). This is ratified by the Department for Transport before being notified to the entire aviation community by means of a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM). The SI, which may be temporary or permanent in effect, is binding on civil aircraft only, but military aircraft will normally comply. This process applies to all UK airspace.

Towns and cities or petro-chemical plants do not have specific 'no-fly zones' unless already in the vicinity of restricted airspace. The Rules of the Air Regulations 1996 prohibit flying by civil aircraft below a height 1,500 feet above any town or city (unless landing or taking off). Military regulations in Volume 3, Part 1 (UK Military Low Flying System) of the UK Military Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) introduce avoidance criteria for military aircraft.

From January 2001 to 10 September 2001 there was no change to airspace restrictions in Scottish airspace currently published as permanent in the UK Air Navigation Order (ANO) and Aeronautical Information (AIP). These include the Highlands Restricted Area (HRA) and sites such as Dounreay, Faslane, Rosyth and Chapelcross.

From September 2001 the following temporary airspace restrictions have been in operation for the periods and reasons shown:

11 September to 12 September 2001, Entire Scottish Flight Information Region, in response to events of 11 September.

11 September to 12 September 2001, Entire Scottish Upper Flight Information Region, in response to events of 11 September.

11 September 2001 to 12 September 2001, Hebrides Upper Airspace Control Area, in response to events of 11 September.

22 February 2002 to 24 February 2002, Perth—Scottish Labour Party Conference.

13 September 2002 to 14 September 2002, RAF Leuchars—Air Show.

In addition, temporary restrictions were imposed around Hunterston and Torness Nuclear Power Stations from 3 November 2001, which were made permanent as from 5 September 2002.

The Government continue to monitor the number and extent of no-fly zones across the UK.

Portland Helicopter Rescue Operation

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the planned consolidation of the Portland sea helicopter rescue operation to Lee-on-Solent. [81654]

Mr. Jamieson: No decision has yet been made on the consolidation (relocation) of the Portland area helicopter to Lee-on-Solent.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made regarding the changes to recovery times if the possible consolidation of the Portland sea helicopter rescue operation to Lee-on-Solent goes ahead. [81655]

Mr. Jamieson: A risk assessment has been made on the effect of relocating the Portland area helicopter to Lee-on-Solent which indicates that the national criteria for UK Search and Rescue helicopters will continue to be met both in terms of response and recovery times.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will allow a private company to purchase and lease back to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency the hangar for the Portland Sea helicopter rescue operation. [81656]

Mr. Jamieson: A range of options for the future of the hanger at Portland are being considered by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) appropriate to operational requirements for now and in the future.

Rescue Times

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the risk to lives caused by the changes to a 60 minute limit on rescue times in medium to high risk areas. [81658]

Mr. Jamieson: The national criteria for UK Search and Rescue helicopters, which includes the response to incidents in medium to high risk areas was established by the UK Search and Rescue Operators Group under the aegis of the UK Search and Rescue Strategic Committee and implemented in April this year following the endorsement of Ministers. The operators group has experienced representatives from all UK Search and Rescue providers including the Department for Transport (DfT), Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), Ministry of Defence (MOD), Home Office, Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), Police, Fire, Ambulance and Mountain Rescue, together with the Association of Lowland Search and Rescue, teams in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The group considered an operational analysis of the risk assessment which introduced the national criteria.

Roadworks

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to reduce the time taken by utility companies to complete roadworks; and if he will make a statement. [83147]

Mr. Jamieson: We are taking a range of measures to deal with this problem.

Regulations under section 74 of the New Road and Street Works Act came into force in April 2001. These allow highway authorities to charge utilities up to £2000 a day for works which overrun an agreed deadline. Over 120 authorities in England are using these powers which should encourage utilities to carry out their works more quickly and reduce disruption. We have appointed consultants (Halcrow) to monitor the effectiveness of these powers.

Further "lane rental" powers under the Act are also being tested in pilot schemes. These allow authorities to charge utility companies "lane rental" charges of up to £750 for each of their works, regardless of whether these overrun or not. These pilots are running in Middlesbrough and Camden and Halcrow are also monitoring their results in order to decide whether these powers should be applied throughout England.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Planning

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (1) what assessment she has made of the workings and implementation of the sections of PPG8 which relate to telecommunications operators consulting with the public; and if she will make a statement; [82676]

(2) if she will take measures to ensure that the sections of PPG8 which relate to telecommunications operators consulting with the public are consistently implemented; and if she will make a statement. [82677]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

In August 2001 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister introduced improved planning arrangements for telecommunications development. These included improved requirements for consulting local people, backed by tougher guidance in Planning Policy Guidance Note 8. The mobile phone network operators also published last year their Ten Commitments to best siting practice for new development. A key objective is to improve dialogue and consultation with local communities in developing mobile phone networks.

A Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development, produced jointly by representatives of central and local government and the mobile phone industry, was published on 11 November 2002. Copies of which can be found in the House Library. It builds on Government guidance and operators' commitments and provides clear and practical advice to ensure the delivery of significantly better and more effective communication and consultation between operators, local authorities and local people. Standardised practice will promote greater consistency of approach and aid the transparency of the process for all concerned.

The Federation of the electronics industry has commissioned a review by Deloitte and Touche to thoroughly assess the implementation of the ten commitments including the commitment related to improved consultation with local communities. The review has not yet been completed, but we expect to see the results by the end of 2002.

Abandoned Cars

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many abandoned cars each local authority in England and Wales stated in their submissions to the Municipal Waste Survey in each year since 1997. [82500]

Alun Michael: As indicated in the reply on 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 176W, to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), the question on abandoned vehicles was asked for the first time in the 2000–01 Municipal Waste Management Survey. Figures from the survey show that 288 local authorities in England and Wales, out of a total of 376, responded

to the number of abandoned vehicles question. The authorities and the numbers of abandoned vehicles removed and destroyed reported are listed as follows:

Authority	*No. of vehicles*
Adur	793
Alnwick	54
Amber Valley	147
Arun	590
Ashford	612
Aylesbury Vale	507
Babergh	391
Barking and Dagenham	2,761
Barnet	3,287
Barnsley	248
Basildon	1,529
Basingstoke and Deane	780
Bassetlaw	92
Bath and NE Somerset	796
Bedford	876
Bexley	1,356
Birmingham	5,466
Blaby	113
Blaenau Gwent	960
Blyth Valley	110
Bolsover	249
Boston	65
Bournemouth	878
Bracknell Forest	707
Bradford	2,600
Braintree	554
Breckland	238
Brent	3,471
Brentwood	400
Bridgnorth	37
Brighton and Hove	4,000
Bromley	3,895
Bromsgrove	119
Broxbourne	1,393
Broxtowe	171
Caerphilly	1,800
Calderdale	441
Cambridge	261
Camden	1,629
Cannock Chase	30
Canterbury	809
Caradon	108
Carmarthenshire	120
Carrick	174
Castle Point	450
Ceredigion	150
Charnwood	153
Chelmsford	800
Chesterfield	45
Chester-le-Street	18
Chichester	600
Chiltern	195
Christchurch	73
City of Bristol	2,590
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	717
City of London	0
Colchester	319
Conwy	250
Corby	504
Cotswold	67
County of Herefordshire	368
Craven	0
Crawley	1,145
Croydon	2,878
Dacorum	1,150
Darlington	98
Dartford	483
Daventry	388
Derby	579
Derbyshire Dales	40
Derwentside	15
Doncaster	410
Dover	469
Dudley	234
Durham City	39
Ealing	3,754
Easington	14
East Cambridgeshire	330
East Devon	288
East Dorset	279
East Hampshire	209
East Hertfordshire	355
East Lindsey	226
East Northamptonshire	191
East Riding of Yorkshire	227
East Staffordshire	164
Eastbourne	631
Eastleigh	200
Enfield	4,711
Epping Forest	1,838
Epsom and Ewell	360
Erewash	270
Fenland	176
Flintshire	100
Forest Heath	145
Forest of Dean	186
Gateshead	149
Gloucester	700
Gosport	496
Gravesham	884
Great Yarmouth	255
Greenwich	3,120
Guildford	724
Gwynedd	619
Hackney	2,700
Hambleton	96
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,430
Harborough	550
Haringey	6,500
Harlow	1,240
Harrogate	143
Harrow	1,914
Hart	256
Hartlepool	55
Hastings	1,100
Havant	897
Havering	1,250
Hertsmere	534
High Peak	87
Hillingdon	2,286
Hinckley and Bosworth	353
Horsham	173
Hounslow	2,247
Ipswich	785
Isles of Scilly	0
Islington	2,619
Kennet	54
Kensington and Chelsea	195
Kerrier	232
Kettering	350
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	271
Kingston upon Thames	739
Kirklees	287
Lambeth	3,308
Leeds	877
Leicester	1,416
Lewes	470
Lewisham	5,000
Lichfield	271
Lincoln	136
Luton	2,403
Maidstone	1,015
Mansfield	650

Authority	No. of vehicles
Medway	1,157
Melton	30
Mendip	250
Merthyr Tydfil	482
Merton	1,683
Mid Bedfordshire	584
Mid Devon	376
Mid Suffolk	145
Mid Sussex	347
Mole Valley	621
Monmouthshire	244
New Forest	474
Newark and Sherwood	289
Newcastle-under-Lyme	150
Newham	6,704
Newport	789
North Cornwall	266
North Devon	33
North Dorset	60
North East Derbyshire	70
North East Lincolnshire	267
North Hertfordshire	332
North Kesteven	101
North Lincolnshire	135
North Norfolk	66
North Somerset	570
North Tyneside	451
North Warwickshire	133
North West Leicestershire	267
Northampton	1,682
Norwich	351
Nottingham	586
Nuneaton and Bedworth	183
Oadby and Wigston	58
Oswestry	129
Oxford	1,455
Pembrokeshire	487
Plymouth	1,779
Poole	649
Portsmouth	826
Powys	606
Purbeck	89
Reading	1,090
Redbridge	1,562
Reigate and Banstead	718
Restormel	266
Richmond upon Thames	1,201
Richmondshire	9
Rother	336
Rotherham	150
Runnymede	609
Rushcliffe	181
Rushmoor	375
Rutland	100
Ryedale	45
Salisbury	354
Sandwell	6,639
Scarborough	543
Sedgefield	80
Sedgemoor	377
Selby	120
Sevenoaks	498
Sheffield	100
Shepway	733
Shrewsbury and Atcham	86
Slough	669
Solihull	275
South Bedfordshire	500
South Cambridgeshire	100
South Derbyshire	154
South Gloucestershire	987
South Kesteven	148
South Norfolk	116
South Northamptonshire	140
South Oxfordshire	418
South Shropshire	7
South Somerset	356
South Staffordshire	48
South Tyneside	415
Southampton	1,132
Southend-on-Sea	1,132
Southwark	1,934
Spelthorne	596
St. Albans	486
St. Edmundsbury	760
Stafford	37
Staffordshire Moorlands	26
Stevenage	598
Stockton-on-Tees	39
Stoke-on-Trent	250
Stratford-on-Avon	43
Stroud	51
Suffolk Coastal	165
Sunderland	197
Surrey Heath	226
Sutton	1,651
Swale	738
Swindon	440
Tamworth	60
Tandridge	500
Taunton Deane	248
Teesdale	17
Teignbridge	741
Telford and Wrekin	1,332
Tendring	835
Test Valley	406
Tewkesbury	115
Thanet	950
The Vale of Glamorgan	264
Three Rivers	351
Tonbridge and Malling	557
Torbay	354
Torfaen	668
Torridge	111
Tunbridge Wells	688
Tynedale	29
Uttlesford	250
Vale of White Horse	464
Walsall	976
Waltham Forest	2,716
Wandsworth	2,571
Warwick	137
Watford	822
Waveney	115
Waverley	343
Wealden	483
Wear Valley	40
Wellingborough	290
Welwyn Hatfield	1,000
West Berkshire	697
West Dorset	232
West Oxfordshire	290
West Somerset	64
West Wiltshire	113
Westminster	496
Weymouth and Portland	85
Winchester	263
Windsor and Maidenhead	488
Woking	352
Wolverhampton	381
Worcester	316
Worthing	310
Wrexham	231
Wychavon	90
Wycombe	1,155

A total of 238,000 abandoned vehicles were estimated for England and Wales in 2000–01, which includes an estimation for the non-responding authorities.

Agricultural Employees

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken by her Department to measure the number of agricultural employees per hectare on *(a)* organic farms and *(b)* non-organic farms within the United Kingdom. [81902]

Mr. Meacher: Information is not currently available to enable such a comparison to be made. But additional information to be collected when the EC Farm Structure Survey is next run, in 2003, is expected to provide a basis for doing so.

Animal Diseases (EU Finances)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her Answer of 19 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 40W, on animal diseases (EU Finances), what estimate she has made of the sums of money that would have been received in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* England, had the application been lodged in time. [83694]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 November 2002]*: Applications totalled some £5.5 million and covered UK TSE surveillance and Northern Ireland TB and Brucella, although not all of this would have been approved. No money would have been received in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland because receipts are held centrally. The Commission have now confirmed that it is not legally possible for payments to be made.

Arable Crops

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will state the gross value of non-food use of arable crops for the production of energy in 2001. [80478]

Mr. Meacher: Information is not collected on the value of arable crops grown specifically for the production of energy. Figures are available which give an indication of the cultivated area of such crops. Oilseed rape, which can be used to produce biodiesel, is the only arable crop commonly grown for the production of energy. Most of the rape destined for biodiesel is grown on set-aside land and in 2001; there were approximately 38,000 hectares grown on set-aside. However, not all of this rape will have been used for biodiesel.

BABFO

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with BABFO, the trade association for the liquid biofuels industry, on what research and development work is required to drive this new industry forward. [81963]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has held a number of discussions with BABFO on research and development work. The views of industry, including BABFO, are taken into account when research and development is commissioned and will be particularly helpful when the Department considers future research needs as part of the planned review of the bio-energy programme in early 2003.

Bat Colonies (Rabies)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been carried out on the likelihood of rabies affecting bat colonies. [82751]

Mr. Morley: For the last 15 years Defra has undertaken a survey for the rabies virus in bats found dead or ill. About 200 bats a year have been examined and the rabies related virus, European Bat Lyssavirus, has been found in only two Daubenton's bats.

In 2003, when bats have stopped hibernating, we intend to increase our surveillance and visit bat roosts and take blood samples from live bats for testing for European Bat Lyssavirus.

Biomass

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if regional funds have been made available in Yorkshire following the insolvency of the ARBRE biomass power station. [81833]

Mr. Meacher: I understand that Yorkshire Forward, the regional development agency for Yorkshire and Humber, has been actively considering the future of the ARBRE biomass power station with the Renewable Energy Development and Deployment Team at the Department of Trade and Industry and the Energy and Transport Directorate of the European Commission. Yorkshire Forward is examining potential and appropriate funding opportunities while discussions with possible future operators continue.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations her Department has received concerning research into biomass; and what assessment she has made of the value for money of the research funded to date. [81899]

Mr. Meacher: The Department receives regular representations on research through meetings, correspondence and applications from industry for LINK research funding. All the Department's agricultural research programmes are subject to formal evaluation on a four-year cycle. The bio-energy programme was last reviewed in 1999, and will be reviewed again in early 2003. At the 1999 review, the value for money of the five programme areas was assessed by external assessors. One programme area was assessed as excellent value for money, three were assessed as good, and one could not be assessed because of the early stage of work at the time. The programme is also subject to on-going evaluation by all Government funders under the Interdepartmental Group on Energy Crop Research, which is chaired by this Department.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the findings of research undertaken by the Government into biomass. [81900]

Mr. Meacher: The purpose of the Department's biomass research and development programme is to provide industry with the basic knowledge to achieve an increase in crop yields, with these higher yielding crops ideally being protected using host resistance and biological techniques rather than conventional pesticides. Research has established that miscanthus is the highest yielding biomass crop in the UK. An industry-supported commercial breeding programme has been set up for short rotation coppice willow. This includes the use of varieties to control fungal diseases and pests. Studies have identified and quantified the environmental impact of bio-energy cropping, including the potential for soil carbon sequestration and the effect on water resources.

BSE

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the welfare of those sheep inoculated intracerebrally with cattle BSE brain homogenate; and what measures are in place to ensure minimal suffering by those animals. [83378]

Mr. Morley: The use of animals in scientific procedures is regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, which is widely viewed as the most rigorous piece of legislation of its type in the world. It puts into effect, and in some ways exceeds, European Union Directive 86/609/EEC (regarding the protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes) and offers a high level of protection to animals while recognising the need to use animals in medical research, the development of new medicines and scientific testing.

Under the 1986 Act, both personal and project licences are required. These ensure that those doing the work are qualified and suitable; that alternatives to animals are used wherever possible; that the number of animals used is minimised; and that suffering or other harmful effects experienced by the animals have been weighed against the potential benefits (to humans or animals). In addition work can only be carried out at designated establishments which meet high standards and which have suitable veterinary and animal welfare personnel.

The sheep inoculated intracerebrally with cattle BSE brain homogenate at the Institute for Animal Health were no exception to the above legislation. All animals were sedated during intracerebral injection of cattle brain material. Inoculated animals were maintained under exceptionally high standards of animal husbandry practice and their health and welfare conditions continually monitored by the highly trained staff at the Institute for Animal Health. Any animal showing definite signs of clinical disease was euthanased immediately, in order to minimise any suffering.

Cetaceans

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent scientific advice on cetacean bycatch she has received; and if she will raise this advice at the forthcoming Council of Fisheries Ministers. [83371]

Mr. Morley: The Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) is continuing to advise this Department on the levels of cetacean bycatch in the fisheries on which it observes, and on mitigation measures. SMRU will shortly be restarting trials in the south west bass fishery to establish whether suitably modified separator trawls can reduce the bycatch of small cetaceans. I have already drawn this work to the attention of Commissioner Fischler and the French Government. I will share the full results with them and other EU Ministers when the results are available.

Cloned Animals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department and its predecessors have spent on research into the possible use of cloned animals in agriculture. [82858]

Mr. Morley: Research to the value of £2.22 million was funded by the Department at Roslin Institute between 1990 and 1999 to understand the causes of Large Offspring Syndrome, a welfare problem in cattle and sheep bred using in vitro fertilisation and embryo transfer. The technology that led to cloning by nuclear transfer resulted from these studies. Research aimed at improving the efficiency of livestock cloning has not been supported by the Department since 1999, although the studies on Large Offspring Syndrome have continued and have identified ways by which the problem can be avoided.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with whom she has had discussions, and from whom she has received representations, in respect of the possible use of cloned animals in agriculture. [82859]

Mr. Morley: While there have been no formal discussions and no direct representations received on the use of cloned livestock, the Government have sought advice on the welfare implications of cloning farm animals from the independent Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC). FAWC's 1998 report made a number of recommendations, and the Government's response to it can be found on Defra's website (http//defraweb/animalh/welfare/farmed/cloning-resp.htm). In addition, the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC) published a report in September this year on how well current and likely future questions about animals and biotechnology, including cloning, could be answered by the current regulatory and advisory machinery. The Government are currently considering the recommendations in the AEBC report and will respond shortly.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to prevent the use in the UK of cloned animals for agricultural purposes; and if she will make a statement. [82860]

Mr. Morley: There is legislation in place to protect farm livestock from any welfare concerns arising from both natural and artificial breeding procedures. Consideration is also being given to whether the misuse of biotechnology in animal breeding should be included in the proposed Animal Welfare Bill.

CO_2

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the CO_2 emissions from the aviation sector in each year since 1990; and what the projected figures are for each year to 2010. [80844]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The UK greenhouse gas inventory and the corresponding projections distinguish between domestic aviation (flights within the UK, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) and international aviation (emissions from fuel loaded within this area onto flights with destinations outside it). The table shows the most recent emissions inventory data on carbon dioxide emissions for these two categories from 1990 to 2000, expressed as thousand tonnes of carbon dioxide ($ktCO_2$) per year.

Year	*Domestic*	*International*	*Total*
1990	2,160	14,791	16,951
1991	2,119	14,570	16,689
1992	2,222	16,121	18,343
1993	2,281	17,241	19,522
1994	2,325	17,856	20,181
1995	2,449	19,012	21,461
1996	2,552	20,238	22,790
1997	2,640	21,552	24,192
1998	2,765	24,122	26,887
1999	2,827	26,424	29,251
2000	2,867	28,544	31,411

Projections on the same basis as the inventory data are available at five yearly intervals from the model of the UK energy economy maintained by the Department of Trade and Industry. This model suggests that, on central assumptions, carbon dioxide emissions from domestic aviation will be 3177 and 3483 kt CO_2 per year in 2005 and 2010 respectively, and corresponding projections for international aviation emissions are 31533 and 37583 $ktCO_2$ per year. The projected total emissions are 34710 and 41066 kT CO_2 per year in 2005 and 2010 respectively.

Complaints

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many complaints were received against her Department in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; and what proportion were investigated and concluded in *(i)* under 14 days, (ii) 15 days to four weeks, (iii) 29 days to eight weeks, (iv) 57 days to 12 weeks and *(v)* 12 weeks or more. [83150]

Alun Michael: 15 complaints about standards of service were made to the Department's Complaint Adjudicator during the 2001–02 financial year, and five have so far been made during 2002–03. There is no central statistical record of less formal complaints.

Defra aims to investigate service standard complaints within 15 working days wherever possible. However, due to the complexity of some cases it was not feasible to investigate them fully within that time. In all such cases, a holding reply was sent explaining the reasons for the delay and when the complainant could expect a full response.

The length of time taken to investigate and conclude the complaints was as follows:

Year	*Under 14 days*	*15 days to four weeks*	*29 days to eight weeks*	*57 days to 12 weeks*	*12 weeks or more*	*Total complaints*
2001–02	0	4	5	5	1	15
2002–03	0	1	4	0	0	5

Correspondence

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire of 10 May regarding Mr. Lloyd, a constituent. [83025]

Alun Michael: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, replied on 25 November.

Deer (Forestry Damage)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the economic damage caused by the deer population to forestry. [80830]

Mr. Morley: The Forestry Commission has not recently commissioned any work on the economic implications of deer. It has however undertaken various related studies, such as an assessment of wildlife damage in forests and a review of damage by mammals in north temperate forests.

Drinking Water

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the adequacy of *(a)* controls and *(b)* the enforcement regime relating to drinking water from private suppliers. [83380]

Mr. Morley: Drinking water quality standards of private water supplies and requirements for sampling and analysis of supplies are set out in the Private Water Supplies Regulations 1991. The 1998 Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC) introduced some new and some revised standards for drinking water quality. My Department will be consulting next year on draft proposals to implement the new and revised standards for the purposes of private water supplies.

Local authorities are responsible for monitoring at the frequencies set out in the Regulations and, where necessary, enforcement of regulatory standards. Local authorities have powers in primary legislation to serve formal notice, requiring specified remedial action where a private supply is unwholesome, or is insufficient for the domestic purposes of people living in a house. Where a private supply is, or may become, so polluted that it is prejudicial to health, an authority may also apply to the court for an order for steps be taken to prevent injury or danger to health.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of domestic customers it is estimated rely on lead pipes for connections to company supplies of drinking water. [83381]

Mr. Morley: In England and Wales, there are an estimated 21 million properties. Information provided by water companies recently indicates an estimated total of some 7.5 million lead communication pipes connecting properties to water mains.

Food (Local Production)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of UK food was locally produced in the last 12 months; and what the projection is for the next *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 years. [82898]

Mr. Morley: This information is not available. The local food sector is highly diverse and any attempt to assess its size and impact is very difficult. In addition, as the Policy Commission on the Future of Food and Farming has recognised, there is no commonly accepted definition of locally produced food.

Future of Farming and Food Report

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the timetable is for the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Report on the Future of Farming and Food. [81156]

Mr. Morley: The Government have already made significant progress delivering action identified in the Policy Commission's Report. A new strategy for sustainable farming and food in England will be published shortly. This will include a formal response to each of the Policy Commission's recommendations.

An Implementation Group of independent members, chaired by former Policy Commission chair Sir Don Curry, will oversee delivery of the new strategy.

Illegal Imports

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many illegal imports by type in passenger baggage and freight were identified at Heathrow *(a)* from 1 April 2001 to 16 September 2002 and *(b)* since 16 September. [82412]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The seizures of illegal imports through Heathrow airport as notified to the Illegal Animal Products Seizures database are as follows:

	1 April 2001 to 15 September 2002		*16 September 2002 to 19 November 2002*	
	Number of seizures	*Weight (kgs)*	*Number of seizures*	*Weight (kgs)*
Commercial				
Meat	19	1,916	1	165
Fish	35	1,496	10	657
Dairy	15	2,459	1	11
Multiple	29	3,333	5	714
Personal				
Meat	493	2,762	167	821
Fish	170	1,932	84	653
Dairy	51	319	60	355
Multiple	226	4,645	114	1,485

Kerbside Recycling

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many local authorities which undertook kerbside recycling schemes have carried out a continuous scheme for longer than six months. [83298]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* We do not have information on how long schemes have been in operation. This information is not held centrally.

Kyoto Agreement

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the extent to which emissions from the aviation sector are covered by the Kyoto agreement. [83377]

Mr. Meacher: The Kyoto Protocol when it comes into effect will cover emissions from domestic aviation for all Parties who ratify the Protocol, although only Annex I Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (developed countries) have emission limitation or reduction targets. Emissions from international aviation are not included in the targets that Annex I countries who have ratified the Kyoto Protocol will have to meet. Article 2.2 of the Protocol requests Annex I Parties to limit or reduce emissions from international aviation, working through the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

Liquid Biofuels

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of funds spent on researching fuel from farmland has been directed to liquid biofuels in the past five years. [81962]

Mr. Meacher: With the exception of a small number of projects evaluating the environmental and socio-economic impacts of using oilseed rape for biodiesel, Defra does not fund research and development work on liquid biofuels. Such research is largely covered by the programmes of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Transport. This Department does have programmes supporting the sustainable development of arable crops that are used for liquid biofuels, both biodiesel and bioethanol, and food. Over the past five years, such research amounted to £10 million for wheat and £4 million for oilseed rape out of total expenditure of £513 million for agricultural, food chain, agri-environmental and non-food research.

Paper Dyes

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with representatives of the paper industry on moderating the use of dyes in paper that render material unsuitable for recycling. [82718]

Mr. Meacher: I am planning to have such discussions in the near future.

Pelagic Trawls

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which pelagic trawl fisheries in the Celtic Sea/Biscay/Channel area UK fishing vessels are active in; how many UK vessels are involved in each; and how many of these fisheries are subject to observer monitoring. [83372]

Mr. Morley: There are normally less than 10 UK vessels active in the pelagic trawl fisheries in the south western approaches, which may pursue any of the individual fisheries. Observers have been on vessels engaged in the anchovy, bass, herring, mackerel, pilchard, smelt and sprat fisheries.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions she has had within the Council of Fisheries Ministers on an observer programme to monitor cetacean bycatch on pelagic trawl vessels in the Celtic Sea/Biscay/Channel area; [83373]

(2) what discussions she has had with her European counterparts about cetacean bycatch in pelagic trawl fisheries south and west of Britain; and if she will make a statement. [83376]

Mr. Morley: The European Commission intends to bring forward proposals to reduce cetacean bycatch as part of its proposals for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. Detailed discussions within the Council on the nature of such a strategy will follow publication of the Commission's proposals. I have written to Commissioner Fischler and to the French Minister pressing the need for action in this area and will continue to raise the issue with EU Ministers as opportunities arise to do so. We are already funding UK observer programmes in relation to cetacean bycatch on pelagic vessels.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what funding her Department has allocated to trialling marine mammal excludes devices for pelagic trawls; and what alternative mitigation measures she is investigating; [83374]

(2) what measures she is undertaking to curb cetacean bycatch in pelagic trawl fisheries south and west of Britain. [83375]

Mr. Morley: This Department has allocated approximately £140,000 for trials into the use of exclusion devices to reduce the bycatch of cetaceans in pelagic trawl fisheries. If these trials are not successful, we will look at other measures. I do not rule out any approach at this stage including arguing for restrictions on fishing, gear or seasonal closures.

Recycling

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she has collated on recycling rates within the OECD for *(a)* glass, *(b)* plastic and *(c)* total waste stream in each year since 1990. [81591]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The United Kingdom contributes statistics on waste arisings and recycling rates to the OECD every two years. These are published in "OECD Environmental Data". The most recent publication detailing these figures for OECD countries is 1999. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has contributed more recent figures but these have not yet been published. The relevant pages for glass are detailed in the table. Figures are not available for plastic or total waste recycled.

Waste recycling rates, glass, 1990–97

Percentage of apparent consumption

Year	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Canada	—	—	17	—	—	—	—	—
Mexico	—	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
USA	20	20	22	22	23	24	—	—
Japan	48	52	56	—	—	—	—	—
Korea	46	45	43	44	46	57	60	68
Australia	—	—	36	—	—	42	—	—
N. Zealand	—	—	—	—	36	—	—	—
Austria	60	60	64	68	76	—	—	88
Belgium	—	55	54	55	67	67	66	75
Czech R.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Denmark	—	35	48	64	67	63	66	70
Finland	36	31	44	46	50	50	63	62
France	—	41	44	46	48	50	50	52
Germany	54	61	60	65	75	75	79	79
Greece	15	22	20	27	29	35	29	26
Hungary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Iceland	70	75	75	—	—	—	—	—
Ireland	23	23	27	29	31	39	46	38
Italy	—	53	53	52	54	53	53	34
Luxembourg	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Netherlands	67	70	73	76	77	80	81	82
Norway	—	22	44	67	72	75	75	76
Poland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Waste recycling rates, glass, 1990–97

Percentage of apparent consumption

Year	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Portugal	27	29	31	29	32	42	42	44
Spain	27	27	27	29	31	32	35	37
Sweden	—	44	58	59	56	61	72	76
Switzerland	65	71	72	78	84	85	89	91
Turkey	31	28	25	23	22	12	13	20
UK	21	21	25	27	27	26	26	26
Slovak R.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	40

Notes:
Recycling is defined as reuse of material in a production process that diverts it from the waste stream, except for recycling within industrial plants and the reuse of material as fuel. The recyling rate is the ration of the quantity collected for recycling to the apparent consumption (domestic production + imports—exports).
CAN Packaging glass only.
MEX Recycling rates are based on amounts of waste generated and refer to municipal waste only.
USA Data refer to the material diverted from the municipal waste stream; recyeling rates are based on amounts of waste generated.
JPN Returnable bottles are excluded; data refer to reuse of glass as cullet compared to national production of glass bottles.
NZL Packaging glass only.
FRA Amounts collected as a percentage of apparent consumption (FEVE)
DEU 1990: Western Germany only; 1991 onwards: total Germany; recycling is based on total sales.
NLD Glass collected in bottle banks as percentage of sale of products in disposable glass on domestic market.
NOR Excludes considerable amounts of glass recovered before entering the waste stream (deposits/reuse of bottles).
UKD Great Britain only; glass collected in bottle banks and from industrial sources (bottlers and packers) and flat glass.
Source:
"OECD Environmental Data, Compendium 1999", OECD 1999

Refrigerator Disposal

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much financial support each local authority will receive during the current financial year to help with the disposal of refrigerators. [83045]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* My written statement of 14 November related to the special grant report (No. 109) laid in Parliament that day (Col 2WS). The draft report, which is subject to the agreement of the House, details the proposed allocation to the relevant receiving authorities of the £40 million allocated this year to assist with the disposal of refrigerators. We propose that the amount payable to an authority will be allocated according to the formula used for county services within the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services SSA block.

Scrapie

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to ensure the selective breeding of scrapie-resistant sheep; and how much her Department has spent on research into scrapie in each of the last five years. [83149]

Mr. Morley: The national scrapie plan has been in operation since July 2001. The aim of the plan is to eradicate TSEs from sheep by breeding genetic resistance into the national flock. So far, over 260,000 sheep have been genotyped. In addition, 25,000 ewes have been genotyped in Wales through the Welsh ewe genotyping scheme.

The table gives expenditure on research into sheep TSEs (covering both scrapie and BSE research). The figures include expenditure on the development of TSE diagnostic tests.

Expenditure on development of TSE diagnostic tests

	(£)
1997 to 1998	3.7
1998 to 1999	5.1
1999 to 2000	6.9
2000 to 2001	8.4
2001 to 2002	10.4

Sellafield (Radiological Leaks)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the radiological leaks from Sellafield; when they took place; and what and how much radioactive material was leaked to the environment. [83251]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency conducts monitoring of the local surface waters around the Sellafield site and springs of groundwater found on the Sellafield beach. I understand that, to date, the Agency has identified two sources which result in detectable levels of radioactivity off the Sellafield site, albeit at very low levels.

These involved seepage of tritium from on-site burial trenches from the 1950s to the present day, resulting in off-site radioactivity levels of 119—353 Becquerels/litre; and seepage of technetium-99 from the B241 waste storage tanks from around 1978 to the present day, resulting in off-site radioactivity levels of < 0.2 Becquerels /litre.

The radiological and environmental impact of the leakage of low levels of tritium and technetium-99 is assessed by the Environment Agency to be trivial.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the

sustainability strategy is for her Department; and how it has changed since the Earth Summit in Johannesburg. [83443]

Mr. Meacher: The Defra sustainable development strategy, "Foundations For Our Future", was published in June 2002, it provides a framework for how Defra will develop policies and identifies a set of indicators which will be used to monitor Defra's progress. The strategy will be reviewed in June 2003 taking into account the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Travel Budget

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total budget is of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies for official travelling in 2002–03. [83031]

Alun Michael: The total 2002–03 travel and subsistence budget for Defra and its executive agencies, is as follows:

	£ million
Total for Defra	16.193
of which agencies	3.662

TSE Surveillance

Mr. Michael Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding has been allocated for TSE surveillance in 2003 in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland. [83695]

Mr. Morley: For 2003/2004, estimated funding allocated for TSE surveillance and associated costs in GB amounts to around £44 million. The testing programme is administered by Defra, in close consultation with the devolved administrations and FSA, so costs are not broken down by country. The estimated allocation of funding for TSE surveillance and associated costs in Northern Ireland is £3.5 million.

Water Supplies

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many domestic customers are reliant on water supplies from private water suppliers. [83379]

Mr. Morley: Local authorities in England and Wales are required to maintain public registers of private water supplies in their areas. On the basis of the information provided by local authorities, we estimate that about one per cent. of the population in England and Wales use water from private supplies.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Biological and Chemical Attacks

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries in the middle east have purchased from the UK in the last 12 months protective clothing to guard against biological and chemical attack. [82549]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

Such equipment may not be licensable, and since sales can fall through, even after a licence has been granted, the DTI does not hold records of such purchases.

Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the grants funded by his Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if he will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82196]

Mr. Rammell: The FCO funds grants for Education, the Environment, Human Resources and other projects. The total funding in 2001/02 was £58 million.

The administration of grant programmes is carried out by a number of different units within the department to which a range of staff make a contribution. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of these costs centrally.

Tibet

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Tibet. [82498]

Mr. Rammell: We continue to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in Tibet. We welcome, however, the releases this year of several Tibetan prisoners, including Ngawang Choepel, Chadrel Rinpoche, Jigme Zangpo and Ngawang Sangdrol. All of these were on the list of individual cases of concern that we have raised with the Chinese Government. We have also welcomed, along with EU partners, the recent visit of the Dalai Lama's representatives to China. We encourage both sides to continue to use dialogue to find a peaceful resolution to the Tibetan issue.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage the European Union to achieve the early appointment of a special co-ordinator in Tibet. [82499]

Mr. Rammell: The EU discussed the appointment of a special representative for Tibetan issues in April. After careful consideration, and bearing in mind the US experience, the EU decided against such an appointment. The EU presidency informed the Dalai Lama's representative accordingly.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Contingencies

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent review of civil contingencies procedures there has been. [82223]

Mr. Alexander: The Civil Contingencies Committee (CCC) has conducted a wide-ranging review of the United Kingdom's contingencies procedures and infrastructure. In conducting the review, the

CCC worked systematically through Government Departments, the emergency services, local authorities and the devolved Administrations. The arrangements are revised and tested through exercises to encourage continual improvement of our response arrangements.

Contingency plans for civil emergencies are reviewed by the departmental owners of those plans and exercises are carried out on a routine basis to test their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. This process is co-ordinated by a Cabinet Committee (DOP(IT)(R), chaired by the Home Secretary, with support from officials in the Cabinet Office.

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) is currently co-ordinating a rewrite of the third edition of "Dealing with Disaster", which is the core guidance document on planning for, responding to, and recovering from a major disruptive incident. The Government have also sponsored a review of emergency planning. The recommendations are being incorporated into the programme of work leading towards a civil contingencies Bill.

Firefighters' Pay

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what advice his Department has given to the Fire Service's employers on pay increases for firefighters in the past 12 months. [82689]

Mr. Alexander: None.

PRIME MINISTER

Royal Prerogative (War Decisions)

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will bring forward proposals to make it a requirement for Parliament to be consulted prior to each exercise of the power under Royal Prerogative to take the country to war. [82853]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr Allen) on 21 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 78W.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Research Funding (Universities)

7. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to increase research funding for universities in Northern Ireland. [81605]

Jane Kennedy: The draft Budget approved by the Executive prior to suspension contained an increase in line with inflation for university research funding. The final Budget proposals will be published in December. Until then I am not in a position to comment on the matter.

Crime Victims

8. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken to help the victims of crime in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [81606]

Mr. Browne: The Government remain committed to improving access to justice for victims of crime in Northern Ireland. The recommendations of the Criminal Justice Review sets out specific recommendations which are currently being implemented.

We have invested almost £2 million in Victim Support (Northern Ireland) and the establishment of court witness schemes in this financial year.

Belfast Agreement

9. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress the Government have made in implementing the Good Friday Agreement. [81607]

20. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. [81618]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Implementation for the agreement is well advanced. But progress now, including restoration of the institutions, can only happen if there is trust that all parties remain committed to fulfilling their obligations, including the commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means. If we can secure that we can complete implementation rapidly.

Criminal Justice Review

10. **Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the implementation of the criminal justice review. [81608]

Mr. Browne: The Criminal Justice Review aims to create a more modern, effective, transparent and accountable criminal justice system for Northern Ireland. The Government intend to publish a revised Implementation Plan for the Review in early 2003. The revised plan will provide details of progress made against its 294 recommendations. Good progress is already being made in a number of areas, supported by the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. The revised plan represents another significant step towards the full implementation of the Belfast Agreement.

Devolved Institutions

11. **Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to ensure that only those people and parties committed to exclusively peaceful methods may participate in the devolved institutions when they resume. [81609]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I do not believe restoration of the institutions would be possible on any other basis.

18. **Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the prospects for restoration of devolved government. [81616]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer my hon. Friend to the response I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley).

Decommissioning

12. **Sir Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by quantity and type the illegally held weapons and explosives decommissioned under the Good Friday Agreement. [81610]

Jane Kennedy: There have been three acts of decommissioning carried out by paramilitary organisations.

The Loyalist Volunteer Force decommissioned: 2 Madsen 9 mm sub-machine guns; 1 Sten 9 mm Mark 2 sub-machine gun; 1 modified Lanchester 9 mm Mark 1 sub-machine gun; 1 Steyr 7 mm rifle [1904]; 1 homemade .22 caliber rifle; 1 sawn-off double-barrelled 12 gauge shotgun; 1 FN Browning 9 mm semi-automatic pistol; 1 FN 7.65 mm semi-automatic pistol; 31 12-gauge magnum 00 buckshot shotgun shells; 23 .38 caliber semi wad-cutter cartridges; 45 .556 caliber cartridges; 280 9 mm cartridges; 5 electrical detonators; 2 pipe bombs; 2 weapons stocks and 5 assorted magazines.

The IRA have carried out two acts of decommissioning. On 23 October 2001 the Commission reported that they had witnessed an event which they regarded as significant in which the IRA had put a quantity of arms completely beyond use. The material in question included arms, ammunition and explosives. On 8 April 2002 the Commission again reported that the IRA had put a varied and substantial quantity of ammunition, arms and explosive material beyond use. When the task is completed an inventory of the arms will be provided to the British and Irish governments.

27. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on timetables set for the completion of IRA decommissioning and disbandment. [81625]

Jane Kennedy: Following the suspension of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland the IRA issued a statement suspending contact with the Independent International Commission for Decommissioning. During his visit to Northern Ireland on 17 October 2002, the Prime Minister stated categorically that Republicans have to make the commitment to exclusively peaceful means, real, total and permanent as should all paramilitary organisations.

Secondary School Admissions

13. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the reform of the secondary school admissions process. [81611]

Jane Kennedy: The recommendations of an independent Post Primary Review Body, chaired by Mr. Gerry Burns, were published for consultation in October 2001. The consultation, which was extensive, inclusive and transparent, ended on 28 June 2002 and a report on the responses was published on 8 October 2002. The responses indicated a widespread demand for change and an emerging consensus, including among political parties, for the ending of the transfer tests.

I am determined to take the review forward and to continue to work towards the abolition of the transfer tests as soon as practical. No decisions have been taken about academic selection or new post-primary arrangements. In the responses to consultation a range of suggestions were made for future post-primary arrangements, including options involving academic selection, and Department of Education officials will be discussing these issues with key education partners and representatives of parents in the coming weeks. My aim is to develop a modern and fair education system which addresses the weaknesses of our current arrangements and enables all children to fulfil their potential.

Multi-party Talks

14. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress with the multi-party talks. [81612]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The two Governments and the political parties met last Thursday to discuss the key issues related to political advance, including how to implement the Belfast Agreement in full and how to address the difficulties caused by paramilitary activity. We plan a further meeting tomorrow.

16. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what meetings he has had with other political parties on restoring powers to the Northern Ireland Executive. [81614]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In recent weeks I have held bilateral meetings with all the parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Last Thursday the two Governments met a number of the parties to discuss the way forward. We shall meet them again tomorrow.

Peace Plan

15. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of the peace plan. [81613]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris).

Minimum Income Guarantee

17. **Kali Mountford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pensioners receive the minimum income guarantee in Northern Ireland. [81615]

Mr. Paul Murphy: 77,720 pensioners in Northern Ireland are receiving minimum income guarantee.

Organised Crime

19. **Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in combating organised crime. [81617]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) which I chair has a clear strategy in place to tackle organised criminal activity. This is laid out in the OCTF threat and strategy documents, which were published on 23 May 2002.

Following on from the successes of the 2001–02 financial year when 57 criminal networks were subject to detailed law enforcement investigation and 43 had members arrested, the law enforcement agencies continue to score many notable successes against the organised criminals.

For example, in May 2002, during a series of joint search and arrest operations, the Police and Inland Revenue successfully uncovered widespread misuse of tax certificates in the construction industry, estimated to cost the Exchequer in the region of £10 million. In this operation, four people were arrested.

In October 2002 one man was arrested following the detection of two fuel laundering plants. In the same operation, 30,000 litres of fuel and equipment used in the laundering process were seized by Customs Officers, assisted by PSNI. There have been many such seizures.

Also in October 2002 the police smashed a loyalist extortion racket in the construction industry. Three individuals, allegedly involved in obtaining money by the use of threats, were arrested in north Belfast.

The Task Force recognises that public support for the work of the law enforcement agencies is an essential ingredient for overall success against organised criminals. In September this year an OCTF website was launched. This is an important development, which will open a "shop window" for the OCTF and permit two way communications between the Task Force and the public. In October I hosted an OCTF awareness evening for the business community in Armagh and I plan to host a second awareness evening early in the new year in Ballymena.

Official Document Theft (Security Implications)

21. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the security implications of the theft of documents from police and Government offices. [81619]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government take the break-in at Castlereagh and the alleged terrorist intelligence-gathering operation at Stormont very seriously.

Sir John Chilcot has been asked to conduct a review of the national security implications of the break-in at Castlereagh. A progress report has been received from Sir John, but as you will understand, the nature of the material it contains means that it is not appropriate to make it public.

A team from the Security Service is currently undertaking a review of security procedures in the Northern Ireland Office, and I look forward to reading their report. Progress on their recommendations may be made within weeks as improvements are identified, but the review cannot be concluded until after the related police investigations are concluded.

Community Policing

22. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the role of the Police Service of Northern Ireland in community policing. [81620]

Jane Kennedy: It is the policy of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to promote community policing as a core function of all policing activity by gearing its service towards meeting locally identified priorities and needs. The Police Service has recently published a policy document, "Policing with the Community in Northern Ireland", which they are arranging to place on their website. I have placed a copy in the Library.

The Government have made clear its intention, through the coming policing legislation, to clarify the centrality of community policing in the work of PSNI and the Board's role in monitoring this.

Violence

23. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the recent level of violence in Northern Ireland. [81621]

Jane Kennedy: The recent outbreak of renewed violence at the interface in East Belfast is disappointing and is to be condemned. There is evidence that this was clearly orchestrated with the intent of stirring up again sectarian tensions within the area. The sight of a gunman on the streets cannot be tolerated.

It is time for republican and loyalist paramilitary groups to make a commitment to end all forms of violence.

Aggregates Levy

24. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research his Department has carried out in the last six months regarding the impact of the introduction of the aggregates levy in Northern Ireland. [81622]

Mr. Pearson: None. Responsibility for policy regarding the aggregates levy rests with HM Treasury/ Customs and Excise.

Security

25. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation. [81623]

Jane Kennedy: Dissident Republicans remain a threat to the peace process but for the most part their activities have been thwarted, intercepted or nullified by good policing operations. Sectarian violence continues to blight both communities in interface areas in Northern Ireland.

Recent activities by paramilitary groups on ceasefire have given cause for concern and the Secretary of State will continue to make judgments as set out in legislation under the Sentences Act 1998, particularly section 3(9).

However, ceasefires in themselves are not enough and we must now see a real and permanent end to the activities of all paramilitary organisations.

Schools (Religious Division)

26. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to end religious division in schools. [81624]

Jane Kennedy: The Government do not seek to impose any particular type of education. The policy in Northern Ireland is that children should be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents providing this does not involve unreasonable public expenditure.

All schools are open to all pupils regardless of religion. All schools should further understanding of the diversity of national, religious and ethnic identities, and the need for mutual respect and tolerance.

Employment Equality

28. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress towards equality in employment between women and men in Northern Ireland. [81626]

Mr. Browne: The Programme for Government contains a commitment to bring forward a cross-Departmental gender equality strategy during 2003. This will strengthen work being done under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The strategy, including baseline indicators, is being developed in consultation with the Equality Commission and voluntary and community sector groups.

Parades Commission

29. **Lady Hermon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Quigley Report into the Parades Commission. [81627]

Jane Kennedy: Sir George Quigley's Report into the Parades Commission was issued for consultation on 7 November 2002. The consultation period will last until the end of January next year and the Secretary of State is keen to get a broad cross-section of opinion.

Nurses

30. **Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many nurses were employed in Northern Ireland in 1997; and how many now are employed. [81628]

Mr. Browne: Figures for nurses employed in September 1997 and September 2002, along with the corresponding increase in numbers, are given in the following table:

	September 1997		*September 2002*		*Increase*	
	Count	*WTE*[1]	*Count*	*WTE*	*Count*	*WTE*
Qualified nurses[2]	12,994	11,085.22	14,137	11,933.85	1,143	848.63
Unqualified nurses	3,799	3,253.37	4,506	3,902.51	707	649.14
Bank nurses[3]	1,356	n/a	3,048	n/a	1,692	n/a
Total	18,149	n/a	21,691	n/a	3,542	n/a

[1] Whole Time Equivalent
[2] Figures for qualified nurses include health visitors, district nurses, midwives, school nurses, community psychiatric nurses, student health visitors, student midwives and other qualified nurses.
[3] Bank nurses maintain service delivery by covering staffing shortfalls and fluctuating workloads. Due to the variable nature of their employment it is not possible to obtain accurate whole time equivalent data with which to measure their input to the service.
Source:
Human Resource Management System

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Agency Workers

Mr. Brian Jenkins To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* employment agencies and *(b)* trade unions regarding the impact of the proposed Directive on Temporary Agency Work; [82948]

(2) what research her Department has carried out on *(a)* the number of agency workers as a percentage of the population and *(b)* the impact of the proposed EU Directive on Temporary Agency Work in *(i)* the UK and (ii) other European countries. [82949]

Alan Johnson: The DTI commissioned a survey of employment agencies which was conducted by the Bostock Marketing Group (BMG) in 1999. This reported an estimate for the number of temporary agency workers in the UK.

The DTI produced a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) in 2002 which estimate the impact of the proposed EU Directive on Temporary Agency Work. Copies of the RIA are in the Libraries of the House.

To estimate the number of temporary agency workers, the number reported in the BMG survey was adjusted to reflect the rate of growth in the sector as reported by the Labour Force Survey. We estimated the number of agency workers to be 700,000, around 2.5 per cent. of total employment.

The DTI has not conducted any research as to the possible impact of the EU Directive on Temporary Agency Work in other EU countries.

Arms Exports (India)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what shipments of military aircraft components to India were granted export licences in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002; and what end-user agreements were reached with the Indian Government in relation to them. [81726]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of military aircraft components is controlled under entries ML2, ML5, ML10, ML11, ML16, ML17, ML21, ML22 and PL5017 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

It would entail disproportionate cost to carry out a search of all export licences issued in 2000, 2001 and 2002 with the above ratings, to establish which covered the proposed export of components for military aircraft, where the end users were in India.

Details of all export licences issued are published by destination in the Government's annual reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 2000 and 2001 annual reports are available in the Libraries of the House.

The granting of a licence does not necessarily translate into an actual export.

In almost all cases an application for a standard individual export licence, for the proposed permanent export of items controlled for strategic reasons, must be accompanied by an end user undertaking which is consistent with the model format published on the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation website. The website address is www.dti.gov.uk/export.control.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much electricity was generated from combined heat and power in each year since 1990. [82792]

Mr. Wilson: The available information is shown in the following table.

	TWh
1991	11.0
1993	14.2
1994	12.2
1995	14.8
1996	16.1
1997	16.8
1998	18.7
1999	20.2
2000	26.8
2001	22.2

Note:
Before 1993 CHP data were not collected annually.
Source:
Department of Trade and Industry

Dounreay

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the value is of the contracts awarded in decommissioning Dounreay Nuclear Reprocessing Plant during each of the past five years to companies with their registered office in *(a)* the Highlands and Islands region, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* UK. [80142]

Mr. Wilson: I understand from UKAEA that this information is only available from 1998–99.

Value of contracts awarded in decommissioning Dounreay

£million

Registered office of company	*1998–99*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Highlands and Islands	32	35	36
Scotland (including Highlands and Islands)	37	41	44
UK (including whole of Scotland)	61	77	89

Electricity Generation

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the total installed capacity of *(a)* renewable energy generation, *(b)* generation from each fossil fuel type, and *(c)* combined heat and power generation in the UK has been in each year since 1990; [82794]

(2) what the total installed capacity of nuclear generators in the UK was in each year since 1990. [82799]

Mr. Wilson: The available information is shown in the following table and covers declared net capacities.

Declared net plant capacity

MW

					Conventional steam stations Major power producers				
End year[1]	*Nuclear sources*	*Renewable sources*	*Combined cycle gas turbine stations*	*Total conventional steam*	*Coal fired*	*Oil fired*	*Mixed or dual fired*	*Other generators*	*Combined Heat and Power*[2]
1990	10,373	1,235	76	55,712	34,583	12,487	5,434	3,208	—
1991	10,373	1,573	76	54,644	34,298	11,895	5,172	3,279	2,312
1992	10,373	1,645	331	51,520	32,686	10,817	4,806	3,211	—
1993	10,373	1,743	1,279	47,897	30,523	8,556	5,781	3,037	2,893
1994	11,274	1,795	5,613	44,239	29,132	6,317	5,694	3,096	3,141
1995	11,649	1,831	8,517	41,710	27,774	5,145	5,534	3,257	3,390
1996	12,916	1,962	12,660	41,459	25,796	3,989	8,445	3,229	3,301
1997	12,946	2,040	13,009	40,635	25,796	4,069	7,530	3,240	3,388
1998	12,956	2,171	15,640	38,332	25,324	2,829	6,928	3,251	3,680
1999	12,956	2,273	17,351	38,744	25,581	2,829	7,017	3,317	3,919
2000	12,486	2,449	21,138	38,149	24,835	2,933	6,872	3,509	4,763
2001	12,486	2,519	22,293	38,144	24,835	2,933	6,872	3,504	4,801

[1] Before 1997 figures relate to end March.
[2] Prior to 1993 CHP data were not collected annually.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of electricity generated in the UK was generated from *(a)* combined heat and power, *(b)* each fossil fuel type, *(c)* renewable sources and *(d)* UK-based renewable sources in each year since 1990. [82797]

Mr. Wilson: The available information is shown in the table. Prior to 1995, figures were not compiled on a "fuel used" basis but by type of station.

		Proportion (percentage) generated from					
	Total electricity generated (TWh)	*Combined heat and power*[1]	*Fossil fuels*				*Renewable sources*
			Coal	*Oil*	*Gas*	*Other*[2]	
1995	337.3	4.4	46.4	3.7	19.1	1.4	2.2
1996	350.9	4.6	41.4	4.3	24.0	1.2	1.7
1997	350.7	4.8	34.1	2.5	31.6	1.2	2.1
1998	362.7	5.2	33.9	2.0	32.5	1.2	2.5
1999	368.2	5.5	28.8	1.8	38.8	1.2	2.8
2000	377.3	7.1	31.8	1.7	39.3	1.2	2.8
2001	385.8	5.8	34.1	1.3	37.0	1.1	2.6

[1] The fossil fuels and renewables percentages include the use of these fuels in CHP plants.
[2] Other sources include coke oven gas, blast furnace gas and waste products from chemical processes.
Source:
Department of Trade and Industry

At the moment, all renewables used for UK generation are UK based renewable sources. Most of the electricity imported into the UK is from French nuclear sources but in 2001 1.7 TWh was certified as being from renewable sources.

Energy Sector (Government Support)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Government financial support was given to the nuclear industry in each year since 1990, broken down by *(a)* research grants, *(b)* transfer of debt from privatised utilities, *(c)* non-fossil fuel levy, *(d)* investment in BNFL facilities, *(e)* running costs of UKAEA and NIREX and *(f)* other sources. [82801]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the Honourable Gentlemen to the answer I gave on 14 November 2001, Official Report, column 757W.

Figures for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority for the period FY 01/02 are as follows:

£ million

Year	*Grant and grant in aid*	*Fusion*	*Other nuclear*
2001–02	253.2	14.3	0.2

Female Workers

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what she is doing to encourage regional development agencies to improve women's participation in the labour market. [83431]

Alan Johnson: RDAs are required to take an integrated and sustainable approach to the economic development of their regions, tackling competitiveness and productivity issues and also the underlying problems, including inequalities.

All RDAs have led the development of Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESAs). These bring together key regional and local bodies to produce a shared analysis of the region's labour market, and an action plan for meeting the region's skills and employment needs and for giving individuals the opportunity and skills to find and progress in employment. The FRESAs enable regional partners together to identify and address key issues for the regional labour market and agree partners who will take responsibility for equal opportunity, including increasing female participation rates where necessary.

We are also working with the RDAs and interested Government Departments to identify and develop a role for the RDAs in encouraging and co-ordinating provision of childcare in their regions.

Fireworks

Mr. Doug Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new measures her Department proposes to introduce in respect of fireworks. [80895]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston on 17 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 889–90, announcing a package of measures to address problems caused by fireworks.

Foreign Direct Investment

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are being taken to increase foreign direct investment to the UK. [83662]

Nigel Griffiths: Invest-UK in London and overseas promotes the UK as the top inward investment location in Europe and works in partnership with all of the UK's Development Agencies to attract the maximum level of inward investment.

In the first three weeks of November Invest-UK has spearheaded initiatives at several events to promote the UK overseas, including:

UK(5)IT Bangalore—28 October to 1 November

Israel Telecoms Exhibition 2002—4 to 7 November

BioScandinavia in Copenhagen to promote the UK as the place for R&D—14 November

UK*(a* Comdex, Las Vegas—15 to 22 November.

Investment conditions are challenging but Invest-UK helped with 123 successes in the first half of 2002, slightly more than in the first half of 2001. In order to boost our effort, we are taking on further staff and improving our client presentations and communication systems.

Fossil Fuels

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much electricity was generated from fossil fuel sources in the UK in each year since 1990, broken down by fossil fuel type. [82793]

Mr. Wilson: The available information is shown in the following table. Prior to 1995, figures were not compiled on a "fuel used" basis but by type of station.

Electricity generated from fossil fuels

TWh

	Coal	*Oil*	*Gas*	*Other*[1]
1995	156.4	12.6	64.3	4.6
1996	145.2	15.0	84.1	4.3
1997	119.7	8.7	111.0	4.2
1998	123.0	7.4	117.8	4.2
1999	106.2	6.5	142.9	4.3
2000	120.0	6.5	148.2	4.4
2001	131.5	5.2	142.6	4.1

[1] Other sources include coke oven gas, blast furnace gas and waste products from chemical processes

Source:
Department of Trade and Industry

Hawk Aircraft

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2002, Ref 81322, *Official Report*, column 151W, whether an export licence was granted in respect of spare parts for Hawk aircraft for export to a country other than Zimbabwe, which have subsequently been exported to Zimbabwe. [83035]

Nigel Griffiths: Since the introduction of the UK arms embargo on 12 May 2000, no Standard Individual Export Licences or Open Individual Export Licences have been issued, which would authorise the export of spare parts for Hawk aircraft to Zimbabwe.

The Government rigorously assess all export licence applications to determine the risk of the proposed export being misused, diverted or re-exported under undesirable conditions in contravention of the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

Industrial Disputes

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many industrial disputes lasted for longer than eight weeks in the most recently available figures. [83538]

Alan Johnson: Detailed information is not collected on the duration of industrial disputes, only the number of days lost to strike action. However, from the data available it is estimated that in the period January to September 2002, 12 industrial disputes (around 1 in 10 of all disputes) lasted more than eight weeks (counted from the first day of industrial action onwards).

Inward Investment

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates she has made of the level of inward investment into *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* the West Midlands region and *(c)* the London region in the period 1998 to 2002. [82867]

Alan Johnson: The figures in the table are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. There is no requirement to notify Invest-UK of such decisions to invest, and so these figures include only those projects where Invest-UK and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice.

Invest-UK does not hold inward investment data relating to sub-regional level. However, the number of inward investment projects successes recorded in London and the West Midlands regions during the financial years 1998–2002 are as follows:

Region	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
West Midlands	72	99[1]	103	98
London	105	159	227	215

Office of Fair Trading

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met the Director-General of the Office of Fair Trading. [83667]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friend last met the Director-General of the Office of Fair Trading in November 2001 and the next meeting is arranged for December.

In addition, I have regular meetings with the Director-General of the Office of Fair Trading, as do DTI officials.

Nuclear Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much electricity was generated from nuclear generators in the UK, and what proportion of all electricity used in the UK was generated from *(a)* nuclear generation and *(b)* UK-based nuclear generation, in each year since 1990. [82800]

Mr. Wilson: The available information is shown in the following table and covers electricity supplied from nuclear sources.

Percentage of UK electricity supplied from

	Electricity supplied from UK based nuclear generators	*UK based nuclear generators*	*Imports*[1]
1990	58.7	19.0	3.8
1991	62.8	19.8	5.2
1992	69.1	21.9	5.3
1993	81.0	25.4	5.2
1994	80.0	24.7	5.2
1995	80.6	24.1	4.9
1996	85.8	24.6	4.8
1997	89.3	25.7	4.8
1998	90.6	25.5	3.5
1999	87.7	24.2	4.0
2000	78.3	21.1	3.8
2001	83.0	22.1	2.3

[1] It is assumed that all electricity imported from France is from nuclear sources, except in 2001 when 1.7 TWh was certified as being from renewable sources.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much electricity was generated from renewable sources in the UK in each year since 1990. [82796]

Mr. Wilson: The available information is shown in the table.

Electricity generated from renewable sources

GWh

			Hydro			*Biofuels and wastes*					
	Wind and wave	*Solar photo-voltaics*	*Small scale*	*Large scale*	*Landfill gas*	*Sewage sludge digestion*	*Municipal solid waste combustion*	*Other biofuels*	*Wastes*	*Total biofuels and wastes*	*Total*
1990	9	—	127	5,080	139	316	140	—	83	678	5,894
1991	9	—	142	4,482	208	328	151	1	88	776	5,409
1992	33	—	149	5,282	377	328	177	52	104	1,038	6,502
1993	217	—	159	4,143	447	378	251	122	165	1,363	5,883
1994	344	—	159	4,935	517	361	449	192	352	1,870	7,307
1995	392	—	166	4,672	562	410	471	199	412	2,053	7,283
1996	488	—	118	3,275	708	410	490	197	417	2,221	6,101
1997	667	—	164	4,005	918	408	585	199	483	2,593	7,428
1998	877	—	206	4,911	1,185	386	849	234	583	3,237	9,231
1999	850	1	207	5,128	1,703	410	856	460	558	3,987	10,174
2000	947	1	214	4,871	2,188	367	862	473	532	4,422	10,454
2001	967	2	210	3,845	2,507	363	948	770	488	5,076	10,099

Source:
Department of Trade and Industry

Temporary Workers

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's policy is on the proposed six weeks qualifying period for temporary workers to have the same rights as permanent workers, as part of the proposed EU Directive on Temporary Agency Work. [82950]

Alan Johnson: The Department of Trade and Industry supports the principle of a qualifying period before temporary agency workers have the same rights as permanent staff but believe the period should be much longer than 6 weeks. We have proposed 12 months.

Turkey

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the level of bilateral trade with Turkey was in 2001–02. [83697]

Nigel Griffiths: The information is in the following table.

UK trade with Turkey: current prices, balance of payments basis

£ million

	UK exports	*UK imports*	*Total trade*
Trade in goods and services			
2001	1,519	2,193	3,712
January to September 2002	n/a	n/a	n/a
Trade in goods			
2001	1,179	1,692	2,871
January to September 2002	938	1,523	2,461
Trade in services			
2001	340	501	841
January to September 2002	n/a	n/a	n/a

Note:
Figures for trade in services are only available on an annual basis.
Source:
Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics (MRETS), ONS
United Kingdom Balance of Payments (The Pink Book), ONS

Vehicle Recycling and Disposal

Dr. Vincent Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of scrap cars were valorised in 2001; if she estimates that the Automotive Consortium on Recycling and Disposal is on schedule to valorise 95 per cent. of all scrap cars by 2015; and if she will make a statement. [83648]

Mr. Wilson: The ACORD industry group report for 2001 estimated that 80 per cent. of the weight of vehicles scrapped in the year 2000 was re-used or recovered. The End-of-Life Vehicles Directive (2000/53/EC) requires

member states to re-use or recover 95 per cent. by the beginning of 2015. The Government is presently considering the design of a system which will achieve that target. Draft regulations will be published early in 2003. Their final form will depend upon member states agreeing a common method for calculating ELV recovery rates, yet to be proposed by the European Commission.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Drugs

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps his Department is taking to ensure the provision of a minimum standard of drugs education in secondary schools. [82934]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We are determined to ensure that the quality of drug education provision in all schools is of high quality. Funding is made available through the standards fund (£15.5 million in 2002–03) to all local education authorities to facilitate this. It will help schools deliver drug education programmes tailor made to the needs of young people, train teachers, and fund school drug adviser posts to work directly with schools to address gaps in the quality of drug education and help ensure drug education and incident management polices are in line with DfES guidance.

There are a number of other measures in place to drive up the quality of drug education including the drug, alcohol and tobacco education package to improve teaching and learning and classroom practice and QCA curriculum materials which provide exemplar teaching and learning activities for key stages 1–4.

The latest Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) survey of drug education published in November 2002 indicated that at key stages 3 and 4 the quality of teaching about drugs is at least adequate in all but a few lessons and good or better in 40 per cent. of lessons. We will be working with Ofsted to strengthen current arrangements for inspecting drug education. This might include specific training for Ofsted inspectors.

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of additional post-threshold pay progression for teachers will be met by additional central Government funding; and whether this extra money will recur in future financial years. [83430]

Mr. Miliband: Movement to point two of the upper pay scale for post-threshold teachers is by performance points awarded on a discretionary basis by school governors. The Department is contributing £90 million to fund progression on the upper pay scale for teachers. The percentage of awards that the £90 million will fully fund depends on the number of discretionary points that governing bodies decide to award.

Schools are also able to use their general budgets to fund moving teachers to point two should they wish to do so. Schools have benefited from a £1.3 billion increase in education standard spending assessments this financial year.

The exact mechanisms for future funding have yet to be finalised. However, we have already said that funding for post-threshold and leadership performance points next year will not be less than the £150 million already announced.

Adult Learning

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress he has made towards the targets for adult learning announced in March 1999 as part of the national learning targets for 2002 [82889]

Mr. Miliband: On November 13 this year, we announced that the National learning target for adult participation had been met. The announcement was made on the occasion of the publication of the Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey (ALALFS)2001–02.

In 1999, the government set a target of increasing adult participation in learning (as measured by the National Audit Learning Survey (NALS) from 74 per cent. in 1997 to 76 per cent. in 2002.

The NALS 2002 survey found that 76.4 per cent. of adults had taken part in learning activities recognised by NALS over the last three years. Thus the target has been met; and it is confirmed by this year's Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey. The target applies to adults living in England aged 16–69 outside continuous full-time education.

The following table summarises the findings from recent surveys of learning which used the NALS definition. The same questions were asked in the NAL did not accept proxy interviews and had a lower response rate.

Survey name	*Date of fieldwork*	*Learning participation Per cent*
NALS 2002	January 2002-June 2002	76.4
ELLFS 2001	March 2001-February 2002	76.0
NALS 2001	January 2001-May 2001	75.6
ELLFS 2000	March 2000-February 2001	74.2
NALS 1997	March 1997-April 1997	73.8

Arson

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many incidents of arson there were in, and what the cost of the damage was to *(i)* state primary schools, (ii) state secondary schools, (iii) all state schools, (iv) further education colleges and *(v)* higher education institutions, in each county in each year since 1992. [83137]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not collect these figures.

Class Sizes

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local education authorities have classes of more than 30 pupils for five, six or seven-year-olds. [81084]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the following table.

Local education authorities with classes of 30 or more pupils—January 2002

	Total all classes	*Of which: number of classes with more than 30 pupils*[1]
Barnsley	278	4
Bedfordshire	531	7
Birmingham	1,341	7
Bolton	354	2
Bracknell Forest	124	1
Bradford	627	9
Brent	291	1
Buckinghamshire	606	7
Bury	245	3
Cambridgeshire	660	11
Camden	130	1
Cheshire	863	9
Cornwall	526	5
Coventry	398	1
Croydon	384	1
Darlington	128	1
Derbyshire	964	14
Doncaster	405	4
Dorset	462	1
Dudley	389	2
East Riding of Yorkshire	391	5
East Sussex	521	2
Enfield	344	1
Essex	1,622	25
Gateshead	234	1
Gloucestershire	665	1
Greenwich	272	1
Hackney	209	4
Hammersmith and Fulham	107	1
Hampshire	1,543	7
Haringey	266	1
Havering	294	2
Herefordshire	222	2
Hertfordshire	1,285	9
Hillingdon	329	4
Hounslow	252	1
Islington	189	4
Kensington and Chelsea	85	2
Kent	1,707	4
Kingston upon Thames	151	1
Knowsley	245	1
Lancashire	1,456	4
Leeds	889	4
Leicester	386	3
Leicestershire	811	9
Lewisham	291	2
Liverpool	595	5
Luton	257	2
Manchester	566	1
Milton Keynes	283	8
Newcastle upon Tyne	293	1
Norfolk	979	3
North East Lincolnshire	213	6
North Lincolnshire	189	1
North Yorkshire	768	5
Northamptonshire	914	3
Northumberland	367	11
Oldham	319	2
Peterborough	232	3
Reading	134	1
Redbridge	288	2
Redcar and Cleveland	199	1
Richmond upon Thames	177	1
Rotherham	354	2
Salford	294	1
Sandwell	403	1
Sheffield	605	3
Shropshire	322	1
Solihull	292	1
Somerset	603	2
South Gloucestershire	354	1
Southampton	254	1
Southwark	340	2
Staffordshire	1,122	8
Stockport	354	1
Stockton-on-Tees	260	2
Stoke-on-Trent	311	2
Surrey	1,177	4
Sutton	174	1
Swindon	255	4
Telford and Wrekin	217	1
Tower Hamlets	231	2
Trafford	269	1
Wakefield	392	7
Wandsworth	216	1
Warrington	278	3
Warwickshire	624	6
West Berkshire	173	2
West Sussex	881	5
Westminster	103	1
Wiltshire	551	6
Windsor and Maidenhead	127	1
Wirral	455	2
Wolverhampton	321	2
Total	43,557	325

[1] About 70 per cent. of these classes included pupils that were admitted as "excepted" pupils under the Education (Infant Class Size) Regulations 1998. Exceptions include classes with pupils admitted outside the normal admission round, after an admission appeal or because of a statement of Special Educational Needs. Also, classes where pupils are temporarily present from a special unit and classes for other teaching sessions such as games, music or drama.

Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Infant class size information for September 2002 was published on 20 November 2002 in the statistical first release entitled, "Infant Class Sizes in England: September 2002". This showed that nationally there were 307 classes of more than 30 pupils of which 288 were recorded as acceptable under the Education (Infant Class Sizes) Regulations 1998. These September figures are not directly comparable with those in January, because of seasonal effects such as pupils entering school in January. Corresponding local education authority level figures are not yet available but will be published in due course on the DfES statistical website www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics.

Education Review Body

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will set up a review body to look at under-achievement and deprivation, and the funding system for education. [82429]

Mr. Miliband: The Education Funding Strategy Group (EFSG) and its technical sub group was set up in February 2001, to oversee the production of proposals for a new LEA funding system, building on the proposals in the September 2000 Local Government

Finance Green Paper. The group considered papers on underachievement and deprivation at a number of their meetings. Its report was published in May 2002, and copies have already been placed in the Library of the House.

Education Spending

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* average spending per pupil and *(b)* pupil teacher ratios are in *(i)* primary and (ii) secondary schools in (A) Staffordshire and (B) England in 2001–02. [80595]

Mr. Miliband: The following tables contain information from 2000–01, the latest year for which data are available:

NIE per pupil: 2000–01

£

	Primary	*Secondary*
Staffordshire	2,060	2,620
England	2,210	2,830

Pupil teacher ratios: 2000–01

£

	Primary	*Secondary*
Staffordshire	23.7	17.6
England	22.9	17.1

We do not yet have information on spending in 2001–02.

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average spending per pupil is in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in *(i)* each shire education authority area in England and (ii) England. [80596]

Mr. Miliband: The following table provides the latest available information:

LEA	*NIE per pupil* *Primary*	*Secondary*
Bedfordshire	2,280	2,590
Buckinghamshire	1,820	2,480
Cambridgeshire	2,040	2,650
Cheshire	1,920	2,220
Cornwall	2,100	2,590
Cumbria	2,240	2,820
Derbyshire	2,010	2,570
Devon	2,040	2,650
Dorset	2,180	2,690
Durham	2,300	2,780
East Sussex	2,120	2,760
Essex	2,270	2,860
Gloucestershire	2,220	2,560
Hampshire	2,150	2,670
Hertfordshire	2,150	2,790
Kent	2,250	2,790
Lancashire	2,180	2,800
Leicestershire	2,080	2,710
Lincolnshire	2,010	2,630
Norfolk	2,010	2,580
North Yorkshire	2,110	2,750
Northamptonshire	2,220	2,800
Northumberland	2,180	2,490
Nottinghamshire	2,200	2,730
Oxfordshire	2,230	2,750
Shropshire	1,990	2,630
Somerset	2,160	2,710
Staffordshire	2,060	2,620
Suffolk	2,230	2,630
Surrey	2,210	2,710
Warwickshire	1,980	2,620
West Sussex	2,210	2,770
Wiltshire	1,940	2,480
Worcestershire	2,090	2,530
England	2,210	2,830

Notes:
1. All figures are provided on a cash basis and rounded to the nearest £10.
2. NIE is the net institutional expenditure, which is the money spent within schools. It does not include central LEA expenditure.

Source:
1. Financial data are drawn from local education authorities section 52 financial statements (outturn) relating to the 2000–01 financial year.
2. Pupil data are derived from the Annual Schools Census adjusted to a financial year basis.

Educational Attainment

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentages of 15-year-olds were low-achieving in *(a)* reading, *(b)* mathematical and *(c)* scientific literacy in England in the last year for which figures are available. [83198]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The nearest equivalent information, relating to the percentage of 14-year-olds at or below level 3 in the Key Stage 3 tests in 2002 is given in the table.

Percentage at or below level 3 Key Stage 3, 2002

Subject	
English	10
Mathematics	11
Science	9

Funding (Cheshire)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the level of central funding from his Department to *(a)* Cheshire county council, *(b)* Chester city council, *(c)* Vale Royal borough council and *(d)* Crewe and Nantwich borough council in each of the last five years; and what the average funding of county, city and borough councils in England was in those years. [81262]

Mr. Miliband: No departmental funding has been made to Chester city council, Vale Royal borough council, or Crewe and Nantwich borough council. The table shows the Department's total recurrent and capital funding for the financial years 1997–98 to 2001–02 to Cheshire Local Education Authority.

£

	Recurrent funding[1]	*Capital funding*[2]
1997–98	16,006,000	8,373,000
1998–99	7,906,000	9,784,000
1999–2000	7,878,000	15,337,000

£

	Recurrent funding[1]	Capital funding[2]
2000–01	25,115,000	27,812,000
2001–02	35,664,000	34,124,000

[1] Funding comprised of Standards Fund Grant (departmental contribution), School Standards Grant, School Budget Support Grant, Education Budget Support Grant, Teachers Pay Reform Grant, Nursery Education Grant, Childcare Grant, Education Action Zone Grant and Grant Maintained Transitional Funding Grant. Reductions in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are due to local government reorganisation and the transfer of Nursery Education Grant for four year-olds to Education Standard Spending.

[2] Funding includes Basic Need (ACG), Standards Fund Grant (departmental contribution), Voluntary Aided School Grant, Schools Access Initiative and New Deal for Schools.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest £1,000.

The Department provides support to each local authority in England which is a local education authority, including all county councils. The main determinant of each local education authority's level of funding is the number of pupils it educates.

House Prices (Windsor, Maidenhead and Wokingham)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the impact on house prices in *(a)* The Royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and *(b)* Wokingham district following the statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister on 18 July, *Official Report*, column 438; and what changes he expects to make to teacher funding levels in the area. [81760]

Mr. Miliband: My right hon. Friend has made no assessment of the impact of the effect on house prices following the statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister on 18 July, and will not be making any changes to funding levels in the area as a result.

Intervention

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what reviews have been undertaken of the effectiveness of different methods of intervention in failing local government authorities; and what proposals he has to undertake further reviews. [81956]

Mr. Miliband: Ofsted reinspection reports on 27 LEAs previously found to be failing have so far shown that 26 had improved, with 21 now satisfactory.

The Audit Commission, in their report, "A force for change central government intervention in failing local government services", which examined interventions in education and social services, found that "effective interventions work by tackling the fundamental causes of service failure: poor political and managerial leadership and poor systems and culture". In addition, in an NOP survey of local councils that had been subject to intervention, 72 per cent. of respondents thought that their councils had made substantial progress, while 75 per cent. said they had found intervention "fairly" or "very" helpful.

The Department has commissioned independent consultants to evaluate new organisational models in local education authorities, including those resulting from intervention. The consultants will report on organisational robustness, performance, value for money and sustainability, as well as identifying the local circumstances under which it would be appropriate to adopt one model rather than another. They will also advise on a process whereby the different models can be further evaluated in two years' time. The consultants' report and guidance will be published by March 2003.

Non-teaching Staff

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the ratio is of non-teaching staff employed by local education authorities, his Department and educational quangos to the numbers of teachers teaching in state schools. [81261]

Mr. Miliband: The requested information is not collated centrally.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the support available to children with mental health problems excluded from school. [82745]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In November 2001 the Government published statutory guidance, "Access to education for children and young people with medical needs", which covers mental health as well as other medical needs. And in June 2001 the Department also published jointly with the Department of Health guidance on "Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings". The guidance is designed to help teachers and others working alongside mental health professionals, to promote children's mental health and to intervene effectively with those children experiencing problems. Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) are available to offer a range of professional support and help for individual children, their families and schools. They can provide early identification of problems, assessment, specialist advice, outreach work and treatment. We have implemented a robust policy to ensure that all pupils permanently excluded from schools receive a suitable full-time education. All pupils should continue to have access to as much education as their mental health condition allows so that they are able to maintain the momentum of their education and keep up with their studies.

School Buildings

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of capital investment in school buildings in coalfield areas was in each year since 1997; and how this compares with the national average. [82252]

Mr. Miliband: We do not have this information. The Department currently allocates most capital funding for schools to local education authorities (LEAs), based on needs-related formulae, and it is for the authorities to assess and prioritise the capital needs of their school buildings in line with their local asset management

plans. Individual LEAs will, therefore, hold information on how much capital investment has been allocated to schools within coalfield areas.

The table shows the level of central Government support for capital investment in school buildings in England for each financial year from 1996–97 to 2003–04.

£ billion

Year	Capital allocation
1996–97	0.7
1997–98	0.8
1998–99	1.1
1999–2000	1.4
2000–01	2.1
2001–02	2.2
2002–03	3.0
2003–04	3.8
Total	15.1

School Places (Sittingbourne and Sheppey)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many pupils and students in Sittingbourne and Sheppey do not have places in schools; and if he will make a statement; [82111]

(2) how many schools in Sittingbourne and Sheppey have refused access to children on grounds of the health and safety legislation since the beginning of the school year. [82112]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The Department does not collect this information. LEAs have a statutory duty to ensure that sufficient school places are available for pupils of compulsory school age and it is for them to monitor local needs and plan provision accordingly. LEAs in general, or boards of governors in foundation schools, have a statutory duty under health and safety legislation to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health and safety of pupils and staff.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many school playing fields have been *(a)* leased and *(b)* sold under the Private Finance Initiative, broken down by education authority; [82361]

(2) how many applications *(a)* to sell and *(b)* to change the use of school playing fields have fallen under the General Consent Orders of Section 77 (5) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 in *(i)* 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02; who determines whether an application falls under the Orders, and what checks his Department carries out on such applications; [82362]

(3) how many applications were made to dispose of school playing fields larger than 2,000 metres square in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [82363]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Lbraries.

School Standards Grant

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 18 November, *Official Report*, column 310, on school standards grant, what adjustments have been made to the amount of standards fund grant payable to each local education authority as a result of changes in the number of pupils in schools within each LEA area. [82719]

Mr. Miliband: The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Schools Funding (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* the formula grant and *(b)* the spending per head in *(i)* primary and (ii) secondary schools in Buckinghamshire is in the year 2002–03. [81180]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Funding for Buckinghamshire in 2002–03 is shown in the following table. We will not know actual spending until the autumn of 2003.

£

	SSA	Grants	Total
Primary	2,660	460	3,120
Secondary	3,410	330	3,740

Notes:

1. Figures reflect education SSA settlement figures (primary and secondary sub-blocks respectively), plus all revenue grants in DfES's Departmental expenditure limits relevant to primary and secondary pupils (excluding EMA and a handful of others where it is not possible to get figures on a comparable basis over time).
2. The pupil numbers used to convert £ million figures £ to per pupil are the maintained pupils und settlement calculations.
3. Status: 2002–03 grants (and hence total) figures are provisional.
4. Price Base: cash
5. Rounding: figures are rounded to the nearest £10. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Specialist Schools Programme

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the engineering colleges that have been created under the Specialist Schools Programme, stating in each case the date of establishment. [82150]

Mr. Miliband: Four schools have been designated engineering colleges, following the first competition for the new specialism, and became operational in September 2002. They are:

Devonport High School, Plymouth

Eckington School, Derbyshire

St. Benedict's Catholic High School, Cumbria

Woodchurch High School, Wirral

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision is made in his Departmental budget for funding the upper pay scale for teachers. [82957]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* We are currently funding 185,000 full time equivalent teachers for their threshold money, which this year is 2,148. The threshold is point 1 of the upper pay scale.

We have also allocated an extra 90 million this financial year for the costs of promoting teachers to point two of the upper pay scale. Schools are also able to use their general budgets to fund moving teachers to point two should they wish to do so.

TREASURY

Child Tax Credit

Martin Linton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the percentage of families in the Battersea constituency who will benefit from the child tax credit from April. [83798]

Dawn Primarolo: Nine out of 10 families with children will be eligible for the child tax credit, to be introduced in April 2003.

Estimates of the number of families with children in the Battersea constituency that will benefit from the child tax credit are not available; however, an estimated 700,000 families with children in London are expected to benefit from the child tax credit.

CR74

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the results of the CR74 record management exercise. [83206]

Dawn Primarolo: CR74 was an Inland Revenue exercise in support of its day-to-day record management process. It involved a systematic check, over a six-month period earlier this year, of national insurance numbers held on Inland Revenue records. Updated records have been kept separate and the Department has introduced better processes to help ensure that its records stay up to date.

CR74 identified about 3.5 million records as no longer needed. The exercise also identified around 1.3 million records as requiring further checking, and the Inland Revenue will be working through them over the next few months.

Landfill Tax Credit

Norman Baker: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent on promoting the landfill tax credit scheme in each year since its inception. [82850]

John Healey: It is not possible to give a precise figure for each year, however from the introduction of the landfill tax credit scheme to the year 2000 Entrust, the scheme's regulator, spent £606,000 on information, communication and promotion. Under its Terms of Approval, Entrust no longer promotes the scheme. To date the scheme has received £588 million in contributions.

National Insurance

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was expended from national insurance contributions on *(a)* contributory benefits and *(b)* the NHS in each year since 1991–92; and what the forecasted expenditure is for each of the next 10 years. [80825]

Dawn Primarolo: Available estimates and outturn of benefit expenditure, 1991–92 to 2005–06, are published on the DWP website http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/Table1.xls

The amount of the NHS allocation from national insurance contributions is published in the accounts of the national insurance fund each year, copies of which are held in the House of Commons Library.

The Government Actuary's Department's estimates for the NHS allocation from NIC receipts for 2001–02 to 2005–06 are shown in the table:

£ million

Great Britain	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
NHS allocation of NIC receipts	7,240	7,560	15,570	17,840	18,780

WORK AND PENSIONS

Adviser Discretion Fund

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information is kept on the uses of money paid out from the Adviser Discretion Fund; and what checks are made to ensure that the money is spent on the things for which it is assigned. [81793]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have introduced the Adviser Discretion Fund to give personal advisers more flexibility in the help they can offer their New Deal clients.

The fund has been a success. Over 61,000 of the people who have received an award have moved into work. On 18 November we announced that we will be extending access to the Adviser Discretion Fund to all incapacity benefit clients working with Jobcentre Plus advisers in areas piloting the changes recommended in the 'Pathways to Work' consultation document.

We maintain records of: the number of awards; the monetary value of awards (case by case and in total); the type of goods and services being purchased; and the number of people who, having received an award, subsequently find work.

Confirmation of the goods and services purchased and their cost is provided through either an invoice where the supplier is paid direct or a receipt (from the supplier) provided by the individual customer.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the basis on which his Department collects data on the number of pensioners who had attendance allowance

withdrawn during a stay in hospital; and how many pensioners were affected by these rules in the past three years for which figures are available. [84124]

Maria Eagle: The Department collects data on people in receipt of attendance allowance (and other disability and carer benefits) by means of a quarterly statistical inquiry. This allows analysis—on a sample basis—of the numbers of recipients whose awards are suspended at the date of the inquiry because they have been in hospital more than 28 days. Because periods of suspension may be completed between two quarterly inquiries or span more than one inquiry, this information does not provide a basis for calculating cumulative figures for people who have had their AA or DLA suspended after spending 28 days in hospital.

Numbers of attendance allowance cases at 31 May of each year in the period 2000 to 2002 and numbers of cases in which payments were recorded as suspended because the recipient was in hospital

	Attendance allowance	
	Total cases	*Cases with payment suspended while recipient in hospital*
2000	1,249,600	13,300
2001	1,290,000	14,400
2002	1,288,200	15,500

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures for suspensions refer only to cases where the reason is known.
3. Information is collected at the end of February, May, August and November each year. Figures in the table vary from those given in the written answer on 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1146W, which date back from November 2001.

Source:
Analytical Services Division Information Centre: 5 per cent. data.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to implement the new assessment procedures at the Child Support Agency for *(a)* existing and *(b)* new clients. [82571]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the letter sent to hon. Members on 19 September 2002 by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, a copy of which was placed in the Library. The new scheme will commence for existing clients when we are satisfied that it is working well. We expect this to be about a year later.

Civil Service Pensioners

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in receipt of a civil service pension started their service prior to 1949. [82047]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Arrangements for the extraction of information from the civil service pensioner payroll database and subsequent investigation of individual pensioner files by former employing Departments would be necessary to identify those with pre-1949 service, including those whose service was in an unestablished (ie temporary) capacity.

Corporate Responsibility

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many HSE investigations into the deaths of *(a)* people at work and *(b)* members of the public have resulted in the prosecution of a company director or senior manager in each of the last five years. [82054]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 21 November 2002]*: HSE's validated prosecution statistics do not identify cases against individual directors and senior managers following fatal incident investigations. HSE have already recognised the need to address this shortfall in their information systems. They set up a new system in April 2002 that will enable them to accurately capture and provide this information for future years.

Employment Action Teams

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what criteria are used by each Employment Action Team to define the areas of special employment action. [83244]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 November 2002]*: We launched the first phase of the Action Teams for Jobs initiative in 2000. The locations of the 40 teams were selected on the basis of their low levels of employment, high levels of unemployment, high proportions of people from ethnic minority backgrounds; or their being in existing Employment Zone or European Social Fund Objective One areas. These teams were able to choose where they worked within the area, subject to the approval of an inter-Departmental Project Steering Group.

In 2001 the Action Team initiative was extended. Some new teams were introduced and some teams in large urban areas were divided to ensure a strong local presence was retained. The focus of the teams was sharpened to ensure they targeted only the most disadvantaged people in the most employment deprived wards. Wards covered by the new Action Teams and additional wards covered by existing teams were selected because their working age employment rate was 58.5 per cent., or below in April 2001 when selection took place. Within these wards, teams can work with people from specified disadvantaged groups.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) which local authority areas have been selected to receive additional points in respect of the Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target set by his Department; what criteria were applied when selecting the areas; whom he consulted in respect of the selection; and if he will make a statement; [82508]

(2) what the criteria are by which additional points are scored in relation to the Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target scheme; and if he will make a statement; [82511]

(3) what criteria he applied when determining the Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target points score to be given to each type of priority client; and what guidance has been given to Jobcentre Plus staff on the way in which such clients should be prioritised in relation to *(a)* other priority client groups and *(b)* other clients. [82513]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 25 November 2002]*: The Jobcentre Plus job entry targets help focus the agency's efforts and resources on helping those people on whom we want to target more support to move from welfare into work. They include lone parents, disabled people and those living in the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

The way in which job entry and additional point scores have been allocated sends clear signals about our priorities to all Jobcentre Plus managers and staff who have been informed about them in writing.

The 60 local authority areas attracting additional job entry point scores are in the table. These local authorities were chosen because they either have the highest unemployment rates or the highest minority ethnic populations. We consulted other Government Departments, the National Employment Panel and key stakeholders in deciding on these criteria.

Local Authorities with highest unemployment rates	*Local Authorities with highest minority ethnic population*
Blaenau Gwent	Barnet
Caerphilly	Birmingham
Dundee City	Bradford
Easington	Brent
East Ayrshire	Camden
Glasgow City	Coventry
Hackney	Croydon
Halton	Ealing
Hartlepool	Enfield
Islington	Greenwich
Kingston upon Hull	Hammersmith and Fulham
Knowsley	Hariney
Liverpool	Harrow
Manchester	Hillingdon
Merthyr Tydfil	Hounslow
Middlesbrough	Kensington and Chelsea
Neath Port Talbot	Kirklees
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	Lambeth
Newham	Leeds
North Lanarkshire	Leicester City
Nottingham	Lewisham
Pembrokeshire	Luton
Redcar and Cleveland	Merton
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	Redbridge
Salford	Sandwell
South Tyneside	Sheffield
Southwark	Waltham Forest
Sunderland	Wandsworth
Tower Hamlets	City of Westminster
West Dunbartonshire	Wolverhampton

Ken Willis (European Judgment)

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the implications of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Ken Willis-application No. 36042/97; and if he will make a statement. [83036]

Malcolm Wicks: In June 2002 the European Court of Human Rights found that the UK Government had violated the Convention in respect of Mr. Ken Willis by not paying him the Widowed Mother's Allowance and Widow's Payment that he would have been entitled to had he been a woman in the same circumstances. The Court ordered a payment equivalent to the benefit that he would have received had he been a woman and an amount in respect of interest. The Government is not contesting that judgement.

Litigation remains before the domestic and Strasbourg Courts. The Court of Appeal heard arguments in the domestic cases during week commencing 7 October and judgment was reserved. The European Court of Human Rights has postponed further hearings of applications by widowers until the completion of the domestic litigation.

The Government never speculates about the outcomes of cases or the decisions that it may take.

Literacy

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the literacy levels of long-term unemployed people in coalfield areas were in each year since 1997; and how this compared with the national average. [82253]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on the literacy levels among long-term unemployed people in coalfield areas is not available. It is estimated that around one third of unemployed people have literacy levels below Level 1 (the level expected of an 11 year old) in England[1].

We are committed to helping unemployed people improve their literacy and numeracy skills so they can find and stay in work. Jobcentre Plus has comprehensive arrangements in place to identify clients who need help with their basic skills, and refer them to high quality learning opportunities. Around 15,000 clients are screened for literacy and numeracy needs by Jobcentre Plus every week.

We are currently introducing a number of measures to enhance our basic skills provision even further. For example, each Jobcentre Plus district now has a basic skills champion to drive forward work and support front line staff in this important area, and in October we introduced a more intensive and work-focused basic skills training programme. Between September 2001 and March 2002 we piloted different ways of encouraging people to take up literacy and numeracy help. One of these pilots was in my hon. Friend's constituency. Evaluation of the pilots will help us determine the future strategy for helping unemployed people improve their basic skills. The final evaluation report will be available next summer.

[1] *Source*

"Skills for Life: the National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills" (March 2001).

New Deal (Disabled People)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the number of beneficiaries of the New Deal for Disabled People. [81675]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since the national extension of the New Deal for Disabled People programme began, it has helped over 6,000 people into jobs and almost 28,000 have registered with Job Brokers to actively pursue employment.

Retirement Ages

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average age of retirement is for *(a)* his Department's employees and *(b)* people who work in each of the executive agencies within his Department. [81951]

Mr. McCartney: The average age of staff retiring from the Department and from each of the executive agencies within the Department is shown in the following table:

	Average age (years)
DWP	61.4
Jobcentre Plus	61.1
The Pension Service	61.2
Child Support Agency	61.9
Appeals Service	62.7

Stakeholder Pensions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what take-up there has been of stakeholder pensions. [82222]

Mr. McCartney: Figures from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) show that up to the end of September 2002, 1,151,371 stakeholder pensions had been sold. A detailed breakdown of sales will not be available until next year. Sales of over a million in their first 18 months on the market represents a very encouraging start.

In addition, the ABI figures show that 335,717 employers had designated a scheme for their work force. This means more people have the chance to save for a decent income in retirement through the work place.

Widow's Benefits

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many UK citizens have cases before the European Court of Human Rights and the domestic courts challenging the UK Government for failing to pay men widow's benefits prior to the introduction of the new bereavement benefits in April 2001. [83037]

Malcolm Wicks: At present the European Court of Human Rights has notified the UK Government of 73 applications from widowers in Great Britain relating to challenges for failing to pay men widow's benefit before April 2001. Further consideration of these cases has been postponed by the Court pending the outcome of the domestic litigation. Any Northern Ireland cases are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Before the Court of Appeal, whose judgment was reserved following a hearing in October, there are four cases.

DEFENCE

A400M

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice was *(a)* sought from and *(b)* given by the Cultural Property Unit of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to his Department in connection with the proposed partnering agreement between the Government and Marine Odyssey Exploration Inc. to salvage antiquities from a wreck believed to be that of the 17th century warship, Sussex. [82980]

Dr. Moonie: Advice was sought from the Department for National Heritage, now part of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), from an early stage on the implications of the agreement with Odyssey Marine Exploration Inc, and DCMS has been represented on an inter departmental Project Board which has given consideration to all aspects of the project.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a UK Government archaeological observer will be on board vessels deployed by Marine Odyssey Exploration Inc. to monitor their operation in relation to salvaging from the wreck believed to be that of the 17th century warship, Sussex. [82981]

Dr. Moonie: The licence agreement provides for officially appointed observers to be on board the vessel during the whole exploration and recovery process at sea.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision has been made to terminate the contract with Marine Odyssey Exploration Inc. if the salvage operation on the wreck believed to be that of the 17th century warship fails to meet established standards of archaeological research. [82982]

Dr. Moonie: The licence agreement requires that Odyssey Marine Exploration Inc produce a detailed project plan, covering all aspects of the project, which must be approved by the Government Departments involved before any excavation can take place. The project plan will be subject to scrutiny by an independent archaeological review group, to be chaired by English Heritage, to ensure that it complies with appropriate standards of archaeological research. If, following further discussion with the company, these standards cannot be guaranteed at the review stage, the Ministry of Defence has the option to terminate the agreement. The licence agreement also includes provision for termination in the event of any serious breach by Odyssey of any of its obligations that has not been remedied as soon as reasonably practicable upon receipt of written notification of such a breach.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the contract between the Government and Marine Odyssey Exploration Inc. for salvage operations on the wreck believed to be that of the 17th century warship Sussex. [82984]

Dr. Moonie: I am unable to place a copy of the Licence Agreement in the Library in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information which relates to a Third Party's commercial confidences. I will, however, place in the Library of the House a copy of The Partnering Agreement Memorandum and a synopsis of the archaeological requirements of the agreement.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which body will be responsible for assessing artefacts recovered from the wreck believed to be that of the

17th century warship Sussex to establish *(a)* their archaeological significance and *(b)* the most appropriate means of retention or disposal under the terms of the partnering agreement between Marine Odyssey Exploration Inc. and the UK Government. [82985]

Dr. Moonie: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and English Heritage will be consulted prior to any final decision on retention and disposal of items recovered from the wreck. We are committed to ensuring that every effort is made to consult public museums with relevant collecting interests.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department first entered into discussion with Marine Odyssey Exploration Inc. in relation to proposals to salvage antiquities from the historic wreck believed to be that of the 17th century warship Sussex. [82986]

Dr. Moonie: The company first expressed an interest in locating the wreck and salvaging its cargo in 1995. The company requested permission to search for the wreck in 1998, and was informed that the Ministry of Defence had no objection to this. The MOD's position throughout has been that no agreement of any sort could be considered unless and until the wreck had been located and identified. Detailed discussions began, following the location of the wreck, in September 2002.

Anti-tank Missiles

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the combined explosive force is of 20 anti-tank missiles of the type lost in the Bristol channel recently. [83391]

Dr. Moonie: The total explosive force of 20 Swingfire warheads is equivalent to 64.2Kg of TNT.

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the report on the lost anti-tank missiles in the Bristol channel will be put in the Library. [83393]

Dr. Moonie: The summary of the Board of Inquiry report will be placed in the Library of the House on 28 November.

Armed Forces (Home Owning)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces *(a)* own their own home and *(b)* cite a wish to own their own home as a reason for leaving the forces; and if he will make a statement. [82473]

Dr. Moonie: Continuous Attitude Surveys (CAS) are undertaken to ascertain the attitudes of personnel towards a range of service conditions and the results used to inform personnel policies, by identifying those aspects of service life which are causes of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction to personnel. The last Naval Service CAS was in September 2002. Surveys were sent to 2000 individuals and 957 (48 per cent.) responded. Respondents represented 2.5 per cent. of the trained strength (excluding FTRS personnel). The latest Army CAS was sent out in March/April 2002. The surveys were sent to 3,978 individuals and 1,897 responded in time for the analysis work. Respondents represented 1.9 per cent. of the trained strength (excluding FTRS and Gurkhas). The latest RAF report was published in March 2002 and covered surveys sent out in May and August 2001. Surveys were sent out to 4,000 individuals and 2,400 responded.

The numbers of those who responded to the CAS that own their own home or cite the wish to own their own home as a reason for leaving each service are as follows:

Navy

The RN has for many years encouraged homeownership through its policy of freedom of choice over mobility and stability. The Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP) is an £8,500 low interest rate loan available to all RN/RM personnel over 23-years-old with more than 10 years to serve and is designed to assist in house purchase. This is very popular and the latest Service Continuous Attitude Survey (SCAS) records 82 per cent. married personnel as homeowners and 72.2 per cent. living in their own home. LSAP is available to non-married personnel and the number of single homeowners is increasing. Definitive figures on ownership are not available but there is a 66 per cent. take up of LSAP among those unmarried personnel eligible to LSAP.

Army

Based on responses to the Army's most recent Continuous Attitude Survey, 38 per cent. of Army personnel own their own home. When questioned about the degree to which an intention to stay or leave was affected by the prospects of buying or renting their own home, 30 per cent. stated that it would increase their intention to stay, 55 per cent. stated that it would have no effect and 15 per cent. stated that it would increase their intention to leave.

RAF

Based on responses to a question in the RAF Continuous General Attitude Survey (GCAS) around 47 per cent. of RAF personnel own their own home (66 per cent. of officers and 42 per cent. of other ranks).

The questions in the GCAS do not make it possible to determine whether an individual's wish to own a home is a factor that encourages them to leave, or remain in the service. However, officers who make an active decision to leave the RAF (by applying for PVR or exercising their right to leave at an option point), and airmen leaving, whether at the end of an engagement, by giving notice, or through PVR, are invited to complete a leavers' survey in which they are asked the importance of various factors on their decision to leave.

Analysis of recent surveys show that there is no single reason for individuals deciding to leave the RAF and compared to other issues, accommodation factors do not rate highly for either officers or airmen. Job satisfaction, career opportunities outside the service, family stability and promotion prospects are among the main concerns.

Armed Services (Fatalities)

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many 16 to 18-year-olds in the armed services have died in service since 1982; how many died as a result of firearms accidents; and if he will specify the other causes of death. [83232]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1 January 1982 there have been 332 deaths among 16 to 18-year-olds serving in the armed forces. Of these, 50 deaths have been due to firearm discharge, 12 of which were due to accidents and 38 were due to other causes (including hostile action and suicides). Of the non-firearm discharge deaths, 156 were due to road traffic accidents, 48 were due to natural causes, and 78 were due to other injuries.

Army Recruitment

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes that would make Army life more attractive to new recruits were most commonly cited by Army personnel, when last questioned. [82474]

Dr. Moonie: The Army has been conducting the Continuous Attitude Survey (CAS) for over 20 years. It is a valuable tool in understanding the current thinking of Army personnel and is used to help manage retention, exercise duty of care and report on progress with Army and wider departmental initiatives.

The latest survey was undertaken in March/April 2002 and sent to a 4 per cent. random sample of the trained Army (excluding Gurkhas and Full Time Reserve Service personnel); 3,978 questionnaires were sent out.

The following changes were most commonly cited by personnel as having the potential to make Army life more attractive to recruits:

Higher pay/better pension

Better standards of single accommodation/accommodation in general

More civilian recognised qualifications

More adventure training.

Challenger Tanks

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many spare Challenger tank engines are held in stock by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the UK defence industry. [82912]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence holds 105 Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank (CR2 MBT) engines in stock. We are not aware of any CR2 MBT engines held in stock by the United Kingdom defence industry.

Defence Disposal Agency

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the archaeological, historic and cultural heritage assets being disposed of by the Defence Disposal Agency; and what the *(a)* means and *(b)* mode of disposal are in each case. [82983]

Dr. Moonie: Items of historical interest declared surplus to the Disposal Services Agency (DSA) include ships' bells, musical instruments with insignia and official gifts. These are sold by public auction through Bonhams Auctioneers & Valuers who have conducted 17 sales since 2000 and following is a table detailing the dates of these auctions and the type of items sold. These sales were promoted by Bonhams Auctioneers & Valuers and the DSA to ensure maximum awareness.

In 1999, the DSA conducted the disposal of wood and copper, recovered from HMS Victory during refurbishment, by competitive tender.

Date of sale	*Description of auction*	*Lot numbers*
8 September 2000	Books and maps	69–73, 286–295
9 October 2000	Printed books, atlases and maps	248–275
4 September 2000	Furniture, carpets and works of art	163–164, 180–182
2 October 2000	Furniture, carpets and works of art	194
5 February 2001	Furniture, carpets and works of art	96, 98, 248–250
14 May 2001	Furniture, carpets and works of art, clocks and watches	452–455
25 June 2001	Furniture, carpets and works of art	100
5 November 2001	Furniture, carpets and works of art, clocks and watches	476–484
2 November 2000	Arms and armour, aeronautical automobilia	1246
5 December 2000	Blenheim sale	577
16 May 2001	Good continental ceramics and glass	96–98
21 November 2001	Good continental and ceramics and glass	[1]85–86
17 December 2001	Silver and plated wares	37
26 June 2001	Clocks and watches	266–270, 279–282
14 July 2001	Traditional rivercraft and maritime	123
15 August 2002	The maritime sale	[2]1–52
9 September 2002	Musical instruments	51–105

[1] Could not sell, when by private sale.
[2] Ships' bells, etc.

Total number between 2000–02 = 17.

Defence Fire Service

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he will introduce to modernise the Defence Fire Service; if he will make a statement on their capabilities; how many DFS establishments there are in the UK; how many fire engines and specialist teams are available; and what proposals he has to increase these levels. [83228]

Mr. Ingram: A major review of the Defence Fire Services, known as the Ministry of Defence Fire Study 2000, has been under way for the past two years. This study, tasked to make recommendations on the most effective fire service for the future has recently been completed and the final report is imminent. It is expected to identify a number of modernisation initiatives for the organization of the Defence Fire Services. In parallel to this study, the Airfield Support Services Project (ASSP), encompassing the Defence Fire

Services, is seeking to achieve the most viable and cost-effective solution for the provision of airfield support, with options that include both public-private partnership and in-house solutions. The result of Fire Study 2000 efficiencies will be used to inform the Public Sector Comparator for the ASSP.

The Defence Fire Services, including the civilian and military components, are fully capable of meeting their defence role and are equipped with the latest state of the art technology. There are 71 establishments in the United Kingdom with 169 fire engines and there are no plans at present to increase these numbers. There are no specialist teams within the Defence Fire Services, with all personnel being trained to the same standard.

Departmental Jobs (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many, and what percentage, of *(a)* civil service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of his Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [83580]

Dr. Moonie: The information for the civil servants and the executive agencies is shown below as at October 2002 and April 1997 (closest data available to May 1997). The non-departmental public bodies data is shown as at October 2002 and April 1998 (closest data available to May 1997). Information on relocations is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(FTE)

	Executive Agencies[1]		*Civil Servants*[2]		*Non departmental public bodies*[3]	
	April 1997	*October 2002*	*April 1997*	*October 2002*	*April 1998*	*October 2002*
Scotland	6,401	5,296	3,223	3,148	0	0
Not Scotland	54,649	43,436	42,611	35,038	344	387
Total	61,050	48,732	45,834	38,186	344	387
Percentage Scotland	10.5	10.9	7.0	8.2	0.0	0.0

Notes:
[1] The Ministry of Defence does not centrally hold information on the number of jobs or posts within its organisation and the equivalent number of people is shown as the nearest comparator.
[2] Figures include foil time equivalent numbers for individuals working part time.
[3] Figures are individually rounded and may not sum precisely to the totals shown.

Eurofighter Typhoon

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to be able to make a statement on the recent crash of a pre-production Eurofighter Typhoon in Spain. [83366]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 November 2002]*: We very much regret the accident involving a Typhoon Development (not pre-production) aircraft last week but are relieved that both aircrew survived. It is too early to speculate on the cause or implications of the accident.

Fire Service Cover

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what special training has been given to civilian firefighters to work with the armed services in the event of chemical, biological or radiological attack against the United Kingdom; and whether such skills are shared by service personnel substituting for civilian firefighters on strike. [82903]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has no responsibility for the training given to civilian firefighters.

During periods of industrial action, armed forces personnel will provide emergency fire and rescue cover. This will include a capability to handle hazardous materials and decontamination. Other contingency plans are in place for responding to a chemical, biological or radiological attack.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he made after 11 September 2001 of the role of civilian firefighters in the event of terrorist attack against military targets in the United Kingdom; [82902]

(2) what discussions there have been between his Department and firefighters' leaders on action to be taken by striking firefighters in the event of a terrorist attack against military installations in the United Kingdom; [82904]

(3) what estimate he has made of the impact of industrial action by firefighters on their response times in the event of a terrorist attack against military targets in the United Kingdom. [82905]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 November 2002]*: Civil firefighters clearly have a role to play in responding to terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom, whether the attack is against a civil or military target. The nature of their response and arrangements during industrial action is a matter for the FBU, local authorities and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, who have responsibility for fire services. The Ministry of Defence welcomes the protocol agreed between these parties relating to the response to a terrorist incident during periods of industrial action.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many military personnel manning Green Goddess applicances have been drawn from units usually employed on security duties at military bases in the United Kingdom; [82906]

(2) what overall assessment he has made of the implications of industrial action by firefighters on the safety and security of military installations in the United Kingdom. [82907]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Security at military establishments is provided by trained military personnel based there, the Ministry of Defence Guard Service, the MOD Police (MDP) or a combination of the three. Neither the MOD Guard Service nor the MDP personnel are involved in providing emergency fire and rescue cover (Operation FRESCO) during the firemen's strike. Military personnel engaged in providing security do so as part of their normal daily duties and tasking is done on a rotational basis. There are no military units dedicated to providing security at military establishments.

Armed forces personnel engaged in Operation FRESCO have been drawn from many different units and from all three Services. This has been done to help minimise the effect of withdrawing forces from their normal duties and to ensure that military core business can continue, including the provision of security at military establishments. Security at those establishments has not been compromised.

HMNLS Rotterdam

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what UK operations and training exercises HMNLS Rotterdam has participated in the past two years; and which British personnel were embarked on the ship. [82212]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom/Netherlands Amphibious Group, formed 29 years ago, enjoys a unique, close and historic working relationship in NATO and the European Amphibious Initiative, and regularly shares assets and a unified command.

In the past two years HNLMS ROTTERDAM has participated in the routine training deployments ARGONAUT 00 and ARGONAUT 02 which took place between mid-September to late-November 2000 and early-September to early- November 2002 respectively. HNLMS ROTTERDAM'S participation in the former was curtailed when she was called to undertake national tasking. For completeness, HNLMS ROTTERDAM has also participated in the following NATO exercises with UK involvement and/or where UK personnel have been embarked on the ship:

a. NATO exercise DESTINED GLORY 01 during which 845 Squadron (five x Sea King Mk4 and some 70 squadron personnel) embarked during the period October to November 2001 to provide lift for the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps (RNLMC).

b. NATO exercise DESTINED GLORY 02, the main focus of the ARGONAUT 02 deployment. During the exercise, and in his NATO role, Commander United Kingdom Netherlands Amphibious Group (COMUKNLPHIBGRU), a RN Commodore, together with 173 UK personnel (constituting 34 per cent. of the ship's company) and four Sea King Mk4 from 845 Squadron providing lift for the RNLMC, embarked in ROTTERDAM between September to November 2002.

Iraq

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions *(a)* coalition aircraft and *(b)* UK aircraft patrolling the southern no-fly zone in Iraq have *(i)* detected violations of the no-fly zones, (ii) detected a direct threat to a coalition aircraft and (iii) released ordnance in each month since March, stating for each month the tonnage released; and if he will make a statement. [83246]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is currently available only up to and including 13 November.

(i) No-fly zone (NFZ) violations are detected in several ways. I am withholding details of detection methods in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The number of violations recorded, by month, in the southern No Fly Zone, is as follows:

Month	*Number of violations recorded*
March	0
April	1
May	0
June	1
July	1
August	0
September	3
October	2
November	0

(ii) Coalition aircraft recorded threats on a total of 143 occasions, as follows:

Month	*Coalition aircraft recorded threats*
March	0
April	1
May	20
June	13
July	30
August	15
September	41
October	14
November	9

Note:
We do not hold separate threat figures for individual nations' aircraft.

(iii) *(a)* Coalition aircraft in the southern NFZ responded in self defence against Iraqi Air Defence targets on 41 occasions in the period from 1 March to 13 November, and released 126.4 tons of ordnance.

Month	*Responses conducted in self defence*	*Tonnage of ordnance released*
March	0	0
April	1	0.3
May	5	7.3
June	3	10.4
July	5	9.5
August	8	14.1
September	10	54.6
October	6	17.7
November	3	12.5

(iii) *(b)* Of these totals, UK aircraft responded on 17 occasions and released 46 tons of ordnance:

Month	*Responses conducted in self defence*	*Tonnage of ordnance released*
March	0	0
April	0	0
May	2	4.9
June	2	2.2
July	1	3.2
August	2	3.2
September	6	21.1
October	4	11.4
November	0	0

Kenya

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the viability of contracting out the *(a)* locating and *(b)* clearing of unexploded ordnance at the Archers Post training ground in Kenya. [83357]

Mr. Ingram: While some Non-Government Organisations and firms have approached the Ministry of Defence with broad offers to assist with Explosive Ordnance Clearance operations currently carried out by the British Army in Kenya, it is considered that this task can be more competently and comprehensively conducted by specialist Royal Engineer Explosive Ordnance Disposal units. Moreover, given the testing climatic environment, there is considerable training value in such clearance operations being carried out by the units involved.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what clearance techniques for removing unexploded ordnance are met at Archers Post, Kenya; [83358]

(2) what surveying techniques are used by the Army in locating unexploded ordnance to be cleared at Archers Post, Kenya. [83361]

Mr. Ingram: After firing of ordnance British Army units training at Archers Post commence a visual search of the surface of the training area with the object of recording and clearing any "blind" or unexploded munitions before leaving the area. The techniques employed observe and adhere to extant British Army practices and regulations for the disposal of munitions. These procedures are applicable on all sites where the British Army trains throughout the world.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions his Department has held with the Kenyan Government about the future clearance of unexploded ordnance on land in Kenya made for military training by British forces; [83360]

(2) how long the clean up of unexploded munitions at Archers Post training site in Kenya took in the spring of *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 operations; [83355]

(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the agreement between his Department and the Kenyan Government on the clearing of unexploded ordnance at Archers Post and other training grounds in Kenya. [83359]

Mr. Ingram: There is no formal agreement with the Kenyan Government specifically dealing with the clearance of unexploded ordnance from areas used by the British Army for training in Kenya. To assist the Kenyan authorities Exercise PINEAPPLE, an annual Explosive Ordnance Clearance exercise, is conducted at Archers Post and other Kenyan training areas. This is a voluntary initiative of the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, undertaken in order to provide a safe training environment. The exercise is conducted in conjunction with Kenyan Army Engineers and its requirement is assessed annually. During each of the years 2000, 2001, and 2002 some four weeks were spent conducting disposals at Archers Post. We plan to repeat this in 2003.

Manning Control Reviews

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Royal Air Force have been subject to a manning control review in each of the last 15 years; in which regiments of the armed forces the policy of manning control has been practised over the past 15 years; and what the *(i)* start and (ii) end dates of the policy were; [82128]

(2) how many personnel who elected for premature voluntary release in each year since 1996 were issued with a manning control warning certificate beforehand. [82129]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force have distinctive manning policies that are designed to meet their different requirements. The hon. Member's question relates to the Army's practice for its non-commissioned personnel and can only be answered specifically for the Army. I shall, however, also outline the nearest equivalent Royal Navy and Royal Air Force procedures.

Army

I refer the hon Member to the answer given on 7 May 2002, (*Official Report*, column 41) which reported the Army figures for the last five years for those discharged following Manning Control review. The number of soldiers in the Army who have been discharged under Queen's Regulations paragraph 9.413 'Not required for a full army career in each of the last 15 calendar years and by regiment following a Manning Control Point review is summarised in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 1: Army Manning Control Point discharges by year

Year	*Number MCP*
1988	492
1989	467
1990	140
1991	100
1992	331
1993	157
1994	14
1995	7
1996	202
1997	231
1998	175
1999	93
2000	66
2001	47
2002	3
Total:	2,525

Table 2 Army Manning Control Point discharges by Corps and Regiments

Regiment	*Total*
Queen's Own Hussars	5
Queen's Royal Irish Hussars	5
13th/18th Hussars	9
Royal Tank Regiment	16
Royal Artillery	234
Royal Engineers	300
Royal Signals	216
Grenadier Guards	27
Coldstream Guards	21
Scots Guards	8
Welsh Guards	9
Royal Scots	16
Royal Highland Fusiliers	40
King's Own Scottish Borderers	9
Black Watch	23
Queen's Own Highlanders	13
The Highland Regiment	17
The Gordon Highlanders	20
Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders	27
Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment	28
The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	26
Royal Anglian	18
King's Own Royal Border Regiment	23
The King's Regiment	22
Prince of Wales Own	31
Green Howards	35
The Royal Irish Regiment	50
Royal Irish (Home Service Full Time)	27
Queen's Lancashire Regiment	36
Duke of Wellington's Regiment	22
Devon and Dorset Regiment	26
The Cheshire Regiment	21
Royal Welsh Fusiliers	29
Royal Regiment of Wales	16
Gloucestershire Regiment	15
The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment	15
The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment	16
The Royal Hampshire Regiment	13
The Staffordshire Regiment	47
The Light Infantry	31
The Royal Green Jackets	21
The Parachute Regiment	12
Army Air Corps	24
Royal Logistics Corps	79
Royal Corps of Transport	169
Royal Army Medical Corps	43
Royal Army Ordnance Corps	78
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	352
Royal Army Veterinary Corps	7
Royal Pioneer Corps	11
Intelligence Corps	6
Army Catering Corps	82
Corps of Army Music	6
Women's Royal Army Corps	13
Adjutant General's Corps (Staff and Personnel Corps)	19
Adjutant General's Corps (Provost)	5
Others	36
Total:	2,525

While it is not possible to pinpoint the start date, research of the regulations has shown that Army Manning Control policy has been extant since at least 1952. Although the policy remains in being, as the statistics show, manning control points are used infrequently in the current manning climate.

The information requested concerning the number of Army personnel who elected for Premature Voluntary Release in each year since 1996 and who were issued with a manning control warning certificate beforehand is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Royal Navy

Royal Naval Ratings and RM other ranks are normally engaged on a 22-year open engagement, which may be curtailed for reasons of inadequate performance or conduct, or reduced employability for medical reasons. RN Ratings and RM other ranks may apply to extend their service beyond 22 years and will be allowed to do so when there is a service requirement. The Royal Navy does not apply a "manning control review" to ratings but its manning levels and rates of premature voluntary release are continuously monitored, and recruiting, training and promotion targets are set accordingly.

Royal Air Force

Non-commissioned engagements in the Royal Air Force are normally offered for an initial period of nine years. Individuals may apply to extend their service to a total of 12 or 15 years and will be allowed to do so when there is a Service requirement. Any further service above this is linked to promotion, for example service to 22 years is possible on promotion to corporal.

Medical Reservists

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements are made by his Department to compensate the NHS for medical staff called up as reservists. [83405]

Dr. Moonie: Like all other employers, health trusts may apply for financial assistance to cover the additional costs they incur as a result of their employees being called out. Payments are made in accordance with the regulations set out in Statutory Instrument 1997/309.

Naval Vessels (Refit and Repair)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those Royal Navy vessels not in service as a result of *(a)* refits and *(b)* repairs, together with their anticipated dates to re-enter service. [83585]

Mr. Ingram: In the majority of cases, it is not possible to separate those Royal Navy vessels undergoing repair from those in refit, other than arbitrarily, as all refits and other programmed maintenance periods contain an element of repair work. However, listed in the table are those vessels that, because they are undergoing some form of refit, maintenance or repair, are currently not available for operational tasking. Vessels that can be categorised as solely undergoing repair have been indicated.

RN vessel	*Anticipated return to service date*
HMS Brecon	February 2003
HMS Campbeltown	March 2003
HMS Cattistock[1]	[2]
HMS Chiddingfold	May 2003
HMS Exploit	December 2002
HMS Glasgow	January/February 2003
HMS Gloucester	July 2003
HMS Illustrious	February 2005
HMS Invincible	May 2003
HMS Middleton	February 2003
HMS Montrose	February 2004
HMS Monmouth	May 2003
HMS Penzance	February 2003
HMS Ocean[1]	December 2002

RN vessel	Anticipated return to service date
HMS Pursuer	December 2002
HMS St. Albans	January 2003
HMS Sceptre	Second quarter 2003
HMS Spartan	First quarter 2003
HMS Tracker	December 2002
HMS Trafalgar	First quarter 2004
HMS Trenchant	Fourth quarter 2003
HMS Triumph[1]	Fourth quarter 2002
HMS Vanguard	Third quarter 2004

[1] Out of service for repair.
[2] Damage sustained on 23 November still being surveyed—too soon to say how long her repairs will take.

In addition, HMS Nottingham is currently in transit to the United Kingdom on a Heavy Lift Ship following her grounding incident off the west coast of Australia in July this year. No decision has yet been made on her future.

Operation Sandcastle

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many statements were taken and in which countries in connection with Operation Sandcastle; and if he will place the report of 31 March 1992 in the Library. [81327]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* According to records held by the Ministry of Defence, 1,868 potential witnesses were traced and interviewed during the course of Operation Sandcastle by the Royal Military Police. During the course of their investigation they recorded 1,056 individual questionnaires and collected a further 725 statements (including those made by British citizens held as Prisoners of War by the Iraqis).

Our records do not detail in which countries those interviews were conducted but I understand that most were conducted in the United Kingdom and Kuwait as well as other Gulf States.

This report contains the confidential statements of individuals who witnessed or were subject to alleged acts of Iraqi brutality during the Gulf War, and the Ministry of Defence has a duty to protect the confidentiality of those who co-operated with the Royal Military Police. I am therefore withholding the report under Exemption 14 (Information given in confidence) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Outreach Programmes

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what funding from his Department has been provided for Outreach programmes run by ACFA in the financial year 2001–02; what will be provided in financial years *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04 and *(c)* 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [82959]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Outreach is a Youth and Community project, administered by the Army Cadet Force Association. The project receives funding from three separate Government Departments: the Ministry of Defence, the Home Office and the Department for Education and Skills. Funding for the project has been confirmed between 2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04. A final decision on the level of funding for 2004–05 has yet to be made. The funding currently allocated by these Departments is as follows:

£000

Financial year	Ministry of Defence	Home Office	Department for Education and Skills
2001–02	60	60	20
2002–03	60	60	34
2003–04	60	60	34

PFI Contracts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the PFI contracts for *(a)* the Germany white fleet, *(b)* MHE vehicles and *(c)* the RAF white fleet; when the contracts were completed; and if he will make a statement. [82258]

Mr. Ingram: Spend and completion dates for the specified PFI contracts are as follows:

Germany white fleet—total spend to date £87.8 million; the contract is due for completion in March 2004.

MHE Vehicles—total spend was £16.4 minion; the contract was completed in August 2002.

RAF white fleet—total spend to date £65 million; the contract has been

extended to run until negotiations for its re-let are concluded.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the PFI contracts for *(a)* the hazardous stores information system, *(b)* the Yeovilton family quarters, *(c)* DFTS, *(d)* electronic messaging service (Armymail), *(e)* the Hawk simulator, *(f)* Tidworth water and sewerage, *(g)* DHFS (Helicopter Flying School) and *(h)* TAFMIS (IT); whether the contracts are on schedule; and if he will make a statement. [82266]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Self-inflicted Injuries

Mr. Kevin McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* members and *(b)* employees of each of Her Majesty's armed forces are perceived to have died through self-inflicted injuries in *(i)* Great Britain, (ii) Northern Ireland, (iii) Germany and (iv) other overseas postings in each year since 1990. [80684]

Dr. Moonie: Between 1 January 1990 and 31 December 2001 there have been 326 coroner confirmed suicides and coroners' open verdicts recorded for serving members of the Regular Armed Forces. No information is centrally held on suicides among civilian employees of her Majesty's Armed Forces. The following table breaks these down by location and year, and includes 285 coroner confirmed suicides and 41 open verdicts. Suicide and open verdicts for 1995 and later are subject to change as outstanding coroners' verdicts are confirmed. This could lead to significant increases, particularly for 1999 and later.

Suicides and open verdicts: Regular Armed Forces personnel by location: 1 January 1990 to 31 December 2001 [1]

	Location				
Year of death	*Great Britain*[2]	*Northern Ireland*	*Germany (BAOR)*	*Other*	*Grand total*
1990	32	3	8	1	44
1991	24	2	8	5	39
1992	17	4	9	3	33
1993	23	2	5	2	32
1994	19	3	6	2	30
1995	14	8	4	3	29
1996	18	3	2	3	26
1997	22	1	2	0	25
1998	12	0	4	0	16
1999	16	0	1	0	17
2000	22	1	1	3	27
2001	7	0	1	0	8
Grand total	226	27	51	22	326

[1] Figures for suicides and open verdicts are subject to revision as further coroner's verdicts are reported to DASA

[2] Great Britain included UK waters and North Atlantic

Note:

As at 15 November 2002

Service Careers

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of armed forces personnel who sign on for 22 years reached the 22-year point of their service in each of the last 15 years. [82119]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* It is not possible to identify the original population who signed on for 22 years and as a result figures cannot be provided as percentages. The number of United Kingdom regular other ranks personnel who have left the armed forces having served 22 years or more are as follows.

		Service	
Financial year	*Naval*[1]	*Army*[2]	*RAF*[3]
1986–87	-	2,266	524
1987–88	-	2,316	523
1988–89	-	2,259	518
1989–90	-	1,950	538
1990–91	-	1,852	543
1991–92	-	2,134	658
1992–93	-	2,695	698
1993–94	-	2,997	628
1994–95	-	2,459	412
1995–96	-	1,935	349
1996–97	73	1,486	373
1997–98	38	1,440	310
1998–99	31	1,490	323
1999–2000	45	1,690	346
2000–01	44	1,727	367
2000–02	50	1,782	457

Notes:

1. The naval service data shown include all exit reasons after the 22-year point and include five personnel who signed on for more than 22 years originally. Only six years of back data are available. These figures include RM and QARNNS.

2. For the army the personnel involved will have joined between 1965 and 1980. During this period all soldiers signed on for a 22-year engagement. There have been some amendments to the 22-year engagement which are explained as follows:

(a) From 1952 to 1957. The 22-year engagement was introduced on 1 May 1952. All soldiers enlisting on this engagement had the right to opt out at the end of three years' service or any subsequent period of three years. The right to premature release on repayment, which had been introduced in 1948, was continued.

(b) From 1957. With effect from 1 October 1957, the three-year option was abolished apart for entrants into certain services and the foot guards.

(c) From 1969. From 1 April 1969,the three-year option was re-introduced, except for certain skilled employments.

Soldiers who signed up for 22 years but were commissioned before the end of the engagement period and have subsequently served additional years have not been included in these totals. The 22-year period has no special significance once a soldier has gained a 'Late Entry' commission.

3. For RAF airmen the 22-year exit point is the first exit point at which they receive an immediate pension on exit. There are three further option points to which personnel can continue to serve- Age 47, Length of Service 30 and Age 55. Eligibility for further service to these points will be dependent on achieving certain ranks.

Submarines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when and which submarines were *(a)* commissioned, *(b)* decommissioned, *(c)* sold for continuing operational use and *(d)* scrapped since 1980. [82550]

Dr. Moonie: The submarines that have been commissioned, decommissioned, sold for continuing use and scrapped since 1980 are:

Submarine	*Class*	*Commissioned date (a)*	*Decommissioned date (b)*	*Sold for continued operational service (c)*	*Scrapped (d)*
Cachalot	SSK	—	1980	—	1980
Finwhale	SSK	—	1988	—	1988
Grampus	SSK	—	1980	—	1980
Narwhal	SSK	—	1983	—	[1]1983
Porpoise	SSK	—	1982	—	[1]1985
Sealion	SSK	—	1987	—	1990
Walrus	SSK	—	1986	—	1987
Oberon	SSK	—	1986	—	1991
Olympus	SSK	—	1989	[2]1989	—
Orpheus	SSK	—	1991	—	[1]1991
Odin	SSK	—	1991	—	1991
Onslaught	SSK SSK	—	1991	—	1991
Onyx	SSK SSK	—	1991	—	1992
Otter	SSK	—	1992	—	[3]1992
Oracle	SSK	—	1992	—	[4]1992
Osiris	SSK	—	1992	[2]1992	—

Submarine	Class	Commissioned date (a)	Decommissioned date (b)	Sold for continued operational service (c)	Scrapped (d)
Otus	SSK	—	1992	—	1992
Ocelot	SSK	—	1992	—	[3]1992
Opportune	SSK	—	1992	—	1992
Dreadnought	SSN	—	[5]1983	—	—
Valiant	SSN	—	[5]1994	—	—
Warspite	SSN	—	[5]1990	—	—
Resolution	SSBN	—	[5]1994	—	—
Repulse	SSBN	—	[5]1996	—	—
Renown	SSBN	—	[5]1996	—	—
Revenge	SSBN	—	[5]1992	—	—
Churchill	SSN	—	[5]1990	—	—
Conqueror	SSN	—	[5]1991	—	—
Courageous	SSN	—	[6]1992	—	—
Swiftsure	SSN	—	[5]1991	—	—
Splendid	SSN	1981	—	—	—
Trafalgar	SSN	1983	—	—	—
Turbulent	SSN	1984	—	—	—
Tireless	SSN	1985	—	—	—
Torbay	SSN	1987	—	—	—
Trenchant	SSN	1989	—	—	—
Talent	SSN	1990	—	—	—
Upholder	SSK	1990	1994	[7]—	—
Unseen	SSK	1991	1994	2000	—
Unicorn	SSK	1993	1994	2001	—
Ursula	SSK	1992	1994	[8]—	—
Triumph	SSN	1991	—	—	—
Vanguard	SSBN	1993	—	—	—
Victorious	SSBN	1995	—	—	—
Vigilant	SSBN	1996	—	—	—
Vengeance	SSBN	1999	—	—	—

[1] Used for target practice by MOD.
[2] Sold to Canada.
[3] Preserved in a museum.
[4] Sold for use as spares for overseas submarines.
[5] Stored afloat.
[6] Exhibit in HMNB Devonport museum.
[7] Reactivation work being carried out pending handover to Canada.
[8] Undergoing sea trials pending handover to Canada.

Note:
The four Swiftsure Class Submarines, HMS Sovereign, HMS Syperb, HMS Sceptre and HMS Spartan are not shown since all were commissioned prior to 1980, and are still in service with the Royal Navy.

Timber

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what species of timber have been or are being procured for the accommodation and offices of the Colchester Garrison; who the suppliers of that timber were; and whether all the timber used or planned to be used meets the Government's requirement to procure timber from legal and sustainable sources. [82856]

Mr. Ingram: It is too early in the design development process to be specific about the materials to be used in the construction.

However, the Ministry of Defence places a contractual obligation on its suppliers to comply with the Government's policy on the supply or consumption of timber and products containing wood.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all suppliers of timber-based board products and furniture to his Department in the last 12 months; and the total value of those items procured. [82857]

Mr. Ingram: Information on timber procurement is not currently collected in the form requested. In August, the Ministry of Defence introduced a new condition of contract, which places an express contractual obligation on its suppliers to comply with the Government's policy on the supply or consumption of timber and products containing wood, and in addition, to supply data to verify that compliance.

Data on timber procurement, generated as a result of the new condition of contract, will be used to inform the process of sustainability monitoring and reporting currently being developed as part of the departmental Sustainable Development Strategy.

US Aircraft

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to the Pentagon about the use of US aircraft by Israel in the occupied territories. [82588]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has made no such representations.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Divorce (Religious Marriages)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Family Procedure Rules Committee will consider the Rules of Court required to give effect to the Divorce (Religious Marriages) Act 2002. [83352]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is intended that draft rules will be considered by the Rule Committee shortly and that the provisions of the Act will be brought into force in January or February 2003.

Drug Courts

John Mann: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many JPs have direct experience of drug courts. [82882]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Junior Barristers

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received on the effect of changes in levels of public funding on the number of junior barristers there will be in five years' time. [82131]

Ms Rosie Winterton: As part of the current review of the Family Graduated Fees Scheme, both the Bar Council and the Family Law Bar Association have raised concerns about the levels of fees and the potential impact on the number of future junior barristers. My officials are working closely with the Bar on these matters.

No other such representations have been received on this issue.

HEALTH

Child Care

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to improve the *(a)* pay, *(b)* conditions, *(c)* training and *(d)* career prospects of staff in residential care establishments for children. [80473]

Jacqui Smith: The Government do not have direct responsibility for pay and career progression within social care. These are the responsibility of the individual employers. However we are taking a lead in developing partnerships with employers.

The national social care recruitment campaign aims to raise awareness about the type of work social workers and social care staff actually do and the career prospects available across all aspects of social care work, including residential child care.

The National Minimum Standards that the National Care Standards Commission is using to register and inspect children's homes includes standards for training and qualifications for residential child care staff. These start with induction training that is to be undertaken within six weeks of commencing employment and leading through foundation training to the Level 3 Caring for Children and Young People National Vocational Qualification (NVQ).

The standards also state that the registered manager of a children's home should have either a Level 4 Care NVQ or a Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) qualification and a Level 4 NVQ in Management. The inclusion of specific qualifications within the national minimum standards helps to raise the profile of residential child care staff and lay down a career path for them.

Funding is available through the training support programme grant and the training strategy implementation fund to help staff undertake these various levels of training. Funding is also available to enable social workers within children's homes to undertake further specialist training in the form of a post qualification in child care award.

Ambulance Personnel

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average age of retirement for ambulance personnel has been over the last five years. [82175]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested in not collected centrally.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average pension received by an ambulance worker is; and what percentage of final salary an ambulance worker is entitled to after 30 years' service. [82178]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally. Pension entitlement after 30 years service would normally be calculated on 30/80ths of final salary.

Anti-TNF Alpha

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines he has issued on the dispensing of the drug Anti-TNF Alpha; and if he will make a statement; [82206]

(2) how many people have been prescribed the drug Anti-TNF Alpha; and how many are on waiting lists for the drug, broken down by health authority area. [82205]

Mr. Lammy: Guidelines on the dispensing of anti-TNF drugs were issued in March 2002 by the Iindependent National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). They recommended that consultant rheumatologists, or consultant paediatric rheumatologists in the case of juvenile idiopathic arthritis, should prescribe these drugs, in accordance with the guidelines set out by the British Society for Rheumatology and British Paediatric Rheumatology Group respectively.

We do not hold information centrally about drugs prescribed and dispensed in hospitals, which is where these drugs are supplied. Waiting list data is not collected for individual drugs.

On 5 December 2001, the Government announced that it would meet its manifesto commitment to ensure that patients receive drugs and treatments recommended by NICE on the National Health Service if deemed appropriate by their clinicians. Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for recommended treatments.

From 1 January 2002 the NHS will have three months from the date of publication of each technology appraisal guidance to provide funding, so that clinical decisions made by doctors involving NICE recommended treatments or drugs can be funded.

Artificial Limbs

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of modern artificial limbs by the NHS to those whose arms require replacement. [82574]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Artificial limbs are provided free of charge on the national health service. Each limb needs to be individually made and fitted for each patient. The range of NHS artificial limbs includes virtually everything that is available on the international market.

Asthma

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children suffered from asthma in each year since 1997. [82700]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally. However information on the number of hospital episodes by age and sex in National Health Service hospitals where the primary diagnosis is asthma from 1996–97 to 2000–01 is shown in the tables.

The International Classification of Disease 10 codes J45-J46 has been used.

Ordinary admissions and day cases combined: completed episode primary diagnosis 493(ICD9 code) Diagnosis: Asthma 345–346 (ICD10)

Age	*Male*	*Female*	*Not known*	*Persons*
England 1996–1997				
0–4	17,660	8,928	215	26,803
5–14	7,449	4,893	129	12,471
15–44	6,563	13,549	205	20,317
Unknown	5	13	—	18
England 1997–1998				
0–4	14,114	6,888	59	21,061
5–4	7,733	5,085	67	12,885
15–44	7,141	14,017	113	21,271
Unknown	8	4	1	13
England 1998–1999				
0–4	13,119	6,306	6	19,431
5–14	7,190	4,702	4	11,896
15–44	6,652	13,590	3	20,245
Unknown	2	7	1	10
England 1999–2000				
0–4	11,589	5,896	8	17,493
5–14	7,091	4,606	6	11,703
15–44	6,351	12,424	21	18,796
Unknown	7	13	—	20
England 2000–01				
0–4	9,676	4,790	114	14,580
5–14	6,916	4,184	47	11,147
15–44	6,219	11,763	11	17,993
Unknown	22	33	2	57

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to promote the use of controlled medication for children with asthma; and what support is available to reduce the stress caused by the illness. [82695]

Jacqui Smith: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has produced guidance on asthma inhalers for children. In September 2000 it issued guidance on the use of inhalers for children under five. NICE also published guidance on inhaler devices for older children, age range five to 15, on 11 April 2002.

Patients with asthma are able to access the full range of National Health Service support services in both primary and secondary care settings.

An analysis of hospital episode statistics shows that the number of hospital admissions for asthma has been falling over the last five years.

Year	*1996 to 1997*	*1997 to 1998*	*1998 to 1999*	*1999 to 2000*	*2000 to 2001*
Admissions	78,036	74,000	69,824	66,054	60,376

Business Plan

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, in which document he publishes his Department's business plan targets; and if he will make a statement. [80641]

Mr. Lammy: The priorities and targets for the next three years for the National Health Service and social services are set out in a document entitled "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: The Next 3 Years Priorities and Planning Framework 2003–2006". This document can be found on the Department's website.

Work is also currently under way on the development of a business plan for the Department for the three-year period 2003–06; to ensure delivery of the targets contained in the Department's public service agreement. At the end of the process a Departmental business plan detailing the Department's work programme for the three-year period will be produced.

Care Home Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to lay before the House the Statutory Instrument to extend the time limit for staff who were employed in care homes immediately before 1 April for obtaining checks from the CRB. [82966]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* A Statutory Instrument will be laid before Parliament as soon as possible.

Child Pornography

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on increasing resources for child protection in connection with child pornography material seized by police. [83177]

Jacqui Smith: Between 1996–97 and 2002–03, the Government increased social services funding by more than 20 per cent, in real terms, and will make further annual average real terms increases available of 6 per cent, between 2003–4 and 2005–6. The Government is spending £11 billion on personal social services this year, 2002–03. It is, however, up to local authorities with social services responsibilities, in the light of their assessments of children's needs within their area, to decide how to allocate this money.

Children (National Service Framework)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the National Service Framework for children to be published. [83174]

Jacqui Smith: It is intended that the children's national service framework (NSF) will be publishing the hospital standards, as announced in response to the

Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry. We will also be publishing a second document signposting the likely areas for inclusion in the final NSF to assist with local National Health Service planning.

Children in Care (Crime)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likelihood of children in care being convicted and sent to prison as young adults. [82749]

Jacqui Smith: Our latest data show that 10.4 per cent, of children between 10 and 17, who have been in the care of the local authority for a year or more, have received a reprimand, final warning or conviction. This represents a rate that is three times greater than for all children. Hence, the Department has a public service agreement target to narrow the gap in offending between the looked after children and their peers.

The achievement of this target is underpinned by the Quality Protects programme, which has been supported by a grant of £885 million over five years from 1999 to 2004. This major programme seeks to ensure that looked after children gain the maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care and thus have the same opportunities as their peers to lead fulfilling lives.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress is being made into the biomedical research on chronic fatigue syndrome and ME; and when NICE will provide guidance on management and treatment for patients with ME; [80421]

(2) when the Medical Research Council will report on their strategy for advancing biomedical and health services research on chronic fatigue syndrome and ME. [80424]

Jacqui Smith: The independent group, set up by the Medical Research Council (MRC) to develop a broad strategy for advancing biomedical and health services research on chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME), hope to complete their recommendations in time for submission to the MRC in March 2003. But the group has recognised that this is a tight timetable, and has agreed not to compromise the integrity and quality of their report to meet the timeframe proposed, reserving the right to extend the timescale if necessary.

The Department endorses the view of the CFS/ME independent working group report that there should be no doubt this is a chronic illness and that health and social care professionals should recognise it as such.

We are still considering whether to ask the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to provide guidance on management and treatment for patients with CFS/ME. In the meantime we have, through both the chief executive's bulletin and the GP Bulletin, made the National Health Service aware of the action for CFS/ME publication "Guidance on the management of CFS/ME". This is a useful summary of the issues.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharges there were in *(a)* the first six months of 2002 and *(b)* 2001 at Southend General Hospital. [83586]

Mr. Lammy: Information on delayed discharges is collected centrally and is placed in the Library but not at trust level.

The data relate to the number and rate of people in acute hospital beds with delayed discharge at a fixed point in time.

Before 1 April 2002 data were collected at the old health authority level. Health authorities were disbanded on 1 April 2002 and replaced with primary care trusts. Health authority level data up to and including Quarter 4 2001–02, March 2002, is available.

For Quarter 1 2002–03, up until the end of June 2002, primary care trust level data are available.

Dementia (Care Homes)

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for funding the mental nursing needs of people suffering from dementia in care homes. [82483]

Jacqui Smith: National health service funded nursing care applies equally to care home residents, regardless of the condition they have. The important issue is the level of input into their care from a registered nurse. This applies to mental health needs as well as to the physical needs of the resident.

Departmental Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the grants funded by his Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if he will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82199]

Mr. Lammy: The Department makes grants to individuals and organisations but the information requested is not held centrally.

The administration of grants is carried out by a number of different units within the Department, to which a range of staff make a contribution. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of these costs.

Diabetes

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he will publish the diabetes National Service Framework implementation plan; and if he will make a statement; [83338]

(2) when a comprehensive diabetic retinopathy screening programme will be in place in England. [83339]

Mr. Lammy: We shall be publishing the delivery strategy for the diabetes national service framework in the next few weeks. A national target for diabetic retinopathy screening is in the planning and priorities framework, "Improvement, Expansion and Reform", which sets the priorities for the national health service for the next three years. The target requires that 80 per cent. of people with diabetes will be offered screening for the early detection, and treatment if needed, of diabetic retinopathy by 2006, rising to 100 per cent. coverage of those at risk of retinopathy by the end of 2007.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to make insulin pump therapy more widely available for the treatment of diabetes in children. [83464]

Mr. Lammy: Insulin pump therapy is not suitable for every person who requires insulin to control their diabetes. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has been asked to provide an appraisal of the clinical and cost effectiveness of insulin pump therapy. This is expected to be published in February 2003.

Eye Specialists

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities do not offer patients an appointment to see an eye specialist within one month. [83188]

Mr. Hutton: Figures are not available to assertain which health authorities do not offer patients an appointment to see an eye specialist within one month.

The table shows the effective length of wait from receipt of a general practitioner (GP) written referral request to first outpatient attendance in weeks for the specialty ophthalmology, quarter two 2002–03, by Strategic Health Authority.

Effective length of wait from receipt of GP written referral request to first outpatient attendance (weeks) ophthalmology, quarter 2 2002 to 2003

Strategic Health Authority	0 to 4	4 to 13	13 to 17	17 to 21	21 to 26	over 26	*Proportion of first outpatient attendances seen within four weeks*
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	2,926	3,744	1,266	663	105	7	33.6
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	1,278	1,708	730	555	280	108	27.4
Birmingham and the Black Country	2,085	4,577	1,696	820	271	54	21.9
Cheshire and Merseyside	3,669	3,798	1,547	929	561	99	34.6
County Durham and Tees Valley	460	1,537	384	240	166	55	16.2
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	758	1,842	839	738	789	50	15.1
Cumbria and Lancashire	2,280	2,757	956	703	534	23	31.4
Essex	1,328	2,540	641	458	341	69	24.7
Greater Manchester	2,812	4,298	1,322	1,015	879	64	27.1
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	1,114	2,934	939	480	304	2	19.3
Kent and Medway	978	1,779	787	625	1,115	0	18.5
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	728	1,492	745	650	660	55	16.8
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	3,247	3,581	1,181	837	562	68	34.3
North and East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire	1,469	2,034	575	506	356	27	29.6
North Central London	2,108	6,608	531	448	360	76	20.8
North East London	735	1,156	484	463	130	7	24.7
North West London	1,279	2,036	259	275	43	0	32.9
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	990	3,839	644	224	103	9	17.0
Shropshire and Staffordshire	1,554	1,531	523	465	861	190	30.3
Somerset and Dorset	871	1,949	873	618	164	52	19.2
South East London	950	2,470	800	655	589	184	16.8
South West London	966	2,185	383	171	143	4	25.1
South West Peninsula	1,447	2,615	526	720	784	23	23.7
South Yorkshire	2,119	2,785	670	252	67	1	36.0

Strategic Health Authority	Effective length of wait from receipt of GP written referral request to first outpatient attendance (weeks) ophthalmology, quarter 2 2002 to 2003						Proportion of first outpatient attendances seen within four weeks
Surrey and Sussex	2,307	4,037	1,593	1,055	794	0	23.6
Thames Valley	906	2,690	957	988	286	53	15.4
Trent	2,078	4,158	916	531	406	39	25.6
West Yorkshire	1,774	2,868	953	857	394	54	25.7

Foreign Nurse Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what means exist for overseas nurses recruited by agencies to report the failure of their agency to comply with the ethical foreign nurse recruitment policy. [82964]

Mr. Hutton: Overseas nurses are able to contact the international nurses advice line for further advice and also to report their agency if they feel that the agency is not complying to the ethical recruitment policy.

The nurses are also able to contact Work Permits UK and the Department of Trade and Industry depending on the nature of their complaint.

Nurses who are members of unions may also seek advice from these bodies.

Home Care Charges

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to monitor changes in home care charges. [82810]

Jacqui Smith: Monitoring of the implementation of this policy is being carried out by the Department's social services inspectorate as part of a wider in-year monitoring programme. Councils were asked to indicate the stage of preparation reached at 31 May 2002 in implementing the policy. This exercise was repeated in Autumn 2002 and the results are currently being processed and should be available at the end of December 2002. The process will be repeated again in Spring 2003.

Long-term Care

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will change his policy on free provision of long-term nursing personal care. [82264]

Jacqui Smith: The Government introduced national health service funded nursing care in care homes on 1 October 2001. We do not intend to make personal care free.

In England, in our response to the Royal Commission in the NHS plan, we stressed that personal care for everyone would be costly, and would not be guaranteed to lead to service improvements. Instead, we will invest £1 billion in social care services for older people by 2006. This will improve access to social care services, expand the capacity of these services and increase the choice of services available to older people, stabilise the care home market, and ensure that delayed discharge is reduced to a minimum.

Macular Degeneration

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NICE has made a final decision on the suitability of PDT for the treatment of macular disease. [82597]

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when NICE will issue final guidance on the use of photodynamic therapy for age-related macular degeneration; and if he will make a statement. [82744]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) appraisal of photodynamic therapy has been extended to allow further consideration of the draft guidance. We expect that guidance could be available to the national health service in January 2003, providing there are no appeals.

In the meantime, guidance issued in August 1999 to all NHS bodies asked them to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from NICE is not available at the time the technology first became available. These arrangements should involve an assessment of all the relevant factors including the available evidence on effect. The local introduction of photodynamic therapy under these arrangements should be funded locally.

Meals on Wheels

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Leeds West were in receipt of meals on wheels in each of the last five years. [83483]

Jacqui Smith: In 2000–01 a reported 5,450 clients in Leeds metropolitan district received meals in their home as part of community-based services provided or commissioned by the council with social service responsibilities based on the referrals, assessments and packages of care return. Comparable data prior to 2000–01 is not readily available.

Data for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young remand prisoners have mental health problems; and what steps he is taking to assist them. [82750]

Jacqui Smith: A survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics in 1997 estimated that 95 per cent. of all young offenders in prison had some form of mental disorder. In 2000, the most recent year for which statistics are available, 96 prisoners—both remand and sentenced—between the ages of 17 and 20 were transferred to hospital on mental health grounds.

All prisons holding juveniles or young offenders are involved in work to implement the improvements set out in Changing the Outlook, a Strategy for Developing and Modernising Mental Health Services in Prisons, published in December 2001. In addition, those prisons holding persons judged to have the greatest mental health needs will be part of the prison mental health in-reach project by March 2004.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish a mental health bill; and if he will make a statement. [83806]

Jacqui Smith: A draft Mental Health Bill and consultation document was published on 25 June 2002. The consultation exercise closed on 16 September and we are currently considering almost 2,000 replies. We intend to introduce a Bill as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Mental Health (Deaf Children)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* sign language workers, *(b)* social workers, *(c)* psychiatrists with sign language skills and *(d)* specialist psychiatrists for deaf children there were in each year since 1997. [82698]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available.

Data collected through the training support programme grant since 1998–99 shows that the following numbers of social care workers have undertaken training to improve their skills when working with deaf and deafblind service users. It is not known whether or not they areworking with deaf children.

	1998 to 1999	*1999 to 2000*	*2001–2002*	*2001 to 2002*
Hearing Impairment				
New specialist workers	133	123	146	195
Other training for specialist workers	635	538	468	527
Awareness training for generalist or non-specialist workers	4,145	3,294	5,213	5,639
Total	4,913	3,955	5,827	6,361
Deaf Blind Impairment				
New specialist workers	16	86	81	130
Other training for specialist workers	290	143	185	293
Awareness training for generalist or non-specialist workers	1,166	1,330	1,811	2,391
Total	1,472	1,559	2,077	2,814

Deaf Children (Mental Health)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what residential care provision is available for deaf children with mental health problems. [82696]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not hold this data centrally.

NHS Purchasing

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many department civil servants and staff of NHS purchasing offices have been to conferences paid for by pharmaceutical companies in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [80546]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nursing Student Bursaries

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average value of the nursing student bursary is in terms of pounds per hour. [81684]

Mr. Hutton: Professional registration as a nurse is achieved following successful completion of a course of higher education at either diploma of higher education or degree level. The status of trainees during their course is that of full-time students, not employees and as such they are not contracted for a specific number of hours. Overall, students are required to complete a minimum of 4,600 curricular hours, usually over a period of three years. Over that period the average financial support provided for those studying at diploma level, who make up the majority of the nursing and midwifery student population, is currently around £18,600, the equivalent of over £4.00 per hour of study.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses working for the NHS were trained abroad, for each year since 1990. [80713]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect data about the number of nurses working in the National Health Service who were trained abroad. However, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) publishes an annual statistical report which includes information about the number of nurses and midwives on the NMC register, including new registrations from abroad. Data about the number of admissions to the register each year for nurses and midwives who trained in the United Kingdom and European Community/Non EC countries for the period 1989–90 to 2000–02 can be found on the NMC website at www.nmc-uk.orq.uk.

This data shows the success of the Department's policy on international recruitment based on international agreements. Overall nurse numbers in the NHS work force have increased by an estimated 39,500 between September 1997 and March 2002.

Paedophilia (Child Protection)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been taken into protective custody in connection with paedophilia in each year since 1997. [83176]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

However, information is held centrally about the number of children looked after by local councils. From the year ending 31 March 2001, this information is collected by age and category of need, which records the main reason why the child requires assistance from his/her local social services department. One of the categories of need is abuse or neglect. However, this category spans all types of abuse and neglect and provides no information about the characteristics of the alleged abusers of the children.

Prison Health Care

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the minimum health care standard to which prisoners are entitled. [83175]

Jacqui Smith: The prison and national health services aim, in partnership, to provide prisoners with access to the same range and quality of health services as the general public receives from the national health service. The current prison service performance standard on health services for prisoners is available at www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk

Psychiatrists

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatrists there were per 100,000 people in each year since 1992. [82692]

Mr. Hutton: As at 31 March 2002, there were 3,090 consultants within the psychiatry group, a ratio of 6.1 per 100,000 of population. This is a 24 per cent. expansion in the number of psychiatry consultants since 1997. There were also 2,801 doctors in training as at September 2001, a ratio of 5.7 per 100,000 of population. The group comprises child and adolescent psychiatry, forensic psychiatry, general psychiatry, old age psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychiatry of learning disability.

Population figures are due to be updated shortly following publication of results from the 2001 population census. This will include a revised set of estimates for the years 1992 to 2000, but these figures are not yet available.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what checks he will put in place to ensure NHS trusts correctly represent data on hospital-acquired infections once the Public Health Laboratory Service is abolished. [81717]

Mr. Lammy: Responsibility for co-ordinating surveillance of health care associated infections transfers from the Public Health Laboratory Service to the Health Protection Agency in April 2003, but as the national system will remain unchanged no additional checks are needed.

Quality Protects

Mr. Paul Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ringfenced budget allocations were for *(a)* IT projects, *(b)* disabled children, *(c)* leaving care, *(d)* RDWs and *(e)* the main grant for Quality Protects for the last three years; and what the planned expenditure is for each of the next three years. [82767]

Jacqui Smith: The table below shows the amounts ring-fenced in the last three years for improving access to information technology for children in and leaving care; services for disabled children and their families, implementing the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000; the costs of regional development workers (RDWs); and the main programme grant. The level of personal social services funding for councils for 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be announced shortly as part of the local government settlement announcements.

All figures in £ million

	2000 to 2001	*2001 to 2002*	*2002 to 2003*
IT projects			9.5
Disabled children		15	15
Leaving Care[1]		128	298
RDWs[2]	0.75	1	1
Main grant	117.75	147.25	138

Notes:

[1] The ring-fence for Leaving Care in 2001–02 covered only the second half of the year, i.e. from implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 on 1 October 2001. Funding to assist councils in preparing for implementation was included in the main grant.

[2] As well as the costs of employing the RDWs and their assistants, the amount shown for RDWs also covers other development work including part funding for the Education Protects implementation team, who are helping councils implement the joint Department for Education and Skills and Department of Health Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients with schizophrenia suffered relapses within one year of receiving treatment in each year since 1997. [82699]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not hold this information centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards implementing NICE guidance on the use of atypical antipsychotic medicine for schizophrenia; and if he will make a statement. [83304]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]*: Detailed assessment of the implementation of individual items of National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance is only possible at a local level. Comprehensive information is not collected centrally.

Silicon Cosmesis

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether, out of the baseline allocation for silicon cosmesis for artificial limbs *(a)* in 2001–02, £418,142 and *(b)* in 2002–03, £1,317,159 was not spent on such provision. [82279]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* Baseline allocations of £0.5 million in 2001–02, £1.5 million in 2002–03 and £2.0 million in 2003–04 were expected to be used for the provision of silicone cosmesis for artificial limbs. Spending on silicone cosmesis through the national health service purchasing and supply agency was £81,858 for 2001–02, and £182,841 so far in 2002–03. The baseline allocation for 2002–03 was for the whole financial year; the spending recorded so far relates to the first half of that year. It will not be possible to provide full-year spending figures for 2002–03 until after the end of that year.

Specialised Health Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who the members are of the small oversight review group that has been convened in order to consider questions from the review on commissioning specialised services from a national perspective; and whether the group has met. [82780]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The following organisations were invited to send representatives to the 10 September national review group meeting:

The Academy of Royal Medical Colleges

The Royal College of Nursing

The Joint Consultants' Committee

Regional specialised commissioning groups

Strategic health authorities

Primary care trusts

National health service trusts

Patients' organisations

Observers from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether, in the context of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002, existing and properly constituted management limited companies may convert themselves into RTMs, limited by guarantee, by special resolution; and what guidance he has issued on the changes that might need to be made to their memoranda and articles: [82544]

Mr. McNulty: Yes.

Section 73(2) of the Act specifies that a company is a Right To Manage (RTM) company in relation to premises if:

it is a private company limited by guarantee, and

its memorandum of association states that its object, or one of its objects, is the acquisition and exercise of the right to manage the premises.

Section 74 of the Act provides a power to prescribe the Memorandum and Articles of Association for a RTM company, and we are currently consulting on the form this prescription should take.

Once the draft regulations have been finalised and brought into force, an existing company limited by guarantee could, by special resolution under the Companies Act 1985 change its objects clause to include the RTM object and adopt the prescribed Memorandum and Articles. In addition, the regulations may provide that certain of the prescribed memorandum and articles will have effect for an RTM company irrespective of whether or not it has adopted them.

However, in order for a RTM company to actually exercise and acquire the right to manage for a building, the membership of that company and the premises itself must meet the qualifying conditions as laid down by sections 72–75 of the Act.

Finally, while we have yet to produce guidance on RTM this will be available when the RTM provisions come into force. It will include all aspects of exercising and acquiring RTM.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he intends to introduce regulations bringing Part 2 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 into operation. [82545]

Mr. McNulty: The first tranche of regulations on leasehold reform came into force on 26 July this year, making it is easier for leaseholders to buy the freehold of their property, extend their leases and seek the appointment of a new manager in tripartite leases.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister proposes to make and lay the remaining regulations on Leasehold Reform in two stages, in spring and autumn 2003. Regulations on right to manage, safeguards against forfeiture, new powers for leasehold valuation tribunals and changes relating to contracts and major works will be laid in spring and should be operational by summer 2003. Regulations on accounting procedures will be laid by autumn next year and operational three months later.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many units of affordable housing have been built in the Beaconsfield constituency in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [82382]

Mr. McNulty: Figures for the Beaconsfield constituency are not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The number of dwellings built by Registered Social Landlords and the local authority in south Buckinghamshire district in the last five years are shown in the following table:

Year	*Number of dwellings*
1997–98	6
1998–99	0
1999–2000	8
2000–01	26
2001–02	11

Arson

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on reasons for which data are not available beyond 2000 for the number of malicious fires attended by local authority fire brigades. [83456]

Mr. Leslie: The latest annual data were published in "Fire Statistics, UK, 2000" in February 2002. The Statistical Bulletin ("Fire Statistics Estimates, UK, 2001") covering the most recent data will be published as soon as it is available, as required under the ONS Code of Practice for National Statistics.

The data in the bulletin are compiled from statistical returns covering some 950,000 fire-related incidents, and are subject to quality control procedures before inputting. The time taken to process and publish is not unusual for complex data collection exercises of this kind.

Civil Partnership Registration

Mr. Key: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress he is making with his analysis of the implications of civil partnership registration and associated rights and responsibilities; and if he will make a statement. [82484]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

Civil partnership registration and associated rights and responsibilities raise a number of complex issues, which have prompted a growing debate within society.

These issues potentially have significant financial and administrative implications. The Government is now examining the issues in detail and DTI co-ordinates this work across all Government Departments with an interest in the issues raised by civil partnerships.

As you will understand, the Government cannot commit itself to any changes without conducting a comprehensive analysis of the relevant rights and responsibilities, to provide a better understanding of their potential impact.

Clinical and Medical Waste

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the definition of clinical and medical waste in the context of special collections by local authorities. [81507]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Clinical waste is defined in "The Controlled Waste Regulations 1992" as any waste which consists wholly or partly of human or animal tissue, blood or other body fluids, excretions, drugs or other pharmaceutical products, swabs or dressings, or syringes, needles or other sharp instruments, being waste which unless rendered safe may prove hazardous to any person coming into contact with it; and any other waste arising from medical, nursing, dental, veterinary, pharmaceutical or similar practice, investigation, treatment, care, teaching or research, or the collection of blood for transfusion, being waste which may cause infection to any person coming into contact with it.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authorities are obliged to collect clinical waste generated in the home where the householder asks them to do so. Local authorities may make a charge for these collections. Where someone is receiving healthcare treatment at home, it is the responsibility of the healthcare professional to assess whether waste arising from their illness and treatment poses a risk of infection and should therefore be treated as clinical waste.

Council Housing, Cherwell

Tony Baldry: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will meet the hon. Member for Banbury and a delegation from Cherwell district council and representatives of local tenants groups to discuss the future of council housing in Cherwell. [83023]

Mr. McNulty: The future of Cherwell's council housing will be decided by the tenants and the councillors of the district council who are currently looking at the large scale voluntary transfer of stock option. As with all local authorities, options available for the future management of council housing include: the council retaining ownership and management of its housing stock, large/small scale voluntary transfer, arms length management and the Private Finance Initiative. The Community Housing Task Force have been working with Cherwell district council to help advise on the option appraisal process. At present a meeting would not bring forward any alternatives that have not already been covered.

English Committee of Regions

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister who the members are of the Committee for English Regions; who funds the Committee; and who is responsible for the Campaign for the English Regions. [82893]

Mr. Leslie: I am not aware of any organisation called the "Committee for English Regions". There is, however, a Regional Affairs Standing Committee and a EU Committee of the Regions. The former is funded by Parliament and its members are.

Name	*Constituency*	*Party*
Candy Atherton	Falmouth & Cambourne	Labour
Henry Bellingham	North West Norfolk	Conservative
Karen Buck	Regent's Park & Kensington North	Labour
Louise Ellman	Liverpool Riverside	Labour
Nigel Evans	Ribble Valley	Conservative
Andrew George	St Ives	Liberal Democrat
Norman Lamb	North Norfolk	Liberal Democrat
John Mann	Bassetlaw	Labour
Denis Murphy	Wansbeck	Labour
Ian Pearson	Dudley South	Labour
Lawrie Qinn	Scarborough & Whitby	Labour
Anthony Steen	Totnes	Conservative
Derek Wyatt	Sittingbourne & Sheppey	Labour

The Chair is selected from the Chairman's Panel and will vary from meeting to meeting.

The EU Committee of the Regions has 16 full members from England. It is funded by the EU. The full members from England are.

Full Members	*Region*	*Authority*	*Party*
Derek Boden	North West	Bury (Metropolitan District)	Labour
Michael Davey	North East	Northumberland (County)	Labour
The hon. Joan Taylor	East Midlands	Nottinghamshire (County)	Labour
Muriel Barker	Yorkshire & Humberside	North East Lincolnshire (Unitary)	Labour
Albert Bore	West Midlands	Birmingham (Metropolitan District)	Labour
Ken Bodfish QBE	South East	Brighton & Hove (Unitary)	Labour
Dame Sally Powell DBE	London	Hammersmith and Fulham (London)	Labour
Margaret Eaton	Yorkshire and Humberside	Bradford (Metropolitan District)	Conservative
Gordon Keymer	South East	Tandridge (District)	Conservative
Sir Simon Day	South West	Devon (County)	Conservative
The rt hon The Lord Hanningfield DL	East	Essex (County)	Conservative
The Baroness (Joan) Hanham CBE	London	Kensington and Chelsea (London)	Conservative
Ruth Coleman	South West	North Wiltshire (District)	Liberal Democrat
Lord Tope CBE	London	Sutton (London)	Liberal Democrat
Peter Moore	Yorkshire & Humberside	Sheffield (Metropolitan District)	Liberal Democrat
Milner Whiteman	West Midlands	Bridgnorth (District)	Independent

The Campaign for the English Regions is an independent body, receiving no central Government funding, which aims to secure a commitment to regional government from all political parties.

Fire Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which fire brigades are organised around the need to respond to fire incidents. [83253]

Mr. Leslie: All fire authorities have a duty under section 1(1) of the Fire Services Act 1947 to make provision for fire-fighting purposes, including securing for their area the services of a fire brigade and equipment necessary to meet efficiently all normal requirements.

Firefighters

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many former firefighters are on retirement pensions; and how many firefighters there are in service. [82173]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. This is a matter for each individual fire authority. It is estimated that in England and Wales there are over 22,000 former firefighters receiving ordinary and ill-health pensions. The number of regular wholetime firefighters eligible for membership of the pension scheme on 31 March 2001, the last date for which figures are available, was 33375.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average age of retirement for firefighters has been over the last five years. [82174]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average pension received by a firefighter is; what percentage of final salary a firefighter is entitled to after 30 years service; and what the average work-related pension received by a pensioner is. [82177]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. This is a matter for each fire authority. An analysis of a small sample of brigades at 31 March 2002 suggests that the average ill-health pension is 9,200 per annum, and the average ordinary pension is 11,300 per annum. The percentage of final salary a firefighter is entitled to after 30 years service is 66 per cent. The median income from occupational pensions for single pensioners in 2000–01 was £2,392 per annum.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of the revenue of the fire service the present pension arrangements cost. [82180]

Mr. Leslie: Based on provisional outturn figures for fire authorities in England, the net total of payments under the firefighters' pension scheme for 2001–02 was approximately 16 per cent. of net budgeted expenditure.

Homelessness (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his latest estimate of the number of street homeless in Leeds is. [81486]

Mrs. Roche: The latest estimate was published in September 2002 and a copy was placed in the Library of the House. It stood at eight.

Housing Development

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many applications have been approved for development on green-belt land in each year since June 1997 in each local authority area; and what locations were involved. [83414]

Mr. McNulty: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 6 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 413W

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80779]

Mr. Leslie: The security of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's IT system is kept under constant review. Separate figures are not available for the number of "digital attacks" (such as computer viruses detected) on the Office's IT system, as the Office shares with the Department for Transport the IT network of their predecessor (the Department for Transport, Local Government, and the Regions). For that IT network, the number of computer viruses detected was *(a)* 18 in October and *(b)* 266 in 2002 up to the end of October.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of aggregate standard spending assessments across local authorities in England were financed by aggregate total external support in each year since 1993–94. [82811]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested can be found in the table.

Standard Total External Support Spending Assessment (SSA)

	(£) million	*(£) million*	*percentage*
2002–03	49,762	40,323	81.0
2001–02	48,792	40,067	82.1
2000–01	46,690	38,526	82.5
1999–00	44,733	37,123	83.0
1998–99	42,668	35,575	83.4
1997–98	40,563	34,101	84.1
1996–97	40,157	34,140	85.0
1995–96	38,743	32,727	84.5
1994–95	37,848	29,444	77.8
1993–94	36,622	28,592	78.1

Total external support consists of revenue support grant to local authorities, redistributed national non-domestic rates, central support protection grant and SSA reduction grant. For 1995/96 onwards it also includes principal formula police grant including the Metropolitan special payment and police transitional grant. Prior to 1995/96 the Home Office funded 51 per cent.of police expenditure. Total external support excludes the City of London offset and the grant to specified bodies.

Local Government Structures

Ann Winterton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to change the number of *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* elected representatives in reviewing local government in England following the establishment of elected regional assemblies; and what assessment he has made of the consequential effect of regional government on devolution. [82728]

Mr. Raynsford: Where an elected regional assembly is established, existing two tier local government will be restructured as unitary authorities following recommendations made by the Boundary Committee. The responsibility for electoral arrangements, including the numbers of Councillors, in any new structure will be a matter for the Electoral Commission.

Paragraph 8.9 of the White Paper on Regional Governance said that some elected regional assemblies in England may need to consider the impact of their activities on Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, and establish appropriate relationships with the devolved administrations and other relevant Scottish or Welsh bodies. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will have reserve powers to intervene if he or she considers that an assembly's strategies or actions are likely to have a detrimental impact on another region, Scotland, Wales, or the UK as a whole.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the Government's policy is on the future number of tiers of local government in England; what assessment he has made of the effect of a review of local government on the stability of local authority finance and administration; and if he will make a statement. [82729]

Mr. Raynsford: Policy for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is that where an elected regional assembly is established, following a referendum in the region, there should only be a single tier of local government. The financial and administrative impact of local government reviews will depend on the structure and boundary changes proposed, and it will be for the Boundary Committee to assess this when it makes recommendation for change.

New Towns (South-East)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact the creation of the proposed three new towns in the south east will have on public expenditure; what the cost will be of providing *(a)* transport, *(b)* schools, *(c)* housing, *(d)* health and *(e)* other infrastructure to the three towns; and what impact public funding for the new towns will have on other regions. [82600]

Mr. McNulty: In his statement to the House in July, the Deputy Prime Minister set out the Government's intentions for tackling the housing shortage in London and the south east. Studies of the potential for growth have been published for the Milton Keynes/South Midlands area and the London-Stansted-Cambridge area, and the Ashford study is due for publication imminently. These studies give some indication of the infrastructure that will be needed to support growth but what is needed will clearly be dependent on the scale of growth and where it is located. Over the coming months the Government, taking account of these studies, will work with regional and local partners in each of the areas to establish where, at what scale, and how quickly growth can be achieved. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will set out next steps when, early in the New Year, he makes a statement to the House on his comprehensive long-term programme of action for sustainable communities, as promised in his statement on 18 July.

Right to Buy

Mr. Pike: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to review right to buy; and if he will make a statement. [83417]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has indicated publicly that we are concerned about the impact of right to buy sales in areas of housing pressure, and that we will act to address this. We are also concerned about exploitation of the rules of the scheme,

and announced earlier this year that researchers at Heriot-Watt university have been commissioned to investigate the scale, nature and impact of such exploitation. The results are expected by the end of this year and will be published thereafter.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish the sources of the anecdotal evidence he has evaluated that the right to buy rules were being exploited in some areas. [83509]

Mr. McNulty: No. The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The results of the research by Heriot-Watt University into the scale, nature and impact of such exploitation are expected by the end of this year, and will be published thereafter.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions Ministers and officials of his Department have held with the research team at Heriot-Watt University investigating the right to buy scheme; what was discussed at each meeting; who attended; and when each meeting took place. [83510]

Mr. McNulty: This research project is subject to normal project management procedures and disciplines operated by professional and policy officials. It is subject to review by a stakeholder group drawn from housing practitioners and representatives of lending institutions and local government.

The results are expected by the end of this year, and will be published thereafter.

Wakefield Metropolitan District

Jon Trickett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the percentage increase in *(a)* SSA, *(b)* expenditure (revenue and capital) and *(c)* government grant for Wakefield MDC in the 10 years from May 1992; and what the comparable statistics are for aggregate local government expenditure. [83159]

Mr. Raynsford: The information available is presented in the table.

	1992 to 93 (£) million	*2002 to 03 (£) million*	*percentage increase*
Wakefield			
SSA	207	283	36.8
Revenue Expenditure	229	328	43.2
Capital Expenditure	35	44	24.4
Government Grants	176	252	43.7
All England			
SSA	37,993	53,570	41.0
Revenue expenditure	41,925	65,252	55.6
Capital expenditure	6,568	10,859	65.3
Government grants	32,859	47970	46.0

Note:
1. Figures between 1992/93 and 2002/03 and between Wakefield and England are not directly comparable for the following reasons.
a) In 1992/93 Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR) amounts were paid only to billing authorities. Consequently, the amounts shown for Wakefield cover all services including Police and Fire. From 1993/94 onwards, support for Police and Fire was paid directly to the relevant Police and Fire Authorities. The figures for England do include Police and Fire for both 1992/92 and 2002/03.
b) There have been changes in the responsibilities of local authorities.
c) In 1992/93, only information on RSG, NNDR and Specific Grants inside AEF are available on a consistent basis.
2. The revenue and capital expenditure figures for 2002/03 are budget estimates.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Corpse Disposal

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made to deal with the disposal of corpses contaminated by a *(a)* chemical, *(b)* biological, *(c)* radioactive and *(d)* nuclear attack. [82161]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* Contingency plans for managing the consequences of attacks using chemical, biological and radiological material are in place and are regularly reviewed. These plans include arrangements for the efficient and sensitive handling of contaminated corpses, although the precise response would largely depend on the circumstances and scale of the incident. The Government do not reveal details of contingency arrangements relating to potential terrorist attacks for security reason.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Antisocial Behaviour Orders have been imposed in each of the last two years. [82083]

Mr. Denham: The table shows the number of notifications reported to the Home Office of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) issued up to 30 June 2002 (latest available) within England and Wales.

Number of Antisocial Behaviour Orders issued, as reported to the Home Office from1 April 1999 to 30 June 2002, England and Wales

	From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000[1]	*From 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2000*	*From 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001*	*From 1 January 2002 to 30 June 2002*	*Total*
ASBOs issued	104	134	293	123	654

[1] Total figure only available within this period.

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made locally have been consistently under-reported in returns made by magistrates courts, and are considering how reporting can be improved.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of *(a)* practical and *(b)* procedural difficulties in relation to the imposition of Anti-social Behavioural Orders; and what remedial proposals he has. [82086]

Mr. Denham: Legislative changes were introduced by the Police Reform Act to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). These changes, combined with the new guidance, will help to remedy some of the problems identified in the Home Office Review of ASBOs, published in April 2002. We are also working with the Local Chancellor's Department (LCD), Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and others to ensure that the necessary training is given to magistrates, prosecutors and others involved in the process. We will continue to review the working of ASBOs in order to make them as streamline as possible.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued since their introduction in the Beaconsfield constituency. [82385]

Mr. Denham: The table shows the number of notifications received by the Home Office of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs), issued within Buckinghamshire (in which the Beaconsfield constituency is situated) and by local government authority up to 30 June 2002 (latest available).

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made locally have been consistently under reported in returns made by magistrates courts, and are considering how reporting can be improved.

Number of antisocial behaviour orders reported to the Home Office which have been issued as from 1 April 1999 to 30 June 2002 for Buckinghamshire by local government authority area

Area	*From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000*[1]	*From 1 June 2000 to 30 June 2002*	*Total*
Police force area/ MCC			
Thames Valley[2]	1	9	10
Local government authority, county of Buckinghamshire			
Milton Keynes borough council	[3]—	3	3
Wycombe district council	[3]—	2	2

[1] Total figure only available for Thames Valley police force area within this period. Local government authority not known.

[2] Includes total figure for counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

[3] Not available.

Child Curfew and Safety Orders

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* child curfew orders and *(b)* child safety orders there have been in each year since their introduction. [81004]

Mr. Denham: Between February 2001, when curfew orders with electronic monitoring were extended to 10 to 15-year-olds, and 31 October 2002 the courts imposed 2,704 orders on young offenders of that age.

Two child safety orders were issued in the areas in which they were piloted between September 1998 and June 2000.

Conviction Rates

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the conviction rate in Crown courts was in each year since 1992. [81001]

Hilary Benn: The information requested, for the years 1992 to 2000, is as follows:

Conviction rate[1] *at the Crown court in England and Wales, 1992 to 2000*

Year	*Rate*
1992	79.9
1993	79.5
1994	78.6
1995	79.1
1996	80.4
1997	80.3
1998	75.9
1999	74.3
2000	72.9

[1] Defendants convicted as a percentage of defendants for trial.

Notes:
The introduction of plea before venue from 1 October 1997 caused a greater number of guilty plea cases to be heard at magistrates courts.
Statistics for 2001 will be available in December.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Criminal Records Bureau to be able to cope with demand sufficiently to implement the criminal record checks as part of the Protection of Vulnerable Adult lists. [81721]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made clear on 4 November 2002 in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), *Official Report*, column 99W, we shall introduce arrangements for Criminal Records Bureau checks against the Protection of Vulnerable Adults list at the earliest opportunity.

Illegal Camping

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the next guidance on managing illegal camping and travellers will be released. [82140]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The new joint Office of the Deputy Prime Minister/ Home Office guidance on managing unauthorised camping by gypsies and other travellers will be issued by the new year.

In order for the Government to strike up a balanced approach to unauthorised camping, the new guide will consist of two documents, Framework Guidance and detailed Operational Guidance, for use by local authorities, police services and both the settled and traveller communities.

Consultation with key stakeholders will commence shortly.

Immigration

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department classes as purposeful activities as set out in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. [83435]

Beverley Hughes: Section 29 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 provides the necessary powers to provide and fund purposeful activities for asylum seekers supported in accommodation centres.

Such activities are likely to include training in English language, information technology and other skills training and volunteering. Other examples include sport, creative activities and practical activities like cookery or gardening. We do not intend to follow an unduly prescriptive approach to what constitutes a purposeful activity. The aim is to keep asylum seekers occupied; contribute towards a positive atmosphere in the centres; make time spent in the UK productive; and provide opportunities to develop useful skills. We want to allow room for local variation and innovation.

Offences

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of *(a)* racially aggravated offences, *(b)* violent crime, *(c)* robbery of personal property and *(d)* drug offences were recorded in (i) Lancashire and (ii) the North West of England in (A) 1997, (B) 1998, (C) 1999, (D) 2000 and (E) 2001. [82373]

Mr. Denham: The requested statistics are given in the following table.

On 1 April 1998, there was a change in the counting rules for recorded crime, and an expansion of the offences covered. This resulted in an increase of crimes recorded by the police. Recorded crime figures before this date will therefore not be directly comparable.

As Lancashire, Cumbria and Greater Manchester police forces implemented the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in advance of its national implementation in April 2002, the recorded crime figures for these areas cannot be directly compared with those for previous years. The affects of the Standard are explained in table footnote 4.

Recorded crime: number of offences recorded from 1997 to 2001/02

Police force area/ offence	*1997*[1]	*1997–98*[2]	*1998–99*[3]	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[4]
Lancashire						
Total racially aggravated offences[5]	—	—	—	232	408	1,057
Total violent crime[6]	5,550	5,718	12,183	11,615	13,870	18,535
Robbery of personal property[7]	—	—	816	866	1,044	1,437
Drug offences[8]	554	529	4,117	3,135	3,124	3,169
North West Region[9]						
Total racially aggravated offences[5]	—	—	—	1,284	2,053	4,746
Total violent crime[6]	46,224	50,503	87,033	93,029	95,940	106,892
Robbery of personal property[7]	—	—	9,338	10,425	11,614	13,656
Drug offences[8]	3,156	3,164	19,267	16,106	15,070	14,775

[1] Recorded on a calendar year basis.
[2] The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the coverage and rules in use until 31 March 1998.
[3] The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the expanded offence coverage and revised counting rules which came into effect on 1 April 1998.
[4] Cumbria, Greater Manchester and Lancashire implemented the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in advance of the national implementation date of April 2002. The 2000–01 and 2001–02 figures for these forces will be affected by the Standard. The NCRS and other changes to police recording practices, has had the estimated effect of increasing recorded crime statistics by at least 5 per cent. for 2001–02, which means the real increase of total recorded crime for 2001–02 is 2 per cent. compared to the published national total of 7 per cent. The impact will vary for different types of offence.
[5] Racially aggravated offences became notifiable to the police on 1 April 1999. The offences covered are; other wounding, harassment, common assault, criminal damage to a dwelling, criminal damage to a building other than a dwelling, criminal damage to a vehicle and other criminal damage.
[6] Violent crime is comprised of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery.
[7] Robbery of personal property was recorded separately (from total robbery) as from 1 April 1998.
[8] Up until 1 April 1998, Trafficking in controlled drugs was the only drugs-related offence recorded. After this date the offence coverage was expanded to include more drugs-related offences.
[9] The North West Region comprises the following police forces; Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

Police Numbers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in each police authority in Wales in each of the past five years; and what the target number of police officers in each police authority was in each of those years. [82519]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The information requested about police strength has

been set out in the table. Targets for individual force strength are not collected centrally.

Police Officer Strength

Year as at 31 March	Dyfed-Powys	Gwent	North Wales	South Wales
1998	1,002	1,233	1,396	2,986
1999	1,026	1,247	1,391	2,981
2000	1,040	1,264	1,403	2,926
2001	1,055	1,274	1,444	3,154
2002	1,132	1,333	1,506	3,222

Civilian Support Staff

Year as at 31 March	*Dyfed-Powys*	*Gwent*	*North Wales*	*South Wales*
1998	341	477	479	1,132
1999	341	487	508	1,223
2000	359	498	519	1,081
2001	401	537	498	1,270
2002	459	570	645	1,435

Source:
Home Office Statistical Bulletins—Police Service Strength 1998–2002

Police Training

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the pass marks for each police entrance exam and physical test for each batch of recruits into police training colleges during *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [82493]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The 1997 information is no longer available. The 2001 information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 28 November 2002

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Planning Application

Mr. Willis: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what the policy is of the Church Commissioners on the division of costs arising from an ecclesiastical court hearing into a planning application to site a mobile phone mast in a church spire. [82840]

Mr. Bell: The Church Commissioners have no involvement in decisions made in parishes about whether or not to site an aerial within a church building, or in determining responsibility for related costs.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Built Heritage

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department has taken to organise support for the built heritage sector; and if she will make a statement. [83756]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, together with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, published its policy on the built heritage in "A Force for our Future" in December 2001. This was informed by "Power of Place", a review of the historic environment by the sector. We are now working closely with the sector to deliver this challenging agenda.

Funding Councils

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the performance of the funding councils for the performing and visual arts and for film; and if she will make a statement. [83760]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regular meetings with the Chairman of the Arts Council, Gerry Robinson, and Baroness Blackstone as Minister of State for the Arts, has regular meetings with the Chief Executive, Peter Hewitt. In July the Secretary of State announced additional funding for the Arts Council reflecting her confidence in the restructuring of the Arts funding system currently taking place.

When the Film Council was established in April 2000, it was set 13 goals for film which had been identified in the course of the Film Policy Review (1998). These goals have formed the basis of the Film Council's funding agreement with the Department. Progress against the funding agreement is reviewed regularly. In addition, both the Secretary of State and I, as Minister for film, have met the Chair and Chief Executive of the Film Council on other occasions to discuss performance.

The Film Council has already made significant progress in delivering many of its goals, and I warmly welcome Sir Alan Parker's speech given earlier this month setting out the Film Council's vision for the future of the British film industry.

National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost of production was of the annual report 2002 of the National Endowment for Science and Technology; how many reports were produced; and if she will make a statement. [83779]

Mr. Caborn: The cost of producing NESTA's annual report 2002 was £48,885 (excluding VAT) and 5,000 copies were produced.

Performing Arts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the New Audiences programme; and if she will make a statement. [83736]

Dr. Howells: This is a matter for the Arts Council of England who have been administering the programme since its inception. The programme does not finish until the end of this year and a full evaluation will be made by ACE in 2003.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of her Department's contribution to enabling access to the performing arts in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [83738]

Dr. Howells: The grant-in-aid figures for the Arts Council for each of the above years was as follows: 1998–99 £189.9 million; 1999–2000 £228.2 million; 2000–01 £237.2 million and 2001–02 £252.2 million. In July this year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a further substantial increase in my Department's funding for the arts for 2004–05 to 2005–06. As a result of this Government funding for the arts will be £412 million in 2005–06, or 73 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1997–98.

Playing Fields

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to her statement on 15 November, *Official Report*, column 336, what the basis was of her statement that 5,000 school playing fields were sold off between 1979 and 1997; and how many school playing fields have been sold since 1997. [82408]

Tessa Jowell: No data were collected centrally on how many school playing fields there were in either 1979 or 1997. My estimate of about 5,000 playing fields comes from two sources. First, the Central Council of Physical Recreation published a paper in 1984 "Sports Fields at Risk", which indicated that some 3,630 areas of recreation land recorded on Land Registers were at risk

of disposal. A more meaningful way of quantifying the area under threat at that time is to translate this figure into about 5,000 school playing fields of sports pitch size.

Second, the then Department for Education and Employment estimated that an average 40 playing fields a month were sold subsequent to the previous Government encouraging the disposal of playing fields in April 1996 by relaxing the Local Authority Capital Finance Regulations. Even if disposals had been running at only half this rate from 1979–1997, the total would have approached 5,000 disposals.

Data collected under this Government were announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport on 10 June this year, *Official Report*, column 1006W.

Public Libraries (Internet Access)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many internet connections there were in public libraries in the UK in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* 2002; what proportion of public libraries in the UK had internet connections in June 2002; and if she will make a statement. [83751]

Dr. Howells: The £120 million lottery funded programme to connect public libraries in the UK to the Internet and provide ICT training for all library staff is proceeding well. In June 2002 there were 2,909 libraries connected to the internet and offering public access compared to just 215 libraries in 1998. This means that 70 per cent. of all UK libraries were online as of June 2002. The programme is expected to fulfil its original target of connecting libraries, wherever practical, to the internet by the end of 2002.

Tourism Revenue (Euro Entry)

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact which the UK's retention of the pound in preference to entering the Eurozone has had on tourist revenue; and if he will make a statement. [84099]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 751W.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carrier Programmes

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have taken place with US and British companies on the design and procurement of the aircraft carrier in relation to the carrier-borne aircraft. [83225]

Dr. Moonie: During the course of normal project development for the United Kingdom's Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) and Joint Combat Aircraft (JCA) programmes, numerous discussions have taken place between British and American companies. Lockheed Martin, the contractor for the United States Joint Strike Fighter programme, is also a member of both teams competing for the CVF project, which are led by BAE SYSTEMS and Thales. Personnel from the CVF project team also maintain contact with their opposite numbers in the US carrier programme.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated cost is to his Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81882]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Any additional costs to the Ministry of Defence as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Correspondence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will write to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South, regarding his answer of 5 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 168W, concerning the disposal of the Gunwharf and HMS Vernon site in Portsmouth to Barclay Homes. [83819]

Dr. Moonie: I have replied today and a copy of my letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Fire Service

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals there are to privatise the Defence Fire Service; and who would have control of the service if there were a major crisis. [83227]

Mr. Ingram: The Airfield Support Services Project (ASSP) is seeking to achieve the most viable and cost effective solution for the provision of airfield support service to the Ministry of Defence world-wide with options that include both Public Private Partnership and in house solutions. There is also a complementary work stream, Fire Study 2000, that has looked specifically at the organisation and operation of the Defence Fire Service, which is to inform the Public Sector Comparator for ASSP.

Bids from the three consortia involved in ASSP were received at the end of April and are now being evaluated. Main Gate approval is currently planned for the second half of 2003. No decisions have been taken at this stage. Whatever solution is taken forward, we would ensure that we preserve our ability to manage crisis situations.

Unexploded Ordnance

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of magnetic profiling in searching for unexploded ordnance at military training areas; [83704]

(2) whether his Department uses *(a)* Global Positioning System and *(b)* magnetometry scanning methods in surveying unexploded ordnance at military training grounds; [83707]

(3) what geophysical instrumentation the British army uses in clean-up operations at military training grounds. [83708]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has had, for a number of years, a magnetic profiling capability which is widely recognised as an effective method of establishing the degree of contamination within an area of land. The British Army does not currently employ geophysical instrumentation in ordnance clearance operations at military training grounds as it is not considered to provide the degree of accuracy required for the location of smaller types of ordnance. The Ministry of Defence currently possesses both Global Positioning System and magnetometry scanning capabilities. It is planned that more advanced equipment will be introduced in the next training year which will provide improved information on the presence of UXO within a given area.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has the capability to carry out airborne surveys of military training sites to detect *(a)* exploded and *(b)* unexploded ordnance. [83356]

Mr. Ingram: Although we do not possess equipment designed specifically to detect unexploded ordnance from the air, the Ministry of Defence has used high-resolution photographic reconnaissance imagery to assist in explosive ordnance disposal work.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hectares per day the British army clears of unexploded ordnance when they carry out clearing operations in Archers Post, Kenya. [83705]

Mr. Ingram: Every British army unit conducting live firing activities on Archers Post conducts, on their completion, a clearance operation designed to ensure that all unexploded ordnance has, as far as possible, been marked and destroyed. In addition, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Squadron of the Royal Engineers undertakes Exercise Pineapple annually in Kenya. The historical average, over the four-week period of the exercise, is that an area of up to three square kilometres is cleared, though this is subject to variation.

McKinsey and Company

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has commissioned from McKinsey and Company in the past four years. [80973]

Mr. Ingram: Since September 1998, Ministry of Defence records indicate that four contracts have been let to McKinsey and Company to produce the following reports:

Consultancy support for the Smart Procurement Initiative.

Support to Equipment Capability Customer Development.

Re-energising the Ministry of Defence Change Programme—Assessment of Defence Information Infrastructure.

Re-energising the Ministry of Defence Change Programme—Review and Adjust the DLO Business Change Programme.

Medical Manning and Retention Review

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what targets have been set in relation to his commitment to implement the recommendations of the Medical Manning and Retention Review; if he will publish *(a)* the Review recommendations and *(b)* the proposed pay scales for personnel in the Defence Medical Services; and if he will make a statement. [83467]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Military Vehicle Contracts

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which firms are bidding for military vehicle contracts; and what is *(a)* the size of their work force and *(b)* the country in which they are based. [81694]

Dr. Moonie: Current competitions for military vehicles include *(a)* HILLS (High Velocity Missile, Improved Medium Mobility, Lightweight Mobile Launcher, Shoulder Launch System) *(b)* Wheeled Tankers *(c)* Cargo Tracks and Wheeled Recovery Vehicles and *(d)* The Future Command Liaison Vehicle. I am withholding information relating to proposed purchases for Special Forces use under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which covers defence, security and international relations.

Project	*Company*	*Work force*[1]	*Country in which company based*
HILLS	Automotive Technik Ltd.	Under 250	UK
Wheeled tankers	Marshall Specialist Vehicle Ltd.	Under 500	UK
Wheeled tankers	Oshkosh Truck Corporation	Under 250	USA
Support vehicles	Oshkosh Truck Corporation	Under 250	USA
Support vehicles	Stewart & Stevenson TV	Under 250	USA
Support vehicles	MAN Truck & Bus UK Ltd.	[2]Under 2,000	UK
Support vehicles	Mercedes-Benz UK Defence	[3]—	UK
FCLV	Alvis Specialist Vehicles[4]	500	UK
FCLV	UDLP	—	[5]USA
FCLV	VDS	500	UK

[1] Approximate UK work force numbers

[2] Includes ERF Ltd. work force

[3] Figure not available

[4] Alvis have taken over VDS but at present there is a "Chinese wall" between the two competing components

[5] UDLP are setting up a base in the UK. US work force numbers are 5,000

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times he has visited east Lancashire in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82403]

Dr. Moonie: None.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will offer saliva tests to assess the extent of exposure to radiation experienced by British Service personnel and medical auxiliaries present at atmospheric nuclear weapons tests. [84258]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 408W to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr Weir).

Parliamentary Questions

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the longest gap was between the submission of a written question in the last parliamentary session and his Department providing *(a)* a substantive reply, *(b)* a holding reply and *(c)* a "will write" response. [83252]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministers aim to answer named day written questions on the day named and ordinary written questions within five working days.

Young Recruits

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice he has taken on whether the limitation of the right of under 18-year-olds to leave the armed forces if they consider that they have made a mistaken decision to join is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998. [83233]

Dr. Moonie: All three services operate schemes which enable under 18-year-olds to leave the armed forces if they consider that they have made a mistaken decision to join. These schemes were not introduced as a consequence of the Human Rights Act 1998, and indeed the Royal Navy and Army schemes for 'unhappy under-18s' predate it. However, in common with other personnel policies, the schemes remain under review by the Ministry of Defence to ensure that they comply with extant legislation. The Ministry of Defence's position is that schemes do not in any way contravene the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998, given that under-18s, all of whom enter the amed forces voluntarily under their own informed will, have ample rights and opportunities to leave before reaching age 18.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Advertising and Public Awareness

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what advertising campaigns and public awareness campaigns have been undertaken by his Department in each year since 1997, and what the cost was of each company. [83415]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was set up on 29 May 2002. Since then the Office has undertaken two advertising and public awareness campaigns: one for fire safety under the title 'Make Your Plan Get Out Alive' at a cost of £2.4m; and one to remind the general public to be extra vigilant about fire safety during the current industrial action by the Fire Brigades' Union, under the title 'Get out, stay out and call 999' with a budget of up to £1.8m.

For the total budget for the 'Fire Kills' campaign in this fiscal year, I refer the hon Member to the answer given to him on Tuesday 5 November 2002, *Official Report*, Hansard (column 196W).

The spend on the fire safety campaign in previous years is as follows:

Year	*Activity*	*Sponsoring Dept*
2001/02	Excuses kill (Smoke Alarms £1.7m). Cigarette Safety £1.95m	DTLR
2000/01	Fire Action Plan £3.3m	Home Office
1999/2000	Chip Pan safety £2.4m	Home Office
1998/99	General Fire safety £800K	Home Office
1997/98	Figures not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost	Home Office

Brownfield Sites

Mr. Pike: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has further to encourage use of brownfield sites; and if he will make a statement. [83418]

Mr. McNulty: National planning policies encourage the reuse of suitable brownfield sites. Through Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (PPG3) we have introduced new measures, including an urban brownfields first policy, to meet the country's housing needs in the most sustainable way. Planning policies for land recycling are backed by a package of fiscal measures to secure the regeneration and renewal of communities worth £1 billion over 5 years.

EU Structural Funding

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans there are to help with match funding in areas that receive Objective 2 funding. [83388]

Mr. McNulty: There are a large number of potential sources of match funding in Objective 2 areas. In addition to central Government programmes such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, other sources are also available including the RDA single pot, local authorities, voluntary and community sector and private sector sources also provide match funding. A publication listing out the many sources of match funding is widely circulated by Government Offices.

Clearly as and when new Government programmes are introduced, they can provide additional sources of match funding for projects.

Fire Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many emergency calls in the last 12 months to fire brigades were related to *(a)* fires and *(b)* other incidents. [83254]

Mr. Leslie: In 2000, the last year for which data are available, of the 1,135,000 emergency calls attended by UK fire brigades, 476,000 (42 per cent.) were related to fires and 658,000 (58 per cent.) were related to other incidents.

The other incidents category comprises false fire alarms (460,000 or 41 per cent. of all emergency calls) and special services incidents, including road traffic accidents and lift rescues (198,000 or 17 per cent of all emergency calls).

The figures shown here differ very slightly from those given in answers to two earlier parliamentary questions (*Official Report*, 21 October 2002, column 59W and *Official Report*, 19 November 2002, column 84W), as the Scottish Executive has subsequently supplied revised special service incident figures for financial year 2000–01.

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* statutory and *(b)* other role fire brigades have in relation to (i) risk reduction and risk management in relation to non-fire emergencies, (ii) community fire safety and fire reductions, (iii) fire safety enforcement and (iv) emergency preparedness against terrorist, biological, chemical, radiological and nuclear threats. [83255]

Mr. Raynsford: The roles that fire authorities have in relation to the activities listed include:

(i) Under section 3(1)(e) of the Fire Services Act 1947 a fire authority may "employ the fire brigade maintained by them, or use any equipment so maintained, for purposes other than fire-fighting purposes for which it appears to the authority to be suitable . . .". In the exercise of this power fire authorities take into account the deployment of resources to manage and reduce risk in relation to non-fire emergencies.

(ii) Among other duties of fire authorities under section 1(1) of the 1947 Act, section 1(1)(f) makes it a duty to secure "efficient arrangements for the giving, when requested, of advice in respect of buildings and other property in the area of the fire authority as to fire prevention, restricting the spread of fires, and means of escape in case of fire". In addition, authorities undertake on a non-statutory basis such activities as fire safety education, community-based risk assessments, arson reduction initiatives and smoke alarm installation programmes.

(iii) Fire authorities currently enforce the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 as amended by the Fire Precautions (Workplace) (Amendment) Regulations 1999. Under the 1971 Act fire authorities are empowered to issue fire certificates that relate to categories of premises designated by the Secretary of State in two orders. The first covers hotels and boarding houses and the second deals with factories, offices, shops and railway premises Under the 1997 Regulations, as amended, fire authorities are empowered to assess the adequacy of the fire risk assessment made by an employer in respect of the employer's premises. Fire authorities are also consulted on the adequacy of fire precautions by local authorities, which are the enforcing authorities for licensing purposes and in respect of houses in multiple occupation.

(iv) The Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1993 give the metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities, including the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, the function of assisting the boroughs in their emergency planning arrangements, specifically by assisting with training and exercises. The Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1999 places fire and civil defence authorities under a duty to prepare and maintain emergency plans to deal with the off-site effects of a major accident. Fire authorities generally participate in co-ordinating emergency response with other agencies. In addition, under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Department of Health in January 2002, fire authorities were encouraged to secure effective co-operation with health service agencies on mass decontamination: each fire authority was asked to draw up a local agreement facilitating the delegation of operations from the local ambulance service.

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether it is his policy that fire resources should be co-ordinated on a regional or sub-regional basis. [83256]

Mr. Raynsford: Fire services are provided locally by 50 fire authorities in England and Wales. We actively encourage wider collaboration, both between fire authorities and with other emergency services.

The Independent Review of the Fire Service under the chairmanship of Professor Sir George Bain will, as part of its terms of reference, inquire into and make recommendations on the future organisation and management of the fire service. We await the report which Sir George hopes to be able to publish in December 2002.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the recent firemen's strike. [82219]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made statements to the House on 22 October, *Official Report*, column 125, 14 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 140, 21 November, *Official Report*, columns 885–86 and 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 165–68. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will keep the House of Commons fully informed.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the terms of reference for the Bain Review of the Fire Service took into account the findings of the Pathfinder trials; and if he will make a statement. [82452]

Mr. Raynsford: Yes. The terms of reference of the Independent Review of the Fire Service require it, among other things, to inquire into and make recommendations on the future organisation and management of the Fire Service to undertake the full range of responsibilities that are appropriate to it; to enable it to respond effectively to all the operational demands that may be placed upon it; and to enable the responsibilities of the Fire Service to be delivered with optimum efficiency and effectiveness.

The Fire Service needs to take an integrated approach to reducing and mitigating the risks from fires and other emergencies. Pathfinder trials have been undertaken in 11 brigades to develop working procedures and to assess the practicality and cost of implementing risk-based fire cover and greater flexibility of response. The findings of the trials have been made available to the Review.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of fire cover requirements where the risk to life is rated higher than that to property, before establishing the Pathfinder trials. [82454]

Mr. Leslie: No such assessment could be made. The Pathfinder trials were commissioned to see what would be involved in practice in moving to a risk-based system of fire cover. The methods of risk assessment were developed as part of the trials, not before.

Local Government (Parishes)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures have been taken to strengthen the parish tier of local government. [83508]

Mr. Leslie: Recent measures to strengthen the parish tier of local government include:

increasing the amount local councils can spend per elector under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, on matters that will have a direct benefit on their communities, from £3.50 to £5.00;

£2 million Government funding over three years to help the Countryside Agency and NALC develop a national training strategy for parish councillors and clerks;

reducing the accounting and audit burden on parishes following the introduction of the "lighter touch" audit;

the introduction of a new ethical framework, including new codes of conduct to promote the highest standards of conduct in parish and town councils; anda wide-ranging consultation on proposals for a Quality Parish and Town Council scheme which we are now working with NALC and others to establish.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance he has issued on the remuneration of parish clerks. [83507]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not issued any guidance on the remuneration of parish clerks, which is a matter for each local council.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Minister has responsibility for parish councils; and if he will make a statement. [83411]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister assisted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich and I are responsible for policy and legislation on English parish and town councils. We share these responsibilities with our Right Honourable and Honourable Friends who have responsibility for those service and policy objectives which parish councils can help to deliver.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many mobile phone masts have been constructed in England and Wales, in each year since 1997 in each local authority area. [83412]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not hold the information requested centrally.

However, all mobile phone antennas are registered with the Radiocommunications Agency. Information on the location and ownership of the antennas is available on the Agency's Site Finder database at www.sitefinder.radio.gov.uk The site is updated every three months.

Public Highways

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what procedure an applicant must undertake to seek the permanent closure of areas of the public highway to prevent use by motorised vehicles; and what action is open to opponents to seek to prevent such an order being granted. [82466]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer given to him today (PQ ref. 82465).

Referendums

Mr. Brady: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on the use of public funds to support campaigns for *(a)* referendums on regional government and *(b)* a particular outcome in a referendum campaign. [83847]

Mr. Raynsford: This is a matter for the Electoral Commission under the provisions of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (sections 108–110 and schedule 12); or, if pertaining to a local authority publicity campaign relating to regional referendums, a matter for the Code on Local Authority Publicity which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has issued under section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986.

Regional Government

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the cost of the headquarters for a regional government in the North West of England; and what the breakdown of this sum is broken down by budget heads. [83786]

Mr. Leslie: The Government has made no estimate of the cost of a headquarters for a regional government in the North West of England. As paragraph 6.7 of the Government's White Paper on Regional Governance says, it will be for an assembly to decide on the best way to meet its accommodation requirements, including the location of its headquarters.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the cost of the initial start-up costs of regional government in the North West of England; and what the breakdown of this sum is broken down by main budget heads. [83787]

Mr. Leslie: The costs of establishing elected regional assemblies will vary from region to region, mainly because of different sizes of their electorates. We expect them all to fall in a range around £15 million to £30 million a region, including the costs of a referendum and of the first assembly elections. The North West is likely to fall towards the upper end of this range.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the cost of *(a)* holding and *(b)* promoting a referendum on regional government in the North West of England. [83788]

Mr. Leslie: Paragraph 69 of the Explanatory Notes to the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill says that the cost of a referendum may range from about £2m in the North East to about £6m in the South East.

With regard to the costs associated with the promotion of a referendum in the North West, that would be a matter for the Electoral Commission under the provisions of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (sections 108–110 and schedule 12); or, if pertaining to a local authority publicity campaign relating to regional referendums, a matter for the Code on Local Authority Publicity which my Rt. Hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has issued under section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the administrative costs of *(a)* regional development agencies, *(b)* government offices for the regions and *(c)* regional chambers were, in each region in (i) 2000–01, (ii) 2001–02 and (iii) 2002–03. [83815]

Mr. Leslie: The information is as follows:

(a) The Regional Development Agencies' administrative costs for 2000–01 and 2001–02, together with estimates for 2002–03, are set out in the following table:

Thousand

RDAs administrative costs	*2000–01 spend*	*2001–02 spend*	*2002–03 forecast expenditure*
North East	10,463	11,603	16,722
North West	14,476	15,004	19,921
Yorkshire	8,284	10,354	14,750
East Midlands	7,213	7,488	10,467
West Midlands	8,352	9,083	13,500
East	4,710	5,925	7,245
South East	6,343	7,143	12,839
South West	8,380	9,099	13,975
London	5,354	9,805	14,044

(b) The Government Offices' administrative costs for 2000–01 and 2001–02, together with estimates for 2002–03, are set out in the following table :

GO	*2000–01 spend*	*2001–02 spend*	*2002–03 forecast expenditure*
North East	8,197.33	8,973.88	8,658.69
North West	13,651.03	15,250.91	13,852.48
Yorkshire and Humber	9,357.21	9,889.50	9,520.69
West Midlands	9,960.77	10,315.96	9,213.41
East Midlands	7,335.77	8,200.80	7,395.22
East	7,542.50	8,532.82	7,704.08
South East	9,477.27	10,309.34	9,249.80
South West	8,711.39	10,671.85	9,418.63
London	13,860.98	13,175.10	12,215.67
Totals	88,094.25	95,320.16	87,228.67

(c) Regional Chambers are not Government bodies. They receive funding from a variety of sources, primarily the participating local authorities. The Government have agreed to provide a contribution towards their costs for the next three years, starting in 2002–03. This equates to £600,000 per Chamber—£15 million in total across all the regions over the three year period.

Regional Planning

Helen Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received on the likely effect of the draft Regional Planning Guidance on the Warrington area; and if he will make a statement. [83892]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) Proposed Changes to Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the North West were published in May 2002, and the closing date for comments was 16 August 2002, 201 organisations responded to the consultation, and a total of 1,825 individual comments were made on the whole of Draft RPG. Of this total, 38 comments were on the Warrington area. Organisations that responded included the North West Development Agency, North West Regional Assembly, Warrington Borough Council, Council for the Protection of Rural England, and the Omega Joint Venture Partnership.

Second Homes

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the number of second homes claiming a council tax discount in each local authority area in *(a)* Devon, *(b)* Cornwall, *(c)* Somerset and *(d)* Dorset. [82969]

Mr. McNulty: The following tables set out the number of second homes (defined as furnished and no-one's main residence) entitled to the 50 per cent. council tax discount as at November 2001,as reported by local authorities.

Some authorities have been unable to report reliable information on their number of second homes. These authorities are indicated in the tables by 'no estimate'.

(a) Devon

Local authority name	*Number of second homes*
East Devon	2,431
Exeter	No estimate
Mid-Devon	301
North Devon	914
South Hams	4,597
Teignbridge	1,396
Torridge	No estimate
West Devon	No estimate
Plymouth UA	No estimate
Torbay U A	1,576

(b) Cornwall

Local authority name	*Number of second homes*
Caradon	1,461
Carrick	No estimate
Kerrier	1,530
North Cornwall	4,095
Penwith	No estimate
Restormel	1,741
Isles of Scilly UA	248

(c) Somerset

Local authority name	*Number of second homes*
Mendip	365
Sedgemoor	404
South Somerset	608
Taunton Deane	362
West Somerset	1,058
Bath and North-east Somerset UA	79
Bristol UA	201
North Somerset UA	No estimate

(d) Dorset

Local authority name	*Number of second homes*
Christchurch	No estimate
East Dorset	280
North Dorset	No estimate
Purbeck	887
West Dorset	1,597
Weymouth and Portland	618
Bournemouth UA	1,583
Poole UA	No estimate

Source:
CTBl(S)form.

Social Housing

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many households are in the registered social housing landlord sector. [83408]

Mr. McNulty: Housing associations registered with the Housing Corporation house 3,037 million tenants in 1.6 million dwellings.

South West of England Regional Development Agency

Mr. Flook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many offices the South West Regional Development Agency has outside the UK; how many people are employed in these offices; and what the annual budget is for the overseas offices operated by the agency. [82603]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) has one physical office outside the UK in Tokyo, where there are three staff and the budget for which is £325,000 in the current year. SWRDA also has five people in the USA in three locations (three people in Chicago; and one in each of Boston and San Francisco) but these are not physical offices. The budget for the US team is £495,000 for the current year.

SWRDA is also contributing £160,000 this year to the South West UK Brussels office.

Swaminarayan Hindu Mission (Brent)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission concerning their dispute with Brent Council; and if he will make a statement. [82359]

Mr. Leslie: I am not aware of any representation received by the office of the Deputy Prime Minister from the Swaminarayan Hindu mission.

Wakefield Metropolitan District

Jon Trickett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the retained capital receipts from the sale of council houses by Wakefield metropolitan district council at May 1997; how much has been released since that date and what the value is of unreleased receipts. [83162]

Mr. McNulty: The cumulative net selling price of council housing stock reported by Wakefield MDC between April 1980 and March 1997 was some £118 million. Under capital finance regulations, 25 per cent. of capital receipts arising from stock sales (excluding the value of any related local authority mortgages) are classified as a usable, while the balance is required to be 'set aside' as provision for credit liabilities. Between April 1997 and March 2002, Wakefield reported a further £54 million generated by stock sales.

Allocations to Wakefield under the Capital Receipts Initiative between 1997–98 and 1999–2000 totalled £9.652 million. In addition, Wakefield applied £9.671 million of its usable housing capital receipts (including those arising from the sale of other assets) to fund its housing capital programmes between 1997–98 and 2001–02.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Higher Education Finance

13. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the capital requirements of higher education institutions. [81979]

Margaret Hodge: There have been three linked studies into the capital requirements of higher education institutions, covering science research infrastructure, teaching and learning, and arts and humanities. These reports concluded that there were shortfalls of £3.2 billion of investment in science research, £5.3 billion in teaching and learning and £0.5 billion in arts and humanities.

Primary Schools

14. **Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the value of target-setting in primary schools. [81980]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The value of target setting is evident from the part it has played in the unprecedented success of primary schools in raising standards of literacy and numeracy. Since the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies schools have achieved a 10 per cent. point improvement in the number of 11-year-olds achieving the expected level in English, and 14 per cent. point improvement in mathematics. This year's results taken together were the best ever.

Top-up Fees

15. **Adam Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on his policy on the introduction of top-up fees for higher education. [81981]

Margaret Hodge: I refer the hon. Member to the oral reply given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Mr. Illsley), *Official Report*, column 448.

School Exclusions

16. **Mr. John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on his policy on school exclusions. [81982]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department's Circular 10/99—Social Inclusion: Pupil Support contains the Secretary of State's guidance on the appropriate use of exclusion—both fixed term and permanent, procedures to be followed on exclusion and provides guidance on the duties and roles of those involved in the process. My right hon. Friend will issue revised guidance when new arrangements for exclusions are put in place under the Education Act 2002.

Maths Teachers

17. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on progress towards the Government's targets for recruiting trainee mathematics teachers in 2002. [81983]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), on 18 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 32W.

Universities

18. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to assist United Kingdom universities to become centres of excellence. [81984]

Margaret Hodge: There is already excellence within our universities—in research, teaching, linking with business and working in the community. We want to make sure that excellence is recognised, incentivised and rewarded. Our Strategy Document, to be published in January, will set out in detail how we propose to do this.

28. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations he has received about the special payments to universities in respect of pupils resident in specified postcode areas. [81994]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend receives representations about a range of higher education issues. Universities and colleges incur additional costs in recruiting, teaching and supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds. The funding they receive from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in respect of these costs is the 'postcode premium'. HEFCE is currently reviewing this funding and has consulted on a range of options.

29. **Rob Marris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to change the minimum full time salary level paid to a university lecturer after five years service. [81995]

Margaret Hodge: The pay of higher education staff is negotiated between employers, their staff and their representative trade union bodies. This is not an issue for the Government, but in the spending review for the years 2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04 we provided £330 million to underpin universities' human resource strategies. This was to help institutions recruit, retain and develop the staff they need to improve further the quality of teaching and learning and to modernise management and reward systems.

31. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he will take to ensure that there is an increase in the number of university students from low income backgrounds. [81997]

Margaret Hodge: We are determined to encourage more young people from lower income backgrounds to enter higher education. Our secondary school reforms will help raise participation and attainment levels so that more young people will be eligible to benefit from higher education. We have committed over £190 million over three years to the Excellence Challenge to raise aspirations and attainment of young people in some of the most deprived areas of the country. This includes making available 25,000 Opportunity Bursaries to encourage young students from low-income families into higher education. Young people in schools and further education colleges in Excellence Challenge areas continue to benefit from the AimHigher road show, which was launched earlier this year to promote higher education.

Our review of higher education which will be published in January will reflect our continued commitment to widening participation in higher education.

Schools (Regulation)

19. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he next expects to meet representatives of teacher unions to discuss the burden of regulation in schools. [81985]

26. **Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent discussions he has had with teachers' representatives on the number of directives issued to schools since 1997. [81992]

Mr. Miliband: I will be meeting representatives of teacher unions shortly to discuss our work force proposals. These include the establishment of an Implementation Review Unit, featuring a panel of experienced serving practitioners, to improve policy implementation and reduce bureaucratic burdens.

Young Carers

20. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what advice he has given schools in order to accommodate the particular needs of young carers, while at the same time, pursuing their careers at schools. [81986]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Advice on how to support young carers at school has been provided to schools in DfES circular 10/99.

It recommends that schools:

adopt flexible strategies to address the young carers' needs e.g. approve absence when needed and set work to avoid gaps in education;

work with statutory and voluntary agencies to identify specific problems and offer solutions; and

designate a member of staff to take responsibility for young carers.

Higher Education Funding

21. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has for the funding of higher education. [81987]

23. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has for funding of universities. [81989]

Margaret Hodge: We will publish a strategy document setting out our 10-year vision for the development and reform of higher education in January. It would not be right for me to say now exactly what is or is not planned.

School Funding

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* average amounts paid to English local authorities and *(b)* amount paid to Leeds education authority per pupil were in respect of (i) educational standard spending, (ii) standards fund and (iii) other special and specific grants in each of the last three years. [83472]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Education Act

22. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools he expects to apply for new freedoms under the Education Act 2002; and if he will make a statement. [81988]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has no preconceived idea of the number of applications for new freedoms that will be received. It is intended that schools should be in the lead in making proposals.

We have always made clear that we intend to consult widely on the criteria for exemptions related to school performance before regulations are laid. Subject to consultation, we envisage linking the criteria to those that Ofsted propose to use for standard inspections.

School Staff

24. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the levels of staff turnover in schools in the South East in the last 12 months. [81990]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the latest available turnover and wastage data for the South East Government Office Region.

Turnover and wastage rates of qualified teachers, 1999–2000 (provisional)

Percentage

	Full-time		*Part-time*[1]	
	Turnover rate[2]	*Wastage rate*[3]	*Turnover rate*[4]	*Wastage rate*[5]
South East Government Office Region	17.2	10. 4	32.1	27.8

[1] 10–20 per cent. of part-time teachers may not be included in the data.

[2] Full-time turnover is defined as all teachers in full-time service in the maintained schools sector on 31 March 1999 who were not in full-time service in the same establishment on 31 March 2000. Turnover therefore includes wastage, transfers to other establishments within the maintained schools sector and teachers leaving to part-time service. Not all employers record all movements between their schools so turnover rates may be underestimated.

[3] Full-time wastage is defined as all teachers in full-time service in the maintained schools sector on 31 March 1999 who were not in full-time service anywhere in the maintained schools sector on 31 March 2000. This includes teachers leaving to part-time service.

[4] Part-time turnover is defined as all teachers in part-time service in the maintained schools sector on 31 March 1999 who were not in part-time service in the same establishment on 31 March 2000. Turnover therefore includes wastage, transfers to other establishments within the maintained schools sector and teachers leaving to full-time service.

[5] Part-time wastage is defined as all teachers in part-time service in the maintained schools sector on 31 March 1999 who were not in part-time service anywhere in the maintained schools sector on 31 March 2000. This includes teachers leaving to full-time service.

Note:
More recent data, for wastage/turnover up to March 2001, are available at national level but the data are not yet sufficiently complete for regional analysis.

Source:
Database of Teacher Records.

There has been a net increase in the number of teachers in the South East region. The full-time equivalent number of regular teachers in the maintained sector rose from 61,800 in January 2001 to 63,500 in January 2002.

The South East region includes: Bracknell Forest, Windsor and Maidenhead, West Berkshire, Reading, Slough, Wokingham, Buckinghamshire,

Milton Keynes, East Sussex, Brighton and Hove, Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton, Isle of Wight, Kent, Medway, Oxfordshire, Surrey, West Sussex.

Food Technology

25. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will introduce Food Technology into the National Curriculum; and if he will make a statement. [81991]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Food technology is part of the design and technology curriculum and is therefore already a statutory entitlement for all primary pupils within the National Curriculum. They learn practical food handling skills, including food hygiene, and are encouraged to develop positive attitudes to food. At Key Stage 3, the Government strongly encourages secondary schools to offer pupils the opportunity to study food technology, and nearly 90 per cent. do so. Food, nutrition and healthy eating are also taught within science and personal, social and health education.

School Transport

27. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the variation in school transport costs between different local education authority areas in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [81993]

Mr. Miliband: The variation in spend on home to school transport between local education authorities was considered in papers to the Education Funding Strategy Group at its meetings on 31 January 2002, and 13 March 2002. In both instances data from 2001–02 were used to develop a formula for the distribution of funding for home to school transport in the new LEA funding system, to be introduced for 2003–04.

Schools (Coalfield Communities)

30. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new schools have been built in coalfield communities since 1997; and how many are planned. [81996]

Mr. Miliband: We do not have this information. Local education authorities determine the need for additional places in the maintained sector and, where necessary, build or support the provision of new schools. The Department makes available capital funding for new school places; many of these are provided in existing schools.

Sure Start (Gloucester)

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on Sure Start in Gloucester. [81998]

Maria Eagle: There is one Sure Start programme operating in Gloucester, a Round Two programme in Barton, Tredworth and White City that was approved in October 2000, with a catchment area covering 934 children under four.

It has revenue funding of £2.2 million until March 2004 and capital funding approval, in principle, of £852,000. It operates over six separate sites within the area, linked to local schools, in educational centres.

The catchment area is situated outside the city centre, bounded by main roads and partially disused railway lines. It serves a diverse community including Afro-Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Ukrainian and Irish groups. There are also a number of asylum seekers settling in the area.

Home visiting is a key service for the programme, as it is enabling 'hard to reach' people who might not otherwise be supported, to be picked up. It has funded 10 people to complete accredited courses for learning support workers in primary schools and a further two people to take the Further Adult Education Teacher certificate. It has increased the overall number of children using library services. Its parents' forum awards small grants to community organisations (e.g. for new equipment for a parent toddler group or adventure playground) and inputs into the local evaluation of Sure Start.

Graduate Earnings

33. **Ross Cranston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent estimate he has made of the average lifetime earnings of *(a)* graduates and *(b)* non-graduates. [81999]

Margaret Hodge: We estimate that the average lifetime earnings of a graduate with a first degree are just over £1 million.

This is based on current labour market conditions, using data from the Labour Force Survey.

The estimated average for the working population as a whole is around £675,000, and it would be significantly lower than this for non-graduates.

School Buildings (Private Finance Initiative)

34. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on private finance initiatives in school buildings in Cheshire. [82000]

Mr. Miliband: Cheshire County Council signed a schools PFI contract with the Eric Wright Group on 22 October, covering a number of schools in Ellesmere Port. The project will rebuild or modernise five primary schools, provide sports and drama facilities at one secondary school and provide additional community facilities. The project is supported by £16.1 million in PFI credits from the Department for Education and Skills for the educational facilities, and by £1 million in PFI credits from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the community facilities.

Secondary Education

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of English students completed upper secondary education in the last year for which figures are available. [83202]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The information available is not held centrally.

EU Education Benchmarks

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many extra sixth form higher education and further education places will be required in England by 2010 to meet the EU education benchmarks. [83203]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The structure and organisation of education systems is the responsibility of individual EU member states. There are no education benchmarks at EU level that we are required to meet. Education Ministers will consider next year whether or not to use some existing international indicators and/or benchmarks to help share and spread best practice in education.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the additional spending required in England to meet EU educational benchmarks. [83204]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The structure and organisation of education systems is the responsibility of individual EU member states. There are no education benchmarks at EU level that we are required to meet. Education Ministers will consider next year whether or not to use some existing international indicators and/or benchmarks to help share and spread best practice in education.

Home Education (Somerset)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils of school age were educated at home in each age group in *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* Taunton in each of the last five years. [82612]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is shown in the table:

Number of pupils not in school and being otherwise educated 1998–2002

	Somerset Local Education Authority				*England*			
	Pupils aged 5–10	*Pupils aged 11–15*	*Pupils aged 16+*	*Total*	*Pupils aged 5–10*	*Pupils aged 11–15*	*Pupils aged 16+*	*Total*
1998	71	234	9	314	2,462	10,587	545	13,594
1999	83	308	5	396	2,232	11,351	422	14,005
2000	93	344	3	440	2,825	12,264	585	15,670
2001	24	337	1	362	3,037	12,843	427	16,307
2002	64	119	19	202	3,361	15,187	386	18,934

The available figures record for each local education authority the number of pupils not in school and being otherwise educated under arrangements made by the authority. As well as covering pupils taught at home, this includes but does not separately identify, traveller children and asylum seekers at further education colleges or with voluntary providers. It does not however include pupils who are being educated at home through parental choice and independent of local education authority arrangements.

Illegal Immigrants

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate his officials have made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* cost of children in this country receiving state education (i) who do not have the legal rights to settle in the UK and (ii) whose parents are illegal immigrants. [80957]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The requested information is not collected centrally.

All children are entitled to education regardless of their immigration status.

Local education authorities receive funding for these children in the same way that they do for other children on school rolls. Other financial support is available through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant for help with the provision of English as an additional language and through a one-off grant for children of asylum seekers supported by schools in the dispersal areas.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many and what percentage of members of *(a)* each local learning and skills council and *(b)* the National Learning and Skills Council declare a record of political activity, broken down by party. [80990]

Margaret Hodge: Appointments to the LSC have been made through fair and open competition, in complete accordance with guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA). Working with the LSC we have sought to attract applications from individuals with a wide range of appropriate experience, regardless of any political affiliation they may have. Information is provided in the table below and shows those Council members who have declared a political interest. This does not necessarily mean that individuals are or have been politically active; they have simply declared an affiliation to a political party. These figures exclude the

Executive Directors of LLSCs since they were not required to declare political activity when applying for these posts.

Figures in brackets show the number of local authority councillors.

Local LSC	Labour	Conservative	Liberal democrat	Others
North East				
County Durham	1	—	—	1
Northumberland	1	—	—	—
Tees Valley	4(1)	1	—	—
Tyne and Wear	3(1)	—	—	—
East Midlands				
Derbyshire	6(2)	—	—	—
Leicestershire	3	—	—	—
Lincolnshire and Rutland	1	—	1(1)	1
Northamptonshire	1(1)	1(1)	—	—
Nottinghamshire	3(2)	1	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside				
South Yorkshire	4(2)	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	—	2(2)	—	—
Humberside	1(1)	—	—	—
West Yorkshire	3(1)	—	—	—
West Midlands				
Birmingham and Solihull	5(1)	—	—	—
The Black Country	2(1)	—	—	—
Coventry and Warwickshire	2(1)	—	1	—
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	2(1)	—	—	—
Shropshire	2	—	1(1)	1
Staffordshire	4(1)	—	—	—
North West				
Cheshire/Warrington	—	—	1	—
Cumbria	2(1)	—	—	—
Lancashire	4(1)	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	4(1)	—	—	—
Greater Merseyside	4	—	1(1)	—
South West				
Devon and Cornwall	—	—	1(1)	—
Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	—	—	2(1)	—
Gloucestershire	2	—	—	—
Somerset	1	1	1(1)	—
Wiltshire and Swindon	1(1)	2(2)	1	—
The West of England	2(1)	—	—	—
East of England				
Bedfordshire and Luton	4(1)	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	1(1)	1
Essex	3(1)	2(1)	1	—
Hertfordshire	1	1(1)	—	—
Norfolk	2(1)	1	—	—
Suffolk	3(2)	1(1)	—	—
South East				
Berkshire	None Declared			
Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and IOW	1	—	—	—
Kent and Medway	2(1)	3(1)	—	—
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Bucks	3(1)	—	—	—
Surrey	1	1(1)	—	—
Sussex	2(1)	—	—	—
London				
London Central	3(1)	3	—	—
London East	4(2)	—	—	—
London North	3(1)	—	—	—
London South	2	1(1)	—	—
London West	3	—	—	—

Of the 15 members appointed to the National Council, 6 declared political activity with the Labour Party, 1 of whom is a local councillor. There were no declarations with respect to other parties.

Modern Apprenticeships

Dr. Jenny Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many modern apprenticeship places were taken up in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and how many were left vacant. [83725]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of starts on modern apprenticeships (Foundation and Advanced) in 2000 and 2001 are shown in the table:

	AMA	*FMA*
26 December 1999 to 24 December 2000	76,900	94,200
25 December 2000 to 23 December 2001	64,400	110,500

Numbers of Modern Apprenticeships left vacant are not available.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to increase the take-up of modern apprenticeships. [83726]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are wholly committed to modern apprenticeships (MA) as a quality work-based learning route for young people. We have adopted a challenging Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for MA entrants by 2004—28 per cent. of young people to begin an MA by the age of 22.

The Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the Chairman of the Learning and Skills Council have announced a new modern apprenticeship task force which will take a key role in promoting MA to employers and thereby contributing to increased take-up.

All parties involved in the initiative are working together to increase the take-up of MAs. The LSC is running a marketing and promotion campaign with a range of measures to reach employers and key influencers, following its successful campaign targeting young people. Connexions Partnerships are delivering improved advice and guidance to young people on the opportunities available in their communities. New and developing sector skills councils also play a key role by supporting promotion to employers in their sectors.

Pilot and Pathfinder Schemes (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for which pilot and pathfinder schemes the Isle of Wight council was eligible to apply. [81267]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: No LEAs were invited to participate in the schools Peer Mentoring Pack pilot, as it is school based. However, Medina High School (Isle of Wight) is involved in piloting the schools peer mentoring pack during the school year 2002–03. Also, Carisbrooke High School (Isle of Wight) will be invited to take part in the second round of the peer mentoring pilot. The second phase of the roll-out will take place in the new year.

No schools in the Isle of Wight fell within the definition for Schools Facing Extremely Challenging Circumstances, therefore, none have been invited to participate in the project, nor have any been invited to participate in the Zoneparcs project, as none met the deprivation criteria for this project.

Isle of Wight LEA was not invited to participate in the Excellence in Cities programme, which covers Learning Mentors, enhanced opportunities for the Gifted and Talented and the Excellence in Cities Primary Pilot. Appropriate LEAs were identified by the Department, there was no application process.

As the Isle of Wight did not meet the defined criteria it is not participating in the Pupil Learning Credits pilot, nor was the Isle of Wight council invited to participate in the School Partnerships for Improvement pilot, or the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) pilot scheme, as no schools met the defining criteria.

Prison Education

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what activities are being undertaken by his Department to promote the take-up of education in prisons; what incentives exist within the penal system to encourage the take-up of education by prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [82457]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* We are improving both the quality and quantity of prison education to bring more prisoners into learning and to ensure they benefit from it. The prison education budget will rise to £87 million next year—an increase of almost 50 per cent. in real terms over last year. This includes investment of £20 million capital over the next two years to support the modernisation of education and training provision including transforming prison libraries so that they become learning resource centres. And it includes a further £2 million in computer training opportunities to help prepare prisoners for the demands of the modern labour market. We are also helping prison establishments to expand the range of environments in which they can offer learning.

Governors have to ensure that the rates of pay they set do not discourage prisons from participating in activities, which are part of their sentence or learning plan. Through the "Incentives and Earned Privileges" scheme, some Governors have developed ways of incentivising and rewarding educational progress and achievement. At the same time, the Prison Service order on "Education in Prisons" sets out the statutory requirement on how education must be provided. It states that all prisons must provide activities in a range of ways, which respond to the individual needs of the learners.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will rank education authorities in England the most recent pupil/teacher ratios for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools. [80597]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Revenue Grants (Warrington)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the likely impact on education in Warrington of each of the five options in the consultation on the review of revenue grant distribution. [83893]

Mr. Miliband: The Government has been carefully considering all the suggestions put to us in response to the consultation, including the F40 Group's suggestion of an Option 5. We will announce decisions on the new funding system early next month.

School Exclusions (Essex)

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils were excluded from schools in Essex in each year since 1997. [80892]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The available information on permanent exclusions is shown in the table. Figures are not available centrally on fixed-term exclusions.

Number of permanent exclusions in primary[1], secondary[1] and special schools in the academic years 1996–97 to 2000–01—Essex Local Education Authority

	Essex[2]	*Essex*[3]
1996–97		
Number of permanent exclusions	276	[4]—
Percentage of the school population	0.12	[4]—
1997–98		
Number of permanent exclusions	[4]—	207
Percentage of the school population	[4]—	0.11
1998–99		
Number of permanent exclusions	[4]—	191
Percentage of the school population	[4]—	0.10
1999–2000		
Number of permanent exclusions	[4]—	182
Percentage of the school population	[4]—	0.09
2000–01		
Number of permanent exclusions	[4]—	198
Percentage of the school population	[4]—	0.10

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed

[2] Before Local Government Reorganisation

[3] After Local Government Reorganisation

[4] Not applicable

Source:

Annual Schools Census

School Leavers (Coalfields)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of children left school with no academic qualifications in coalfield areas in each year since 1997; and how this compares with the national average. [82247]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is given in the table:

Percentage of 15 year old pupils attaining no passes at GCSE / GNVQ

	2001	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
Coalfields—maintained Schools	*5.9*	*6.1*	*6.2*	*7.2*	*8.7*
England—maintained schools	*5.1*	*5.0*	*5.5*	*6.1*	*7.3*
England—all schools	*5.5*	*5.6*	*6.0*	*6.6*	*7.7*

Note:

The definition of a coalfield area taken from the coalfields task force report, June 1998, is: a ward where 10 per cent. of resident males in employment at the time of the 1981 census of population were engaged in the energy and water sector. In these areas, this sector overwhelmingly comprises coalmining.

School Standards

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when *(a)* heads were able to cease following orders, *(b)* school performance failure was most recently unchallenged, *(c)* the school curriculum was most recently not publicly scrutinised and *(d)* school accountability was weak as stated in Education and Skills: Investment for Reform. [81763]

Mr. Miliband: The Government document Investment for Reform sets out clearly the changes under way in the education system.

Post-16 Students

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on shared delivery of education between schools and sixth form colleges and further education colleges for post-16 students. [81966]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government expects schools, colleges and all providers in the learning and skills sector to work together to raise standards, improve choice and ensure success for all post-16 learners. Improving this collaborative working is a key theme in the Government's ambitious plan for reform of further education and training—Success for All—which was launched on 19 November. We are supporting this reform package with the largest ever investment in the learning and skills sector, which will enable the Learning and Skills Council to reduce substantially the current gap in the core funding rates per qualification it pays to school sixth forms and FE colleges.

A key part of these reforms is the programme of Strategic Area Reviews led by local Learning and Skills Councils, which will commence in April 2003. This process will help build in each part of the country a network of providers working in collaboration to achieve educational and economic success.

We have also begun our pilot of the first sixteen 14 to 19 pathfinder areas. This programme will explore how a coherent 14 to 19 phase can be delivered nationally in a variety of locations with different social circumstances and different mixes of schools and colleges.

Construction Industry

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his latest estimate is of how many vacancies there are in the construction industry in Leeds. [83488]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply. The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Battle, dated 28 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking for information on the latest estimate of the number of vacancies in the construction industry in Leeds.

The only comprehensive information about current job vacancies analysed by industry is the new monthly enterprise—based ONS Vacancy Survey, which at this stage is being published on an experimental basis. According to this survey there were 20,400 job vacancies in the construction industry on average for the period August to October 2002 for the United Kingdom as a whole. The survey is designed to met users' needs for high quality information about vacancies at national level and, in its present state of development, cannot provide analyses by region or local area.

The most recently available data from the Jobcentre plus administrative system shows 648 unfilled job vacancies in the construction industry of the Leeds travel-to-work area in April 2001. This figure is not comprehensive as only a proportion of vacancies are notified to Jobcentres. There are no more recent data because publication was deferred in May 2001 due to substantial disortions in the data caused by the introduction of Employer Direct by Jobcentre Plus. This was a major change which involved transferring the vacancy taking process from local Jobcentres to regional customer service centres over the period from April 2001 to January 2002.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Hunting

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the evidence submitted during the consultation process relating to hunting. [83383]

Alun Michael: The proceedings referred to have been exemplary in terms of being available to everyone who has an interest in the issue. The three full days of hearings held in Portcullis House in September were *(a)* open to the public *(b)* available via live webcast and *(c)* Published in full transcript within days of the event. In addition video recordings of the three days on 9, 10 and 11 September have been placed in the Library of the House. Transcripts of the public hearings and the presentations made by the expert witnesses are available electronically at www.defra.gov.uk. Copies of these documents together with the evidence submitted to me by organisations, including individual hunts, during the consultation process will be available in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Common Foreign and Security Policy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on the development of a European common foreign and security policy. [83880]

Mr. MacShane: The United Kingdom is committed to a strong EU Common Foreign and Security Policy in order to achieve the objectives set out in Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union, that is to safeguard the common values, fundamental interests, independence and integrity of the Union, to strengthen the security of the Union, to preserve peace and strengthen international security, to promote international cooperation and to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

EU Structural Funding

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much EU structural funding was returned to the Commission, by *(a)* region and *(b)* organisational sector, between 1994 and 2001. [82667]

Mr. MacShane: The information requested cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. Repayments of EU Structural Funds in the period concerned are largely in respect of pre-1994 programmes rather than the 1994–99 programmes which do not have to be closed until mid-2003.

European Arrest Warrant

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the European Arrest Warrant. [81495]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has received various pieces of correspondence on the European Arrest Warrant, which have been passed to the Home Office for reply. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs (Mr. Bob Ainsworth) on 26 November 2022, *Official Report*, column 246W.

European Union

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Dutch Government proposals to reduce the influence of large member states in the European Union. [83665]

Mr. MacShane: We strongly believe that all member states should have an equal say in shaping the future of Europe. All are equally represented in the convention, as are the accession countries. The ideas produced by the convention will be submitted to an intergovernmental conference for agreement by unanimity.

Gibraltar

Mr. Greg Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when *(a)*

Ministers and *(b)* officials last met their Spanish counterparts to discuss Gibraltar; and when they plan to meet next to discuss Gibraltar. [84006]

Mr. MacShane: The last meeting with Spain under the Brussels Process took place on 4 February 2002. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last discussed Gibraltar with his Spanish opposite number when they met on 27 September. I discussed Gibraltar in the margins of the EU GAERC with the Spanish Minister for Europe. No date has been set for a further meeting.

EU Migrant Workers

Mr. James Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European counterparts on protection by member states of migrant workers in Europe. [83240]

Mr. MacShane: Various European Union regulations, principally Regulations 1612/68 and Regulation 1408/71, set out the fundamental rules for migrant workers with EU citizenship exercising their rights of free movement within the European Union. My Ministerial colleagues are engaged in continuing dialogue with other Member States and the European Commission in improving the effectiveness of these measures, while ensuring these are consistent with the aims of improving mobility and simplification for the citizen and Member States' administrations.

Turkey

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards Turkey's accession to the EU. [83420]

Mr. MacShane: The European Commission's 2002 Regular Report on Turkey described the progress that Turkey has made towards complying with the Copenhagen political criteria, which are a precondition for opening accession negotiations. The Brussels European Council welcomed the important reforms undertaken by the Turkish Government, and said that Turkey's progress had brought forward the prospect of opening accession negotiations. HMG is a strong supporter of Turkey's EU candidature and we look forward to the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey as soon as possible and in accordance with the conditions which all candidates must meet.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with President Erdogan of Turkey since his election to the presidency of Turkey. [83884]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), on 20 November. They discussed the AKP's plans for government and their commitment to reform, particularly in the area of human rights. The Foreign Secretary welcomed the new Turkish Government's ambitious programme and underlined the UK's strong support for Turkey's EU candidature and for the role Turkey played in the wider world. The Foreign Secretary also stressed that there was now a unique opportunity ahead of the Copenhagen Summit in December to make progress over European Defence issues, and to resolve the problem of Cyprus on the basis of the UN Secretary-General's recent comprehensive proposals.

The Foreign Secretary will be travelling to Turkey on 3–4 December to continue these discussions with the new Turkish Government.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Turkey regarding the number of Turkish Kurd asylum seekers illegally entering the United Kingdom. [83886]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not raised immigration with the new Turkish Government. However, discussions between UK and Turkish officials have been taking place for some time on asylum and immigration matters.

HEALTH

Adoption

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role the Government plan for voluntary adoption agencies following the Adoption and Children Act 2002. [84025]

Jacqui Smith: The Government is aware that voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) make a very significant contribution to the adoption service and play an important supporting role alongside their local authority partners in assessing prospective adopters for both domestic and inter-country adoption. Indeed, statistics prepared by the consortium of voluntary adoption agencies show that in 2001–02, 604 children were placed for adoption with adopters approved by 26 of their member agencies. This accounts for around 20 per cent of the looked after children likely to have been placed for adoption during that year.

Many VAAs specialise in finding adoptive placements for the more difficult to place children, including older children, children from ethnic minority groups and those with special needs. Almost a quarter of the 604 children placed for adoption with adopters assessed by VAAs were disabled, developmentally delayed or had special health care needs.

VAAs also provide choice for adopters, for example some cater for prospective adopters of a particular religious faith, and local authorities and vulnerable children benefit from this choice.

VAAs also play an important part in the provision of adoption support services. Nearly all VAAs offer support networks and provide a wide variety of support including workshops, therapeutic and social groups and counselling of individuals.

The Government expects the valuable role played by VAAs to continue and grow under the new Act.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in increasing the number of children who leave care to be adopted. [83165]

Jacqui Smith: The Department's social services performance assessment framework indicators 2001–02, which were published last week, show that the number of adoptions of looked after children increased from 3,100 in 2000–01 to 3,400 in 2001–02—a rise of 11 per cent.

Since the Quality Protects initiative began in 1998–99, there has been an increase of 1,200 in the annual number of looked after children adopted—a rise of almost 55 per cent.

The Government believe that more can and should be done to promote the wider use of adoption to provide permanent, secure homes for vulnerable children, and have set a public service agreement target to increase by 40 per cent., and if possible, by 50 per cent. of the number of looked after children adopted by 2004–05 from a baseline of 2,700 in 1999–2000.

Care Home Inspectors

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* care home inspectors are employed and *(b)* vacancies there are in each region for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [82022]

Jacqui Smith: The numbers of inspectors in post by region and the numbers of current vacancies are shown in the table.

Regions are currently in the process of interviewing for inspectors where it is expected an extra 75–100 posts will be filled, further boosting capacity.

Region	*Establishment WTE*	*Actual headcount*	*Actual WTE*	*Variance Total Staff v. Establishment WTE*	*Offers made*	*Vacancies*	*Percentage vacancies against establishment*
North East	79.49	80.00	76.96	2.53	0.00	2.53	3.18
East Midlands	115.79	113.00	106.36	9.43	0.00	9.43	8.14
South West	201.21	197.00	184.42	16.79	0.00	16.79	8.34
West Midlands	148.27	149.00	137.46	10.81	0.00	10.81	7.29
North West	212.03	193.00	185.03	27.00	0.00	27.00	12.73
London	137.01	125.00	116.08	20.93	0.00	20.93	15.28
South East	268.62	220.00	207.31	61.31	35.00	26.31	9.79
Eastern	128.66	122.00	115.78	12.88	0.50	12.38	9.62
Yorkshire and Humberside	137.84	128.00	123.86	13.98	0.00	13.98	10.15
Inspector total	1,428.92	1,327.00	1,253.26	175.66	35.50	140.16	9.81

Notes:
1. Offers made are those that are currently awaiting start dates following the recruitment campaign of July/August.
2. Regions are currently in the process of interviewing for the current round of inspectors where we expect to fill 75–100 posts.
3. Advert will be going to press on 4 December for any remaining vacancies.

Child Protection

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken since 1997 to develop preventive services to identify children at risk of abuse. [81064]

Jacqui Smith: Following the publication of the Cross Cutting Review of Children at Risk for the 2002 Spending Review, the Government recently announced the next steps in developing preventive approaches in services for children and families. Local authorities, the health service, the police and key criminal justice agencies will, for next year, agree local preventive strategies which will build on existing initiatives such as Sure Start, the Children's Fund, Connexions and youth offending teams. The development of local strategies will be supported by Government offices and the inspectorates who, where necessary, will work with the local partners on ensuring that an effective strategy is in place.

The Government have also announced in the Treasury White Paper on the Spending Review published in July 2002, their intention to pilot new organisational models for managing children's services known as children's trusts. This work will be complemented by the Green Paper on Children at Risk announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in July 2002.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for local authorities in the UK to put in place area child protection committees to look at safeguarding children. [81065]

Jacqui Smith: "Working Together to Safeguard Children", the Government's guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, published in 1999, states that local authorities, in exercising their social services functions, should ensure that there is an area child protection committee covering their area, which brings together representatives of each of the main agencies and professionals responsible for helping to protect children from abuse and neglect. Area review committees were first established in 1974 and became area child protection committees in 1991. This guidance applies only to England.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of young children were classified as failing to thrive in each year since 1997. [82746]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

The category, 'failure to thrive', has not been used in the Government's child protection guidance since 1991. "Working Together Under the Children Act 1989", which was first published in 1991, and later replaced in 1999 by "Working Together to Safeguard Children—a

Guide to Inter-agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children", narrowed the categories used when placing a child's name on the child protection register. The category of 'failure to thrive' is now, therefore, no longer recommended for use as a child protection register category.

Children in Care (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were in care in Leeds in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 2000; and what percentage these represented of Leeds children. [83477]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table.

The number of children in the care of (or being looked after by) Leeds metropolitan council at 31 March, and the rate per 10,000 children aged under 18 years

Year	Number at 31 March	Rate per 10,000 children
1970	1,015	73
1980	2,000	104
1990	1,365	85
2000	1,275	79

Notes:

1. All numbers are rounded to the nearest 5.
2. Figures for 1970 to 1990 relate to children in care of local authorities under the Children Act 1948, the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 and associated legislation.
3. Figures for 2000 relate to children being looked after by local councils under the Children Act 1989.

Children's Trusts

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans for the role of the children's trusts. [83348]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) on 29 October 2002, *Official Report*, volume 391, column 679–80.

We are currently seeking views of stakeholders to inform our thinking about models that would support the vision of children's trusts we have set out. Pilots will start from April 2003, and we will be issuing a prospectus inviting expressions of interest in December.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which primary care trusts and health authorities are making available digital hearing aids for *(a)* children and *(b)* adults. [82485]

Jacqui Smith: In order to access the national health service contract for digital hearing aids, trusts must first have in place the appropriate infrastructure, equipment and training. All 20 sites from the first wave of the modernising hearing aid services project regularly supply digital aids.

The number of second wave sites prescribing digital aids will increase each month so that all 30 will be prescribing by the end of March 2003. In addition, the 17 sites announced on 22 November as receiving the necessary information technology equipment will be in a position to prescribe digital aids from April 2003.

A list of first wave sites, second wave sites and sites to receive equipment will be placed in the Library.

Doctors' Hours

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assumptions were made concerning doctors' work rotas in the work force modelling undertaken as part of the Wanless Review of the long-term trends affecting the national health service. [83453]

Mr. Hutton: The modelling for the Wanless Report was carried out by Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT), using a model that they had developed for forecasting the long-term growth in demand for health care services. The output from this model was converted into work force demand using a model developed within the Department and adapted for the HMT requirements. This model took account of the reduction in average hours worked as a result of the European Working Time Directive and assumed that all medical staff would be working less than 48 hours per week for the national health service by 2009.

European Doctors

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors from Europe the contracts signed by NHS trusts brought to the UK for each trust involved. [83284]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 November 2002]*: Forty overseas doctors have signed contracts with National Health Service trusts as part of the overseas clinical teams initiative, of whom 24 were from Europe. Central Middlesex is working with one doctor from Italy, one from Ireland and one from Germany. Seven German doctors are working at South Tyneside NHS Trust. Ten French doctors are working at East Somerset NHS Trust. Three French doctors are working at Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust. One German doctor worked at mid-Staffordshire General Hospitals NHS Trust.

Sixteen South African doctors have been involved in the scheme; four doctors are currently working at Hillingdon Hospital and 12 worked at Morecambe Bay Hospital NHS Trust.

Foundation Trusts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 31 acute NHS trusts which indicated in 2001 that they were interested in becoming foundation trusts. [82843]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 November 2002]*: In June 2002, we asked for expressions of interest in National Health Service foundation trust status from chief executives of NHS trusts awarded three stars in the previous NHS performance ratings announced in September 2001. We received 31 expressions of interest.

These organisations have not been listed since applications to become NHS foundation trusts will be invited only from acute and specialist NHS trusts that

were awarded three stars in the performance ratings announced in July 2002. Of the 31 original expressions of interest, however, more than half retained their three star status in July 2002.

We will shortly issue a publication that will set out our detailed proposals on establishing NHS foundation trusts. Alongside this, or shortly after publication, we will invite preliminary applications to become NHS foundation trusts.

General Practitioners

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the results of the General Practitioner Recruitment, Retention and Vacancy Survey for 2002 will be published. [82737]

Mr. Hutton: The results of the General Practitioner Recruitment, Retention and Vacancy Survey 2002 were published on 19 November 2002.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the age distribution of general practitioners at retirement was in each of the past five years. [82738]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally. The number of medical general practitioners, in England and Wales who have received a retirement pension before or after age 60 for each of the financial years 1998 to 2002 is shown in the table.

Financial year	*Before age 60*	*After age 60*	*Total*
1998	246	406	652
1999	226	381	607
2000	191	279	470
2001	298	473	771
2002	313	439	752

Hospital Admissions (Homeless People)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted to NHS hospitals whose address was listed as no fixed abode between *(a)* December 1999 and January 2000, *(b)* December 2000 and January 2001 and *(c)* December 2001 and January 2002. [81678]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the number of admissions to national health service hospitals where place of residence is not known. Admissions involving patients of no fixed abode are not separately identifiable.

Admissions to NHS hospitals where place of residence is not known (including no fixed abode)

December 1999 to January 2000	3,804
December 2000 to January 2001	4,466

Notes:

1. Data in this table are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.
2. Data exclude all healthy newborn babies, as their address is recorded as not known.
3. Data not yet available for 2001–02.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Mass Casualties (CBRN Attack)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made to treat mass casualties arising from a CBRN attack. [82582]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 November 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 145W.

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in implementing Standard 1 of the National Service Framework for mental health. [81045]

Jacqui Smith: Health and social services were set a target to develop and agree local mental health promotion strategies by March 2002. To help support the delivery of this target the Department published "Making It Happen: A guide to delivering mental health promotion" in August 2001. Local services have undertaken a themed review to ascertain progress in developing their strategies. This will, when completed, give a national picture of progress made.

NHS Choice

Mr Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend NHS choice throughout the country in specialisms only available in London; and if he will make a statement. [82108]

Mr. Hutton: The London patient choice pilot has since the beginning of October 2002 offered choice for two ophthalmology procedures where a patient has been on a waiting list for an operation for more than six months. We will be extending that choice in London to include ear, nose and throat, orthopaedics and general surgery from April 2003.

We are planning to operate equivalent pilots to other parts of the country, and as these pilots are still in the planning stage and funding has not yet been announced, are not able yet to give more details.

The longer term objective is that by 2006, choice will be routinely offered to all patients nationwide at the stage when the general practitioner decides that a referral to a specialist is needed, for example, the point of booking for the outpatient or equivalent appointment.

Osteopaths

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether those who have attained and passed Government accredited training as an osteopath may call themselves an osteopath. [82472]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 November 2002]*: Under the Osteopaths Act 1993, only those with a qualification recognised by the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) and approved by the Privy Council may register with the GOsC and therefore, legally call themselves osteopaths. Details of all the qualifications it currently recognises may be obtained from the GOsC.

Delayed Discharges

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what *(a)* representations he has received on and *(b)* assessment he has made of the likely change in host social services facilitating the discharge of patients outside their catchment area, following the introduction of fines for delayed hospital discharge; [83491]

(2) what impact he expects the introduction of fines for delayed hospital discharge to have on those hospitals with *(a)* regional specialties and *(b)* large concentrations of patients from outside their area; [83493]

(3) what measures he will take to encourage host social services to continue work currently undertaken to facilitate the discharge of patients not in their catchment area; [83492]

(4) what measures he will take to facilitate the discharge of patients who do not live in the area served by the social services department in the hospital under his proposals to fine local authorities for delayed hospital discharge. [83490]

Jacqui Smith: Two councils have raised concerns on this. Under the provisions of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges, etc.) Bill, responsibility for arranging the social care of someone ready for discharge from hospital would rest with the council where the patient lives, rather than the council where the acute hospital trust is based. However, we would expect the relevant social services departments to continue to work together over discharge, as they do now.

The Bill will ensure that there are financial incentives in place for both local councils and the national health service to ensure that they tackle delayed transfers of care. It will also encourage quicker and better identification of the appropriate council responsible for providing social care services to patients. In particular, this will be of great benefit to specialist hospitals and those that attract patients from some distance away.

Social workers will, as now, need to be involved in the assessments of patients in acute hospital trusts. This will be re-emphasised in the forthcoming revision of the Hospital Discharge Workbook.

Pulmonary Embolism

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients died from a pulmonary embolism in each of the last five years. [83495]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply. The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Smith dated 28 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many NHS patients died from a pulmonary embolism in each of the last five years (93495)

The available data relate to all deaths occurring in England and Wales. It is not possible to state which of these were to NHS patients, as information on whether or not the deceased was a registered NHS patient is not recorded at death registration. Figures on the total number of deaths certified as due to pulmonary embolism and deep vein thrombosis in England and Wales for each year from 1997 to 2001 are therefore given in the table below.

Most pulmonary embolisms arise from deep vein thrombosis in the leg, and virtually all deaths from deep vein thrombosis occur as a result of a pulmonary embolism. However, the precise description of this sequence of events leading to death (as provided on the death certificate) effects whether the death is coded as pulmonary embolism or thrombosis. Therefore, a figure combining the two causes is presented in the table to give a complete and consistent picture over time.

Number of deaths from pulmonary embolism and deep vein thrombosis[1], persons, England and Wales, 1997 to 2012

Calendar year	*Number of deaths*
1997	6,996
1998	6,992
1999	6,877
2000	7,233
2001	7,207

[1] The cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes 415.1, 451, 1,451.2, 451.9 and 453.9 for the years 1997 to 2000, and, for the year 2001, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes 126, 180.1 180.2 180.3, 180.9 and 182.9. Figures are for deaths occurring in each calendar year from 1997 to 2001.

Residential Home Fees

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning his proposed amendment to Regulation 5 of the Care Home Regulations 2001, making it clear to residents what part of their fees relate to nursing, where the funding is coming from, and what part relates to other aspects of care; and if he will make a statement. [83535]

Jacqui Smith: A total of 47 responses were received by the end of the consultation period. 26 of these were in favour of amending the regulations and 21, mainly from providers and provider organisations, opposed the introduction of the amending regulations.

Severe Mental Illness

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to give legal status to advance statements for people with severe mental illness. [83804]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, volume 395, column 143W.

Specialised Healthcare Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what function and powers the strategic health authorities have in *(a)* monitoring the provision and commissioning of specialised healthcare services and *(b)* managing the performance of individual primary care trusts. [82779]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The functions of strategic health authorities and primary care trusts in relation to specialised services are set out in the National Health Service (Functions of Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts and Administration Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2002 (Statutory Instrument 2002/2375).

Regulation 2(1) of these Regulations defines "specialised services". Part 2 of Schedule 1 to the Regulations sets out the functions exercisable by primary care trusts, which are to be performance managed by strategic health authorities. Where specialised services commissioning arrangements cross strategic health authority boundaries, the directorate of health and social care facilitates agreement and if necessary, determines disputes.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Jury trial

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to exclude those with a close connection to the justice system from jury service. [80500]

Hilary Benn: Under the proposals set out in the Government's White Paper "Justice for All", everyone will be eligible to do jury service, (subject to the requirements of age, electoral registration, residence and disqualification set out in section 1 of the Juries Act 1974) except the mentally ill. This will include those connected with the administration of justice.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve procedures for the issue and implementation of Anti-social Behaviour Orders through the courts. [81478]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The legislative changes in the Police Reform Act 2002 extend the powers of courts to grant Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). These, combined with the new guidance, will improve their efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, we are working with the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Judicial Studies Board to raise awareness and understanding of ASBOs and provide training for magistrates and prosecutors. We will continue to review implementation of ASBO, and will make changes as necessary to ensure they are streamlined and unbureaucratic to use.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there have been in the last 12 months for breach of an anti-social behaviour order in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the north-west of England and *(c)* Wales. [82377]

Mr. Denham: The available information, relating to breaches of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), covers the period 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2001 and is shown in the table. The analysis covers only those breaches by persons issued with ASBOs during this period and notified to the Home Office.

Persons convicted for breach of anti-social behaviour orders Lancashire, north-west England and Wales—1 June 2000 to 31 December 2001

	Number of persons convicted
Lancashire	6
North west England (including Lancashire)	21
Wales	3

Note:
Figures cover only those proceedings relating to persons issued with ASBOs between 1 June 2000 and 31 December 2001 and notified to the Home Office. Persons are counted only once if they breached the same order on more than one occasion.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there have been in the last 12 months for breach of antisocial behaviour orders in *(a)* Somerset, *(b)* South West England and *(c)* England. [82610]

Hilary Benn: The available information, relating to breaches of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs), covers the period 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2001 and is shown in the table. The analysis covers only those breaches by persons issued with ASBOs during this period and notified to the Home Office. Figures for Somerset only are not available centrally.

Persons convicted for breach of antisocial behaviour orders, Avon and Somerset, South West England and England—1 June 2000 to 31 December 2001

	Number of persons convicted
Avon and Somerset	5
South West England (including Avon and Somerset)	9
England	122

Note:
Figures cover only those proceedings relating to persons issued with ASBOs between 1 June 2000 and 31 December 2001 and notified to the Home Office. Persons are counted only once even if they breached the same order on more than one occasion.

Asylum Seekers (Occupied Territories)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many claims for asylum have been made in the last two years by citizens of Israel who are refusing to serve in the armed forces of Israel in the Occupied Territories; [83556]

(2) how many claims for asylum have been received in the last two years from Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. [83557]

Beverley Hughes: Asylum applications are recorded by nationality only and therefore it is not possible to say how many of the applicants originated from the Occupied Territories. Furthermore, statistics on the reasons behind asylum claims are not compiled. The number of those who applied would therefore be available only by examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost.

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 29 November 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Magillagan Prison

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the appropriateness of HMP Magilligan as a holding centre for asylum seekers; and whether it is his policy that asylum seekers should share accommodation with people serving sentences for criminal offences. [83795]

Beverley Hughes: Following a review, in 2001, of the detention provision in Northern Ireland it was decided that all immigration detainees in Northern Ireland would be detained only at Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry and that Her Majesty's Prison Magilligan would no longer be used for immigration detention.

Immigration detainees at Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry are detained in separate accommodation to convicted prisoners.

It is our policy to transfer persons detained in Northern Ireland to immigration removal centres on the mainland unless a specific request is made to stay in Northern Ireland, in which case the detainee in question will continue to be held at Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police constabularies contributing police officers and civilians to the European Union Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina; how many each is seconding; and what the cost is to *(a)* each constabulary and *(b)* central government. [83398]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply

The following list gives details of those police constabularies contributing officers to the European Union Police Mission from 1 January 2003. All constabularies are providing one officer unless otherwise indicated.

Cornwall Avon and Somerset; Bedfordshire; Cheshire x3; City of London; Derbyshire; Devon and ; Dorset; Durham; Gloucestershire; Grampian; Greater Manchester x2; Hampshire x2; Kent; Lancashire; Lincolnshire x2; Mersey side x4; Metropolitan x4; North Wales; North Yorkshire x3; Northamptonshire; South Wales x3; South Yorkshire; Surrey x2; Thames Valley; Warwickshire; West Midlands x6; West Yorkshire x2; Wiltshire

The constabularies do not incur any costs as a result of seconding officers who are all volunteers and seconded with the agreement of Chief Constables. The full reimbursement of salary to constabularies and the travel, equipment and insurance costs of seconding officers are met by the joint MOD, FCO and DfID Global Conflict Prevention Pool. The cost for next financial year is estimated at just over 3 million .

Cannabis

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to categorise cannabis as a herbal substance. [82236]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government welcomes the recent announcement by GW Pharmaceuticals that their advanced clinical trials into the development of a medical preparation of a cannabis-based drug have been successfully completed and that they plan to seek marketing approval for the product from the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) early next year.

This evaluation by the MCA is one which all prospective new medicines have to go through and is designed to protect public health.

If product approval is forthcoming, the Government will seek Parliament's approval to make the necessary changes to the law to enable the prescription of cannabis-based medicine at the earliest opportunity. We recognise how eagerly awaited these changes are.

Child Curfews

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child curfew orders have been imposed. [82085]

Mr. Denham: Between February 2001, when curfew orders with electronic monitoring were extended to 10 to 15-year-olds, and 31 October 2002 the courts imposed 2,704 orders on young offenders of that age.

Child Rescue Alert

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long the Child Rescue Alert programme will be piloted in Sussex; and what plans there are to extend this scheme to the rest of the UK. [83221]

Hilary Benn: Child Rescue Sussex Police was launched on 14 November and will run for six months.

It is a pilot project sponsored by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), and it will be for them to evaluate it and determine the value of extending this scheme. We await with interest the outcome of the evaluation.

I understand that ACPO's Homicide Working Group will consider a report on the project in April, which will include recommendations about whether to extend the scheme.

Children in Jail

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on trends in the numbers of children being held in jails in England and Wales in the last 10 years. [82148]

Hilary Benn: The number of people aged under-18 held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for 1992 to 2002 is given in the table.

Number of people aged under-18 in Prison Service establishments at 30 June each year

Year	Number
1992	1,328
1993	1,304
1994	1,526
1995	1,675
1996	2,093
1997	2,479
1998	2,466
1999	2,422

Number of people aged under-18 in Prison Service establishments at 30 June each year

Year	Number
2000	2,434
2001	2,448
2002	2,609

Community Punishments

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many community service and community punishment orders have been made by the courts; how many have been breached; and how many breaches resulted in a custodial sentence being imposed in each of the last five years; [82098]

(2) how many probation/community rehabilitation orders have been made by the courts; how many have been breached; and how many breaches resulted in a custodial sentence being imposed in each of the last five years. [82099]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 2000", a copy of which is in the Library (Table 7.24 refers).

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 7 October 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Muqtar Suufi Abubaker. [83428]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 21 November 2002

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 7 October 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Ali Aredleer. [83429]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 20 November 2002.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will respond to the letters of 26 April 2002 and 19 June 2002 of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire concerning the cost of police pensions. [83543]

Mr. Denham: A reply to both letters was sent on 26 November 2002. I apologise for the considerable delay in responding.

Crime Reduction Strategy

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made within Essex following the introduction of the Government's Crime Reduction Strategy. [80887]

Mr. Denham: The table outlines the Home Office crime reduction investment in Essex since the publication of the Crime Reduction Strategy in 1999. This encompasses the Basildon, Brentwood, Braintree, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon, Rochford, Southend, Tendring, Thurrock and Uttlesford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas.

Funding initiative	*Funding received (£)*
CCTV	2,311,904
Communities against drugs	1,254,000
Partnership development fund	878,788
Tackling domestic violence	599,971
Safer communities initiative	429,599
Small retailers in deprived areas	183,126
Community support officers	118,735
Reducing burglary initiative	72,649
Total	5,848,772

In addition, mainstream funding of £590 million has been allocated to Essex for policing since 1999.

The targeted funding listed has helped to reduce crime in priority areas such as burglary dwelling, down 10.1 per cent., and drug offences, down by 14.8 per cent.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of *(a)* racially aggravated offences, *(b)* violent crime, *(c)* robbery of personal property and *(d)* drug offences were recorded in (i) Somerset, (ii) South West England and (iii) England in (A) 1997, (B) 1998, (C) 1999, (D) 2000 and (E) 2001. [82609]

Mr. Denham: The requested statistics are given in the table.

On 1 April 1998, there was a change in the counting rules for recorded crime, and an expansion of the offences covered. This resulted in an increase of crimes recorded by the police. Recorded crime figures before this date will therefore not be directly comparable.

Avon and Somerset police force implemented the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in advance of its national implementation in April 2002. The effects of the Standard are explained in table footnote 9.

Recorded crime: number of offences recorded from 1997 to 2001–02

Police force area/offence	*1997*[1]	*1997–98*[2]	*1998–99*[3]	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*[4]	*2001–02*[4]
Avon and Somerset						
Total racially aggravated offences[5]	—	—	—	240	478	700
Total violent crime[6]	12,176	13,219	14,985	16,061	19,071	23,670
Robbery of personal property[7]	—	—	1,694	2,177	2,573	4,585
Drug offences[8]	484	461	2,145	2,017	1,990	1,860
South-west Region[9]						
Total racially aggravated offences[5]	—	—	—	667	1,216	1,521
Total violent crime[6]	27,419	28,814	40,242	43,986	47,785	53,840

Recorded crime: number of offences recorded from 1997 to 2001–02

Police force area/offence	*1997*[1]	*1997–98*[2]	*1998–99*[3]	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*[4]	*2001–02*[4]
Robbery of personal property[7]	—	—	2,657	3,265	3,694	5,954
Drug offences[8]	1,705	1,699	9,471	9,637	8,922	9,635
England						
Total racially aggravated offences[5]	—	—	—	21,140	24,303	29,080
Total violent crime[6]	326,993	332,683	571,027	662,527	692,561	773,680
Robbery of personal property[7]	—	—	55,645	71,387	82,010	107,325
Drug offences[8]	21,627	21,774	126,196	113,346	105,107	111,895

[1] Recorded on a calendar year basis.
[2] The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the coverage and rules in use until 31 March 1998.
[3] The number of crimes recorded in that financial year using the expanded offence coverage and revised counting rules which came into effect on 1 April 1998.
[4] Avon and Somerset implemented the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in advance of the national implementation date of April 2002. The 2001–02 figures for this force, and consequently those for the south west region will be affected by the standard, as have those figures for England. The impact of the standard will vary for different types of offence.
[5] Racially aggravated offences became notifiable to the police on 1 April 1999. The offences covered are: other wounding, harassment, common assault, criminal damage to a dwelling, criminal damage to a building other than a dwelling, criminal damage to a vehicle and other criminal damage.
[6] Violent crime is comprised of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery.
[7] Robbery of personal property was recorded separately (from total robbery) as from 1 April 1998.
[8] Up until 1 April 1998, trafficking in controlled drugs was the only drugs-related offence recorded. After this date the offence coverage was expanded to include more drugs-related offences.
[9] The south west region comprises the following police forces: Avon and Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

Drug Addiction

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence has been produced in the NACRO project funded by him comparing drug addiction of offenders, with special reference to Worksop. [82883]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: As part of the drug testing pilot programme evaluation Worksop has been selected as a comparative site in the Nottinghamshire area. The National Association of Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) team will interview and track offenders who have a similar profile to those within the Nottingham pilot site to compare how their offending and drug misuse differs from those being drug tested. Interviewing began in late summer 2002 and NACRO is due to report in the autumn of 2003.

Drug Convictions (Sentencing)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons convicted of drug dealing have received custodial sentences of more than 10 years in the last 12 months. [82932]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: 42 persons in England and Wales were sentenced to at least 10 years immediate custody for drug dealing in the year 2000.

The term dealing is taken to cover the following drug offences: possession with intent to supply unlawfully, unlawful supply and unlawful import/export.

Data for 2001 are not yet available.

Drug Treatment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy that workers at drop-in centres and centres for the homeless who specialise in preparing drug-users for treatment and provide counselling and guidance to them should be required to notify the police of substance misuse. [83548]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 created offences for the occupier or persons concerned in the management of any premises to knowingly permit or suffer specified controlled drug misuse on their premises. Section 38 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 extended Section 8*(d)* of 1971 from the smoking of cannabis, cannabis resin or prepared opium to administering or using any controlled drug. However, it was agreed by Parliament, during the passage of the amending legislation, that notes of the Guidance would be published on the operation of the new provision before it was enacted.

Draft notes for guidance were accordingly prepared and sent out for wide consultation by the Home Office on 19 September. These explained the background to the change and how it was proposed to operate it. The guidance included a sentence to the effect that occupiers and managers of premises who suspect drug misuse should contact local police at an early stage to prevent it. It further explained that failure to inform and co-operate with the police exposes individuals to possible prosecution. However the Guidance also described examples of harm reduction factors which would need to be taken into account by the police when deciding, based on the public interest, whether or not to instigate a prosecution.

The consultation exercise closed on 8 November. A decision will be taken on the issue of the Guidance Notes once the responses to the consultation exercise have been fully analysed and considered.

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Entitlement Card

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what co-ordination he has undertaken of Department assessment of the implications of the entitlement card proposals for the devolved powers of the Scottish Parliament. [83583]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* Home Office officials met with counterparts in the Scottish Executive to discuss issues of particular relevance to the devolved administration, prior to the publication of the consultation paper on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud. These contacts have continued during the consultation exercise.

The consultation paper states that any legislation to establish an entitlement card scheme would be enacted by the Westminster Parliament, as any scheme would need to operate on a UK-wide basis if it was to be effective as an immigration control measure.

One of the detailed options for the scope of any legislation would allow organisations to link services to a card scheme via their own legislation. Under these arrangements, it will be a matter for the Scottish Executive and Parliament to decide whether to link the services they are responsible for to a card scheme. However, they could not prevent the issuing of a card for purposes which are outside the scope of their powers, for example, the UK card as a travel document in Europe.

Female Genital Mutilation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in the UK against surgeons carrying out female genital mutilation in each of the last 10 years. [82208]

Hilary Benn: Information held centrally on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, shows that there were no prosecutions brought for such offences in England and Wales in the years 1991 to 2000.

Information for 2001 is due for publication in December.

Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

Immigration (Overstayers)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the applications made under the regularisation scheme for overstayers have been *(a)* decided, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused; how many cases are (i) under consideration and (ii) awaiting validation; and when he expects all cases to have been decided. [83471]

Beverley Hughes: A total of 3,379 cases have been decided under the regularisation scheme for overstayers. Of these 2,954 have been granted and 425 refused. As of 22 November 2002 11,936 cases have to be finally determined. Of these 9,114 are awaiting consideration by the Integrated Case Work Directorate North and 2,822 are being dealt with in other areas of the Integrated Case Work Directorate. Considerable extra resources, have now been allocated to the consideration of these cases and it is anticipated that all will have been decided by April 2003.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was available to be spent by the Metropolitan Police in each of the last 10 years. [82476]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* Net revenue budget requirements for the Metropolitan Police Service in each of the last 10 years are set out in the table.

Year	*£ million*
1993–94	782.0
1994–95	813.0
1995–96[1]	1,661.0
1996–97	1,676.0
1997–98	1,720.0
1998–99	1,778.0
1999–2000	1,836.0
2000–01[2]	1,830.0
2001–02	1,980.1
2002–03[3]	2,037.7

[1] Police grant was redefined to be within Budget Requirements from 1995–96. Before then, police grant was deducted from expenditure to show net expenditure. Since then, expenditure has been shown before deduction of police grant.

[2] The Metropolitan Police Service budget in 2000–01 is not directly comparable with previous years. Parts of the metropolitan police district transferred to Essex, Herts and Surrey from 1 April 2000.

[3] The grant figure for 2002–03 is not directly comparable with that for 2001–02 owing to changes in funding for the National Crime Squad/National Criminal Intelligence Service. The figure for 2001–02 comparable with the 2002–03 provision would have been £1,941.9 million.

Source:
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police support staff in the Metropolitan Police area there where in each of the last 10 years; and on what tasks they were employed. [82479]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The information requested in respect of the number of support staff in the Metropolitan Police is set out in the table which has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. During the period in question the Metropolitan Police undertook an outsourcing programme and a number of staff transferred to the private sector in areas such as Information Technology (IT) vehicle maintenance and property services. The

figures provided therefore include privately contracted staff as well as Metropolitan Police authority employed staff.

In response to what tasks they are employed on, civilians perform more than 150 different tasks and it is not possible to list them all. In general civilians employed in borough operational command units undertake personnel, finance or communications support. If employed in central departments they will cover issues such as recruitment, personnel, finance and procurement. In addition the Metropolitan Police Service employ a number of specialist civilian employees who undertake work such as IT specialists, Scenes of Crime examiners as well as traffic wardens, control room staff and station reception staff.

Year end	*Number of support staff*
31 March 1993	14,663
31 March 1994	14,483
31 March 1995	14,337
31 March 1996	14,368
31 March 1997	13,492
31 March 1998	12,563
31 March 1999	11,390
31 March 2000	10,759
31 March 1901	10,197
31 March 1902	10,548

Mr. Robert Brown

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice and other assistance has been made available to Mr. Robert Brown following the recent quashing of his conviction; and if he will make a statement. [82227]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The Home Office-funded advice service being piloted by the Citizens Advice Bureau at the Royal Courts of Justice for individuals released on appeal against conviction was established earlier this year. The project staff were made aware of Mr. Brown's case prior to his release and have sought to contact him twice by telephone to offer assistance. They have not yet been able to establish contact. An application for compensation for wrongful conviction has been lodged at the Home Office and is being treated as a priority.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [82670]

Hilary Benn: The multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), which the police and probation services were required by statute to establish in each of the 42 areas of England and Wales from April 2001, have already strengthened the effectiveness of the assessment and management of the risks posed by sexual and violent offenders. An assessment of the new arrangements was set out in the central annual report on the MAPPA, which I published on 22 July 2002, a copy of which was placed in the Library.

Paedophiles (Internet)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take further measures to prevent advances to children for sexual purposes *(a)* on the internet and *(b)* elsewhere. [82675]

Hilary Benn: This Government's Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet set up in May 2001 has developed proposals for a criminal offence to tackle the "grooming" of children by paedophiles online or offline. This is intended to allow prosecution at an early stage when children are being groomed, before an existing sexual offence has been committed. In addition, the proposals include the creation of a new civil protection order relating to behaviour towards a child for an illegal or harmful sexual purpose. These proposals were announced in the Government's command paper on Sex Offence Reform, "Protecting the Public" on 19 November 2002.

In addition, the task force has developed, run and now evaluated a successful national awareness campaign targeted at both children and parents about internet safety. Independent evaluation of the campaigns shows significantly improved awareness of the key messages in both target audiences. The task force is now considering that evaluation and how to build on the momentum created.

Practical online child protection measures have included draft models of good practice for service providers in respect of chat, instant messaging and web services. These encourage, among other things, clear and accessible safety messages and advice and user-friendly mechanisms for reporting abuse. The drafts are being considered by the wider industry through the Internet Service Providers' Association (ISPA) and the London Internet Exchange (LINX).

The task force will next be looking at: consideration of the extent to which the criminal law currently covers unsuitable material being sent to children and all forms of indecent representations of children; an assessment of the new challenges posed by development of 3G mobile phones; and developing basic training materials for child protection staff on children's internet use.

In parallel with the task force, the UK has played a leading role in the development of a G8 strategy for protecting children from sexual exploitation on the internet. The strategy, which is not yet finalised, will cover issues such as: victim identification; intelligence gathering and sharing; location of suspects; enforcement tools and training: awareness building and prevention; and police working with industry and non-governmental organisation's (NGOs). The task force will take forward the UK's domestic actions where it can to support the leading role played by the UK so far in this field.

The "Protecting the Public" command paper, published on 19 November 2002 also included details of proposed sex offence reform that will further protect children from sexual activity. New or expanded offences of adult sexual activity with a child, familial sexual abuse of a child, commercial sexual exploitation of a child, sexual activity between minors and abuse of trust are designed to protect children from those who seek to exploit or abuse them sexually.

Police (Pensions and Staffing)

Mr. Brian Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many former police officers are on retirement pensions; and how many police there are in service; [82171]

(2) what the average age of retirement for police has been over the last five years; [82176]

(3) what the average pension received by a police officer is; and what percentage of final salary a police officer is entitled to after 30 years service. [82179]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* Specific information relating to all forces in England and Wales about the number of former police officers with pensions, their average retirement age and the average level of their pensions is not held centrally.

We estimate that about 125,000 former officers and dependents are receiving pensions and that about three quarters of these will be former officers. As at 31 March 2002, there were 129,603 police officers in England and Wales.

Although national information is not available, figures provided by the Staffordshire Police for the average age of retirement of police officers from that force either with an ordinary or ill-health pension are in given in the table.

Based on data from 11 forces we estimate that the average amount received by a former officer retiring with an ordinary pension or ill-health pension, not including the lump sum, is about £11,800 per annum. After 30 years of service and contributions to the Police Pension Scheme, a police officer is entitled to 40/60ths of his or her average pensionable pay for the final year of service, or one half average pensionable pay if he or she elects to commute a quarter of his or her pension for a lump sum.

Year	*Average age*
1997	48.15
1998	48.73
1999	49.43
2000	50.41
2001	57.75

Policing Priorities

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent guidance he has sent to police authorities on policing priorities. [82448]

Mr. Denham: On 20 November I laid the National Policing Plan before Parliament as required by section 1 of the Police Reform Act 2002. As I explained in my letter to hon. Members that day, the plan sets out for the first time in one document, the priorities for the police service in England and Wales for the next three years together with the performance targets and indicators against which delivery will be measured. The strategic priorities for the police service in 2003–06 are as follows:

Tackling antisocial behaviour and disorder

Reducing volume, street, drug-related and violent and gun crime in line with local and national targets

Combating serious and organised crime operating across force boundaries

Increasing the number of offences brought to justice.

The plan contains a planning framework as a tool to aid implementation. I shall shortly be issuing guidance on local three-year strategies.

Prisoners

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison places there are in England and Wales; what the prison population is; and what plans he has to increase the number of prison places over the next three years. [82090]

Hilary Benn: As at 21 November 2002, the prison population of England and Wales stood at 72,477. On the same date, useable operational capacity was 72,882.

£60 million has been made available to provide 740 additional places by March 2004. This is in addition to funding from the 2002 Budget that will provide 2,320 places by March 2003, together with 400 places at Birmingham prison, which are funded by the 2000 spending review and are scheduled to open in April 2004.

Prison Service plans to build two new private prisons at Ashford (near Heathrow) and Peterborough in Cambridgeshire have recently been approved. These two new prisons will together provide around 1,300 places by 2004–05.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners in UK prisons under 35-years-old have served time in young offenders institutions. [82825]

Hilary Benn: No information is collected centrally on which establishments prisoners have served previous sentences in. Information relating to prisoners in Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive (Helen Liddell) and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid) respectively.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what differences there are in securing *(a)* town visits, *(b)* home leave and *(c)* early release under the tagging system between Scottish and English domicile prisoners held in prisons in England; [83578]

(2) what differences in status and rights there are between Scottish domicile and foreign national prisoners held in prisons in England. [83579]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* All convicted prisoners located in prisons in England and Wales, irrespective of where they are domiciled, have the same status and rights under the Prison Act 1952. The Prison Service does not separately define prisoners domiciled in Scotland.

Prisoners detained in England and Wales who have close family ties with Scotland may apply to serve their sentences there, in accordance with the provisions of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997. Foreign national prisoners may apply to serve their sentences in their country of nationality, providing there is an international agreement in force between the United Kingdom and the country concerned.

There are a number of forms of temporary release available to prisoners at different stages of the sentence. The rules do not differentiate between prisoners domiciled in Scotland and those domiciled in England. However, some forms of temporary release are for the purpose of allowing prisoners to visit their homes during the day in order to begin their resettlement. It may not be practical, therefore, for prisoners domiciled some distance away from their prison to benefit from this type of release. Other forms of temporary release, which include an overnight stay, can be taken in Scotland.

Prisoners sentenced in England and Wales cannot be given Home Detention Curfew (tagging) to an address in Scotland.

Prisoners (Dental Treatment)

Mr. Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are awaiting dental treatment in each prison in the UK; and what the length of waiting times are. [83180]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not available. However, arrangements are being developed to collect data about waiting times for urgent and routine appointments in prisons in England and Wales. Matters concerning Scotland are the responsibility of the devolved Administration. While the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility for prisons in Northern Ireland rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Quat

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to propose a change in the law to make illegal the use of Quat. [82235]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs keeps under review the extent to which Quat (or Khat) is misused, and whether that misuse has harmful effects sufficient to constitute a social problem. The matter will be considered at the Council's next meeting. Any decision about the legal status of Khat will be taken in the light of the Council's advice.

Rape

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Department will publish its review of its action plan to implement the recommendations of the HMCPSI/HMIC joint investigation into the investigation and prosecution of cases involving allegations of rape; and if he will make a statement. [80548]

Hilary Benn: Implementation of the action plan is progressing well. Aninter-agency working group, led by the Home Office and with representation from the police, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Court Service, is monitoring progress against the agreed action points. The group is also considering the issues of wider evaluation to assess the impact of the action plan on the ground, and the dissemination of this information.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take further measures to ensure that released sex offenders are not re-housed near schools or children's play areas. [82672]

Hilary Benn: We are planning to introduce measures in the Criminal Justice Bill and the Sexual Offences Bill which will further strengthen the recently introduced multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), which have improved significantly the work of the police and probation services in protecting the public from sexual and violent offenders.

The new measures include a sentence for dangerous offenders, which will ensure that they are only released when they are no longer regarded as a risk; and some further tightening up of sex offender registration. Additionally, we are keen that full use is made of sex offender orders and restraining orders, which can be very effective in helping protect schools and play areas from sexual offenders. In early December we are to issue new guidance to the police on using sex offender orders in light of our experience of best practice and of the new provisions we introduced in the Police Reform Act 2002.

Stolen Art and Artefacts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the value was of stolen art and artefacts in the last year for which information is available. [80984]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office does not collect such information centrally.

Street Crime

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Ministers allocated responsibility for delivery in the police force areas covered by the street crime initiative will continue to supervise policing in those areas; and if he will make a statement. [83680]

Mr. Denham: The Street Crime Action Group, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, agreed that it would be helpful for each of the 10 street crime areas to be supported by a Government Minister. The role of the sponsor Ministers is not to supervise policing of the street crime areas, which falls to the commissioner or relevant chief constable.

The role of the sponsor Ministers is to undertake visits to the areas they have been allocated, to meet with, and support local agencies, promote a shared approach to tackling street crime at a local level, and to identify issues on which further action by government agencies would be helpful. The sponsor Ministers will continue to carry out this role.

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what extra support he plans to give to victims and witnesses as part of the Street Crimes Court Initiative. [81473]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* One of the aims of the Street Crime Initiative is to improve the support for victims and witnesses throughout the criminal justice process. Enhanced victim and witness facilities are available in the 70 street crime courts designated to deal with street crime cases across the 10 force areas participating in the initiative. Forty five of these courts have had physical improvements made (costing over £4 million), including separate entrances and waiting rooms, to provide suitable facilities and support to victims and witnesses to protect them from intimidation while at court.

An entire witness suite, launched on 21 November, has been created at the Inner London Crown court to serve the London courts. This allows vulnerable and intimidated witnesses to give evidence to any court connected with ISDN lines through a video link. Witnesses using this system enter the court using their own secure entrance, and have no need to visit the public part of the Court, ensuring that they do not come into contact with the offender.

Local Victim Support schemes across the 10 areas are working in support of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Premium Service, which has enhanced working arrangements between prosecution teams, courts and Victim Support and the Witness Service. The focus on supporting and guiding the victims of street crime through the process from the moment they report a crime is particularly important to ensuring an effective outcome through the court process.

Witnesses

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for reform of the law relating to the competence and compellability of witnesses in court proceedings. [81469]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* There are no plans to reform the law relating to the compellability of witnesses in court proceedings.

Under section 53 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, the general presumption is that at every stage in criminal proceedings all persons, whatever their age, are competent to act as witnesses and give evidence unless it appears to the court the person in question cannot understand the questions put to him and give answers to the court that can be understood.

When considering the competence of a person to be a witness the court should take into consideration whether the quality of the person's evidence can be improved by the assistance of special measures, in particular the use of aids to communication and intermediaries. The use of aids to communication for vulnerable or intimidated witnesses was implemented in the Crown courts on 24 July 2002 and the implementation of the use of intermediaries will be considered following the evaluation of pilot projects which are due to commence next year.

Women Prisoners

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of sentence is for women convicted of drug offences in the last year for which figures are available. [82863]

Hilary Benn: The average sentence of immediate custody imposed of women convicted of drug offences in 2000 in England and Wales was 17.5 months.

Data for 2001 are not yet available.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women convicted in each of the last five years were *(a)* sent to prison and *(b)* given community penalties. [82877]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is contained in the table.

Women found guilty of all offences at all courts and sentenced to immediate custody and to community sentences, England and Wales, 1996 to 2000

	Women found guilty	*Sentenced to immediate custody*	*Given community sentences*
1996	260,982	4,403	16,592
1997	217,137	5,506	18,780
1998	235,578	6,567	21,052
1999	219,980	7,504	22,169
2000	256,018	7,900	23,625

Data for 2001 are not yet available.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women were sent to prison on remand in each of the last five years; and how many where subsequently acquitted. [82878]

Hilary Benn: The requested information is in the following tables.

The first table represents the number of female prisoners that were received into prisons in England and Wales onto remand over the whole of 2001. These individuals may subsequently have been sentenced.

The second table represents female prisoners who were remanded in custody in England and Wales at some stage by a magistrates court, and who were acquitted at some point in 2001.

The two tables do not necessarily cover the same individuals. They are from different data sources and some individuals will be acquitted in a different year to when they were sent to prison on remand.

	Number of remand receptions
1996	4,221
1997	5,124
1998	6,258
1999	6,721
2000	6,584
2001[1]	7,191

[1] Provisional

Women remanded in custody at some stage in magistrates court proceedings

	Estimated percentage acquitted
1996	24
1997	23
1998	21
1999	20
2000	21
2001	n/a

Women's Prison (Ashford, Middlesex)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the delay in signing the contract for a women's prison at Ashford (Middlesex). [83369]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The contract between Her Majesty's Prison Service and UKDS for the new prison at Ashford is expected to be signed shortly. Following usual practice I will write to the hon. Member before the contract is signed.

Young Offenders

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many under-18 year olds were in each of the last 10 years held in custody in England and Wales on 30 September; broken down by those in *(a)* each prison, *(b)* each local authority secure unit and *(c)* each secure training centre; and in each case how many persons were held aged *(i)* 10 to 12 (ii) 13 to 14 and (iii) 15 to 16 and (iv) 17 to 18. [81772]

Hilary Benn: The requested information has been placed in the Library. Information is not held in the detail requested prior to 1995.

Information on juveniles held in local authority secure units and secure training units was not collected centrally prior to April 2000.

Mr. Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the practice of remanding 15 to 16-year-old boys in prison. [82823]

Hilary Benn: For juveniles a custodial remand should always be the last option considered by the courts. We have provided a wide range of community alternatives including bail support and supervision schemes, tagging on bail and the intensive supervision and surveillance programme.

Where a custodial remand is necessary 15 and 16-year-old boys are remanded to Prison Service accommodation, unless the court considers them particularly vulnerable, in which case they could be remanded to a local authority secure unit.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Works Expenditure

Mr. Hammond: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what was *(a)* the total cost of the works carried out to Old Palace Yard and Abingdon Street over the course of 2001 and 2002 and *(b)* the contribution of the House of Commons Commission to such works. [83397]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House of Commons Commission has made no contribution to the cost of the road works, for which the authorities of the House of Lords are responsible.

The House of Commons has paid £33,384 in 2002–03 towards the cost of the Golden Jubilee Sundial.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Education

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to ensure that every child in the world receives a free basic education as guaranteed under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [83402]

Clare Short: Unfortunately there has been little international effort to implement the rights to education outlined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the past.

The Government are strongly committed to mobilising greater international efforts to meet the millennium development goals. The target for education is to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. We are working with the UN and international financial institutions and national development agencies to heighten commitments to meet the target.

Since 1997 we have committed £700 million to basic education. Forecast commitment for the next five years are £1.3 billion. Of this £500 million will go to Africa and £800 million will go to Asia. These spending figures are forecasts and depend on agreeing quality programmes with partners.

Ethiopia

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about UK measures to avoid starvation in Ethiopia. [82997]

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much emergency aid her Department will provide to Ethiopia during the present food shortage; what form that aid will take; when it will be delivered; and if she will make a statement. [83156]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 201–02W.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she expects the remaining debts for the heavily indebted poor countries to be cancelled. [83195]

Clare Short: So far, 26 countries out of a total of 37 eligible countries have qualified for relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Of these, six countries have reached Completion Point and have received full debt relief. A further 20 countries have reached their Decision Point and are receiving interim debt relief. We expect the bulk of these countries to reach Completion Point in the next two years; when they, too, will receive full debt relief. It is difficult to predict when the other 11 countries will qualify for HIPC relief, as many are still affected by conflict and governance problems. Of these, Central African Republic, DR Congo, Comoros and Cote d'Ivoire may reach Decision Point in 2003 but, in some cases, this will depend on progress towards peace. The remaining countries are a long way from qualifying as they are affected by conflict or have serious governance concerns; these are Burundi, Congo Republic, Liberia, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan and Togo.

Malawi

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial assistance her Department is giving to Malawi to *(a)* treat and *(b)* prevent HIV/AIDS. [83190]

Clare Short: My Department is providing support for the National HIV/AIDS Strategic Framework by means of a £25 million sexual and reproductive health programme. A further £10 million supports the provision of sexual and reproductive health services by a local non-Governmental organisation (Banja La Mtsogolo).

The UK is contributing £300 million to the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria, and Malawi was recently granted $200 million from this fund to be utilised over the next five years.

DFID has also been involved with Government and other donors in the development and establishment of the National AIDS Commission (NAC). NAG operates as a trust, relatively independent of Government, and is responsible for the preparation of a national strategy and action plan, which aims to improve prevention, care and support and impact mitigation. DFID will be strengthening its support to the Government of Malawi through NAC, the Ministry of Health and Population and other Ministries which are improving their responses to HIV in the workplace and the communities they serve, and to a stronger national Civil Society response.

All DFID programmes now include sector specific activities to help address HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she expects Malawi to achieve the Millennium Development goals. [83191]

Clare Short: Malawi ranks as one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita income of US$170 in 2001. An equally low UN Human Development Index indicates that progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) will be slow.

Specific challenges include attainment of the MDGs for poverty reduction and gender equality. There have been gains in achievement of universal primary education, but this is marked by concerns regarding the quality of education and participation rates for girls. Progress in achievement of MDGs for child mortality and maternal health has been poor; maternal mortality has doubled to 1,120:100,000 since 1992. There are indications that the high incidence of HIV/AIDS (currently 16 per cent.) and its coincide with the present food crisis, will lead to further increases in mortality. Life expectancy has already dropped below 40 years of age. There are also growing problems with governance standards.

Malawi launched its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in April. PRS monitoring will be linked to MDGs. My Department is providing support in partnership with other donors, to ensure this is appropriately robust.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on *(a)* the level of debt interest payments made by Malawi and *(b)* the effects on poverty eradication in the country. [83194]

Clare Short: According to the Reserve Bank of Malawi, in 2001, external debt service was Malawian Kwacha 6.4 billion (US$78 million) and of this (30 per cent.) Malawian Kwacha 1.9 billion (US$23 million) was in respect of payments.

Malawi remains eligible for interim debt relief under the Enhanced HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative (US$91.4 million in total). In 2001 Malawi benefited from US$27 million of this. In 2002, the position is different. Although Malawi could have received a further US$50 million in debt relief, this amount has not been forthcoming because of the Government's unsatisfactory economic and financial management performance during the year. The country is currently off track with its IMF programme and has serious problems of corruption. The Minister of Finance has promised to announce a number of remedial measures this next week and the IMF is expected to return to Malawi in mid-December to discuss progress against these. Assuming Malawi can get back on track with the IMF in the near future, the Government could still be on schedule to reach its HIPC completion point by mid 2003. At that stage, all of the debt covered by the HIPC initiative would be irrevocably cancelled. In addition, Malawi would be reimbursed for the relief it is currently losing. HIPC debt relief should be used for increased spending on health, education, and other social priorities.

Domestic debt, which stood at MK20.2 billion (14 per cent. of GDP) in July 2002 and the rising domestic interest bill is also a concern. This underscores the importance of Government implementing the necessary remedial actions to restore fiscal stability and thus reduce the need to borrow domestically.

Maternal Mortality (Africa)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment her Department has made of rates of maternal mortality in

Africa; and what recent evaluation she has made of the impact of her Department's programmes on rates of maternal mortality. [80550]

Clare Short: Improving maternal health is a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and the most difficult goal to meet. DFID is committed to working towards achieving this goal and the associated target to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters between 1990 and 2015.

Maternal mortality is difficult to measure and most poor countries have poor systems and lack reliable estimates of the number of women who die in pregnancy. We have to rely on standard surveys of maternal mortality as and when they are undertaken. Monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of DFID's programmes tend to be against proxy indicators. An internationally accepted proxy indicator for maternal mortality reduction is the proportion of births attended by skilled attendants. Using this indicator we can see progress in Latin America and the Caribbean, but in Sub-Saharan Africa where poverty is deepest and HIV/AIDS makes progress more difficult, there has been no significant change. DFID has and will continue to work with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Bank and others to develop new and improved tools and methods to measure maternal mortality and evaluate the effectiveness of maternal and neo-natal healthcare strategies.

We will continue to work bilaterally and with multilateral agencies towards the reduction of maternal mortality. Greater investment in health and more political commitment from national governments and international development agencies is needed to address this issue.

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent reports she has received about displaced Zimbabwean farmworkers and their relocation; who is responsible for their relocation; how many people her Department estimates will be affected; what impact she believes this will have on the humanitarian situation in *(a)* Zimbabwe and *(b)* bordering countries; what representations she has made to *(i)* SADC and (ii) EU countries on this matter; and if she will make a statement. [83042]

Clare Short: My Department is working closely with the UN and other donors who share our concern about destitute farm workers in Zimbabwe. They are among the most vulnerable people in the current humanitarian crisis. EU member states and SADC countries are aware of this.

At present the large majority of commercial farm workers remain on site, or with neighbouring farm worker families, alongside new settlers. Their longer-term future is uncertain. Some are moving to take jobs with new employers, often on a casual basis. Several thousand people have been forcibly evicted, particularly from farms allocated to new commercial scale farmers. But there is no present evidence of systematic displacement. The UN plans a new survey of the situation in January.

DFID is already supporting supplementary feeding for 49,000 children in farm schools, and general feeding of 50,000 people in farm villages. We are ready to increase our support as agencies scale up their operations.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Libra IT System

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much the overspend was on the Department's new Libra IT system; what fees were paid to the consultants on the system; and if she will make a statement. [83649]

Yvette Cooper: The contract with Fujitsu Services for the delivery of Libra has been varied twice since initial completion in December 1998. This has resulted in changes to the baseline making it inappropriate to compare spend to date across an original and two variants of the contract. The actual spend against the contract can be summarised as follows:

Original ICL Contract Dec 1998

Total contracted charges expected to arise over contract life of 10.5 years—£184m

Negotiated ICL Contract May 2000

Total contracted charges expected to arise over contract life of 14.5 years—£319m

Negotiated Fujitsu Services Contract July 2002

Total contracted charges expected to arise over contract life of 8.5 years—£232m

Total contracted charges paid by 30 Sept 02—£64.8m (This is included in the £232 current contract)

In addition, the Department has spent £9.6 million on the management of the project over the same period, of which £1.4m covered consultancy costs.

Witness Payments

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he plans to publish the results of his consultation on payments to witnesses; and if he will make a statement. [83539]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor intends to publish a paper summarising the responses to the consultation early next year.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Drugs Funding

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on how additional money for drugs was distributed to boards and trusts in Northern Ireland by the Department of Health in the last 12 months. [83040]

Mr. Browne: As regards illicit drugs, additional resources from the Northern Ireland Drug Campaign have been allocated to targets in the Regional Action Plan, which were agreed as priorities by the Working Groups, set up as part of the Joint Implementation Model. The Executive endorsed the Joint Implementation Model in May 2001.

The Treatment Working Group has allocated resources for priority services through the eight Community Addiction Teams, based in Health and Social Services Trusts. No additional resources were supplied to Health and Social Services Boards who are all members of the Treatment Working Group.

In relation to prescribed drugs, on 21 August 2002 Boards were allocated a further £3 million to help meet the cost of new, effective but highly expensive specialist drugs already being prescribed in the hospital sector. This money was, as is customary, issued in accordance with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's capitation formula for sharing out resources between Boards.

It is for each Board to decide on the distribution of its share to the Trusts concerned, in light of the needs of their respective populations. I understand that these resources are being directed towards a range of existing pressures including those related to severe mental illness, high-risk infections, cystic fibrosis, Crohn's disease, Fabry's disease, rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis.

Fishermen

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action is being taken to ensure the livelihoods of fishermen are safeguarded. [82027]

Mr. Pearson: I fully recognise the concerns about the future of livelihoods of those depending on a viable and sustainable fisheries industry in Northern. I have recently met representatives of the catching sector, and with processors as well as local elected representatives concerned with the future of the industry. They have briefed me in considerable detail on the difficulties which the industry faces at the moment, and of the responsible efforts they have made in recent years to allow declining stocks of fish in the Irish Sea to recover. In acknowledging the gravity of the current situation, and the seriousness of the scientific advice on the state of key commercial stocks in the Irish Sea, I also recognise that a viable and sustainable industry is important, not just for those directly involved in fishing and fish processing, but for the wider community. I have given a commitment to work energetically in the interests of the Northern Ireland fishing industry, particularly between now and the Fisheries Council meeting in Brussels just before Christmas, to ensure that the Northern Ireland dimension to this complex and difficult problem is not overlooked. I will meet the DEFRA Fisheries Minister to ensure that the Northern Ireland dimension is fully recognised in the UK position during the Fisheries Council bilaterals later this month.

Poverty

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are in place to combat poverty in Northern Ireland. [83102]

Mr. Browne: New Targeting Social Need (TSN) is Northern Ireland's main policy for tackling poverty and social exclusion. New TSN aims to tackle social need and social exclusion by targeting efforts and available resources within existing Departmental programmes towards people, groups and areas in greatest social need.

New TSN is being implemented by all Northern Ireland Government Departments and relevant agencies providing a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to tackling poverty and social disadvantage.

Action Plans have been developed by each Department containing the actions and targets through which they deliver New TSN. Every Department reviews its Action Plan every year and updates it to take account of progress, building in new targets to follow those completed.

The New TSN Annual Report 2002 will be published week commencing 1 December 2002. It will provide specific examples of the measures taken by Departments to combat poverty in Northern Ireland. We have commissioned an independent external evaluation of New Targeting Social Need in order to assess the way in which the policy has been implemented so far and to examine its impact. The outcome of the evaluation will feed into future thinking on New TSN.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many funded places in playgroups and nursery schools have been awarded for children aged three years and under in Northern Ireland; and how many children in their pre-school year have not been provided with a funded pre-school place in Northern Ireland in each of the last two years. [83235]

Jane Kennedy: The funded places allocated to private and voluntary providers are only available to children in their immediate pre-school year—those aged between three years two months and four years two months. Places in the statutory sector are, as has been the case since the early 1970s, open to children from two years old to the lower limit of compulsory school age. The number of children attending statutory nursery schools and units who had not attained the age of three (the basis on which data is collected) by the date of the schools census was 992 in the 2000–01 school year and 1,423 in the 2001–02 school year.

In the current school year I expect places to be provided for more than 90 per cent. of the relevant cohort of children. Given that participation in pre-school education is voluntary, this level of provision should be sufficient at regional level to meet the expected demand. However, there may be occasions where a funded place is not available in a specific locality but no information is collected centrally on such cases.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will amend existing legislation in Northern Ireland to ensure that priority is given to providing a funded place for each child in immediate pre-school year. [83236]

Jane Kennedy: Under the current pre-school admissions regulations, statutory nursery schools and units are required, in all cases, to give applications in respect of children in their immediate pre-school year priority over those in respect of younger children. The funded places allocated in the voluntary/private sector are only available to children in their immediate pre-school year. I am therefore content that the current arrangements are sufficient.

Research Assessment Exercise

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will allocate resources to the University of Ulster and Queen's University, Belfast in line with their performance in the Research Assessment Exercise. [83460]

Jane Kennedy: The Draft Budget approved by the Executive prior to suspension contained an increase in line with inflation for university research funding. The final Budget proposals will be published in December. Until then I am not in a position to comment on the matter.

Rural Rate Relief

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made towards introducing a rural rates relief scheme to assist access to rural retail and Post Office services in Northern Ireland. [82683]

Mr. Pearson: On 28 March 2002 the Northern Ireland Executive agreed that the proposed Northern Ireland scheme, which was due to come into effect in October 2002, should be suspended following an assessment that to proceed with the scheme as outlined in the original legislation would not have the desired effect.

Since then options for a more workable scheme have been considered by my officials along with colleagues in Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and relevant agencies.

As the outcomes of the wider Review of Rating Policy and the Non-Domestic Revaluation were likely to impact on any new Rural Rate Relief Scheme, my predecessor as Minister of Finance and Personnel, Dr. Sean Farren, decided to defer putting forward alternatives until both these exercises were completed. Both the Review and the Revaluation are nearing completion and I will shortly be considering the implications for the Rural Relief Scheme—taking account of alternative business reliefs that may emerge from the Review and the impact analysis emerging from the Revaluation exercise.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and if he will make a statement on how it has changed since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [83504]

Angela Smith: Under devolution, the Northern Ireland Executive's first Programme for Government (which set out the plans and priorities of the devolved Administration) included a commitment that sustainable development would be a key theme running through the Executive's work and priorities. This theme has been reflected in subsequent editions of the Programme for Government.

In line with this commitment, the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment, which has lead responsibility for sustainable development, earlier this year published a consultation paper entitled "Promoting Sustainable Living", which set out proposals for a sustainable development strategy for Northern Ireland.

The responses to the consultation exercise are currently being analysed. This work will take account of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Thereafter officials will bring forward a draft Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy for consideration by Ministers.

Apple Industry

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the vacant post of top fruit adviser for the apple industry; and what the timescale is for an appointment to this position. [80110]

Mr. Pearson: The position of top fruit adviser in the Agri-Food Development Service is vacant due to the promotion of the previous incumbent. This officer is currently providing support to the local top fruit sector through his current role as senior horticulture adviser.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development does intend to fill the vacant post of top fruit adviser by April 2003 provided that a suitably qualified person can be recruited.

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Papers (Work and Pensions)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Cabinet papers prepared by the Department for Work and Pensions in the session 2001–02. [83868]

The Prime Minister: It is established practice under section 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to proceedings of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees.

Degree Awards

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Prime Minister what research papers his policy unit has produced on allowing private institutions to award degrees; what costings the unit has made of the cost implications; and if he will place copies in the Library. [84140]

The Prime Minister: Information relating to internal discussion and advice is not disclosed under Exemption 2, Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Government Performance

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister what system he adopts for assessing the performance of Members of the Government; and to what extent he uses a system based on self-assessment. [84118]

The Prime Minister: The Ministerial Code provides guidance to Ministers on the standards and conduct expected of them.

Intelligence Services Commissioner

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Prime Minister what disciplinary action was taken against the individuals responsible for errors discussed in the report of the Intelligence Services Commissioner for 2001. [83199]

The Prime Minister: The agency concerned has dealt with each incident in the appropriate way. As the Intelligence Services Commissioner's report makes clear, those concerned acted entirely in good faith. Lessons have been learned from each incident to help ensure that the errors are not repeated.

SCOTLAND

Employment

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Scottish Executive to review the role played by Scottish Enterprise in generating employment in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [82430]

Mrs. Liddell: I meet regularly with colleagues in the Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise to discuss the Scottish economy. The labour market in Scotland is in healthy shape; employment is close to historic highs and the unemployment rate is around the lowest for a generation.

Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the grants funded by her Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply, and if she will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82190]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department does not provide grants to individual members of the public or organisations.

Media

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last discussed plurality in the Scottish media with the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport. [82432]

Mrs. Liddell: I meet my right hon. Friend regularly to discuss a range of relevant issues, including those covered by the Communications Bill which was published last week.

Shipyards

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the effect that implementation of the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations will have on Scottish shipyards. [81007]

Mrs. Liddell: The implementation of the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive (96/61/EC) is devolved to the Scottish Executive. The Directive was implemented in Scotland by the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Scotland) 2000, which the Executive proposes to amend to defer until 2007 the date when existing shipyards are required to apply for permits to carry out organotin coating activities.

Union of the Crowns

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much of her Department's budget has been allocated to provide for celebrations of the 400th anniversary of the Union of the Crowns. [82433]

Mrs. Liddell: None.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has had from the Scottish Executive regarding plans to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Union of the Crowns; and when she received them. [82434]

Mrs. Liddell: The First Minister wrote to me on 7 November with proposals to commemorate this and other important dates in Scottish history as a means of promoting tourism. A steering group is being established on which my Department will be represented.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Union of the Crowns. [82435]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department will be part of the Steering Group which will consider what might be done to commemorate this date.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Victims of Crime

38. **Keith Vaz:** To ask the Solicitor-General, when she next plans to meet the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss communications with the victims of crime [82006]

The Solicitor-General: I meet with the Director of Public Prosecutions on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of issues including victims of crime.

The CPS has recently completed national implementation of the Direct Communication with Victims initiative which involves the lawyer explaining to the victim the decision to drop or alter a charge.

Public Interest Cases

39. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Solicitor-General, what her practice is in relation to consulting the Crown Prosecution Service in respect of decisions which are likely to be of substantial public interest. [82007]

The Solicitor-General: In the relatively few cases where the Attorney General's consent is required for a prosecution it is usual for the prosecuting authority to give us its views when asking for consent.

Apart from such cases, decisions are for the prosecuting authority. The Director of Public prosecutions and other heads of prosecution agencies occasionally consult the Law Officers before taking decisions, particularly where these are likely to be of substantial public interest.

Deceased Victims

40. **Andrew George:** To ask the Solicitor-General what policy is applied by the Crown Prosecution Servcie in respect of the protection of the reputation of deceased victims. [82009]

The Solicitor-General: If the reputation of a victim is impugned during the course of a trial, unless the assertion is relevant to an issue in the case the prosecutor will object to the line of questioning. If the assertion is relevant to the facts of the case and the prosecutor believes it may be untrue, he or she should consider seeking and calling evidence in rebuttal. In appropriate cases the prosecutor will seek the court's leave to cross-examine the defendant as to his or her own bad character.

Crown Prosecution Service

41. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Solicitor-General, what is the policy of the Crown Prosecution Service in relation to the prosecution of incitement to racial hatred. [82010]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service reviews all allegations of inciting racial hatred in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

Before any prosecution can be brought there are two tests that must be satisfied, firstly, there must be sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of a conviction, and secondly the prosecution must be in the public interest.

The Code for Crown Prosecutors specifically states that "a prosecution is likely to be needed if the offence was motivated by any form of discrimination against the victim's ethnic or national origin.

Car Parking

Mr. Christopher Chope: To ask the Solicitor-General how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of her Department and *(b)* visitors to her Department within the proposed central London road user charging zone. [81850]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* In relation to the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, no car parking spaces are available for employees or visitors. Parking for the Ministerial cars of the Attorney General and myself are arranged off-site by the Government car agency.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has no parking spaces available for employees or visitors.

The Crown Prosecution Service has a total for 32 car parking spaces spread over two offices within the central London road user charging zone. Generally these are available to staff or visitors on a "by need" basis in connection with the Department's business.

The Serious Fraud Office has a total of 25 spaces, of which 10 spaces are allocated to staff with domestic or medical needs. The remaining 15 are available for booking to visitors, staff (not in the category mentioned previously) and for other operational reasons.

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has no car parking spaces within the central London road user charging zone for either employees or visitors.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Solicitor-General what the estimated cost is to her Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81888]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* In relation to the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the cost of the charge on the two ministerial cars used by the Attorney-General and myself will be borne in the first instance by the Government Car Agency. No figures are currently available to me for the cost, if any, that will be passed to the Department. No employees of the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers travel by car to work. Should the use of a private car be essential or cost effective for any special reason, the Department would bear the cost of the charge. It is not expected that any such occasion should arise.

The policy of the Treasury Solicitor's Department is to encourage its employees not to use private vehicles on official business and to encourage them to use public transport. The Department will, however, pay road tolls, including the Central London Road User Charge, where use of a private vehicle is essential or where the journey remains cost effective in comparison to the use of public transport.

The Crown Prosecution Service has no figures to show the estimated cost of the Central London Road User Charge for either of the specified periods.

The estimates of the likely additional costs to the Serious Fraud Office as a result of the introduction of the Central London Road User Charge are in relation to *(a)* £1,000 and *(b)* £10,000.

In respect of HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, use of private cars is rare. It is estimated that the cost of the Central London Road User Charge is unlikely to exceed for the relevant periods *(a)* £20 and *(b)* £100.

Royal Family

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Solicitor-General what guidance she has issued to the CPS on approaching members of the Royal Family for statements when they may be material witnesses in a prosecution. [82008]

The Solicitor-General: I have not issued guidance to the CPS. The CPS is responsible for the prosecution of criminal cases and will provide advice to the police in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors taking into account any new evidence or relevant information as a case progresses. However, as the police are responsible for investigating allegations of criminal offences and obtaining evidence, the police rather than the CPS would obtain any witness statements.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people in the Greater London area have received the recent increase in the national minimum wage. [82369]

Alan Johnson: Using the data on low pay collected by the Office for National Statistics in spring 2002, the DTI estimates that around 40,000 people in the London area stood to benefit from the October 2002 increase in the national minimum wage.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost per kilowatt hour is of electricity generated by *(a)* existing coal fired stations, *(b)* existing gas stations, *(c)* new gas stations, *(d)* AGR, *(e)* Magnox, *(f)* onshore wind and *(g)* offshore wind. [82901]

Mr. Wilson: The costs of generating electricity are a commercial matter for generators.

Costs can be estimated on a variety of bases and will vary from plant to plant. For example, figures can include all cost items, including depreciation and return on capital, or can refer only to the additional costs associated with continued operation. The costs of plant using fossil fuel will vary as fuel prices change.

Estimate of the cost of generating electricity from new and existing coal- and gas-fired power stations were published in chapter 5 of the 1998 White Paper, "Conclusions of the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation" (http://www .dti.gov.uk/energy/publications/whitepapers/review sources/chpt05.pdf).

Projections of future generation costs using different technologies (including renewables) are available in:

(i) chapter 6 of the Performance and Innovation Unit's "Energy Review" (http://www.piu.gov.uk/2002/energy/report/9.html), which was published in February 2002; and

(ii) chapter 6 of the Inter-departmental Analysts' Group report, "Long-Term Reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the UK" (http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/greenhousegas/cost.pdf), which was published in February 2002.

Information on the cost of British Energy's UK nuclear stations (which include one Pressurised Water Reactor as well as the AGRs) can be found in the company's report and accounts: (http://www.british-energy.com/investors/reports/index.html).

Information on electricity generation and the cost of operating the Magnox stations is contained in the report and accounts of Magnox Electric plc. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in Libraries of the House.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Government financial support has been given to the renewable energy sector in each year since 1990, broken down by *(a)* research grants, *(b)* renewables obligation, *(c)* non-fossil fuel levy and *(d)* other sources. [82795]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* Financial support to the renewable energy sector through research grants and other sources and through the non-fossil fuel levy for each year since 1990 is set out in the table.

The renewables obligation, which took effect from 1 April 2002, does not involve direct Government funding as it is a market-led measure. In this, the first year of the obligation, suppliers are expected to provide 3 per cent. of the electricity supplies from eligible renewable resources. They may meet their obligation through providing a proportion of their supplies from renewables, through buying renewable obligation certificates (ROCs) in the market or through paying the buy-out fee.

Electricity from renewable sources now also benefits from exemption from the climate change levy (which was introduced in April 2001). In addition, the Government have made provision of £250 million over three years for capital grants for renewable energy.

£ million

	Renewable energy funding[1]	*Fossil fuel levy*
1990–91	15.2	6.1
1991–92	18.0	11.7
1992–93	18.7	28.9
1993–94	17.9	68.1
1994–95	12.1	96.4
1995–96	12.3	94.5[2]
1996–97	9.3	111.9[3]
1997–98	6.8	120.7
1998–99	5.9	120.3[4]
1999–2000	7.9	49.6[5]
2000–01	9.7	62.0
2001–02	13.6	85.5

[1] This column sets out payments from the DTI's new and renewable energy R&D programme. In addition, some relevant projects will have been funded by research councils.

[2] The reduction in levy funding compared to the previous year was primarily due to a fall in generated output for hydro (46 per cent. reduction) and wind (20 per cent. reduction) caused by mild weather and drought conditions during 1995–96.

[3] Figures from 1996–97 on include payments from the fossil fuel levy (Scotland) which commenced in that year.

[4] The reduction was due to the effect of termination of NFFO 1 and 2 contracts on 31 December 1998.

[5] The significant reduction was due to the full-year impact of the termination of NFFO 1 and 2 contracts.

Diamonds

Dr. Jenny Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with *(a)* the World Diamond Council and *(b)* representatives from the UK jewellers industries regarding promoting the Kimberley Process. [83773]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

In November 2001, my right hon. Frend the then Minister for Europe (Mr Peter Hain) met with Gary Ralfe, Managing Director of the De Beers Group, part of the World Diamond Council, to discuss the Kimberley Process.

FCO officials have had regular contact with the World Diamond Council for the past two years and are in close touch with the British Jewellers Association.

In preparation for implementation of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme in January 2003, further discussions with the UK diamond industry, including the Jewellers Association, are due to take place at the FCO on 6 December.

Manufacturing

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the level of *(a)* manufacturing output and *(b)* employment in the manufacturing sector in each of the last five years were in each region of the UK; [83922]

(2) if she will make a statement on changes in the size of the manufacturing sector in the UK in the last five years; [83919]

(3) what the level of *(a)* manufacturing output and *(b)* employment in the manufacturing sector in the North West were for each of the last five years. [83921]

Alan Johnson: The available information is given in the following tables.

Table: Manufacturing Gross Value Added[1] by English regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland 1995–99 (million)

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
United Kingdom[2]	139,789	146,079	152,299	153,408	152,402
North East	6,919	7,330	7,348	7,344	6,654
North West	16,407	16,919	17,442	17,828	17,577
Yorkshire and the Humber	13,162	13,953	14,590	13,934	13,567
East Midlands	10,320	11,036	11,790	11,862	11,671
West Midlands	22,501	22,674	24,565	23,877	23,415
East	11,452	12,168	12,880	12,910	12,584
South East	16,004	16,665	17,800	18,642	19,229
London	12,764	13,650	13,781	14,382	14,567
South West	8,965	9,359	9,806	9,894	10,482
Wales	8,831	9,311	9,200	9,323	8,832
Scotland	9,732	10,024	10,002	10,283	10,555
Northern Ireland	2,730	2,990	3,102	3,124	3,264

Notes:
[1] Estimates of regional gross value added in this table are on a residence basis, where the income of commuters is allocated to where they live, rather than their place of work.
[2] Excluding 'Extra-Regio'which consists of gross value added which cannot be assigned to regions.
Source:
Office for National Statistics 'regional gross value added' 21 November 2002.

Table: Employee jobs in manufacturing by English Regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland 1997—2001 (December)

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
United Kingdom	4,176,000	4,147,000	4,019,000	3,904,000	3,745,000
North East	191,000	187,000	173,000	176,000	169,000
North West	532,000	530,000	514,000	499,000	474,000
Yorkshire and the Humber	425,000	410,000	394,000	384,000	368,000
East Midlands	424,000	423,000	399,000	383,000	365,000
West Midlands	561,000	553,000	533,000	495,000	478,000
East	356,000	353,000	328,000	334,000	327,000
South East	440,000	442,000	444,000	437,000	427,000
London	285,000	287,000	296,000	287,000	277,000
South West	318,000	321,000	314,000	302,000	291,000
Wales	215,000	208,000	207,000	201,000	193,000
Scotland	320,000	327,000	315,000	302,000	280,000
Northern Ireland	108,000	107,000	101,000	104,000	99,000

Source:
1997–2000 DTI analyses of employment statistics from Annual Business Inquiry (GB) and Short Term Employment Survey (Northern Ireland) taken from NOMIS (ONS' labour market database). 2001 from 'Labour Market Trends' (ONS), Table B16, November 2002.

Post Office

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Post Office has to close *(a)* main post offices and *(b)* sub post offices in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham; and if she will make a statement. [84040]

Mr. Timms: The programme to restructure the urban post office network has only just started and is being taken forward in consultation with individual sub-postmasters, the community, Members of Parliament, other local stakeholders and Postwatch in accordance with the Code of Practice. There is no pre-determined closure list. Under the code, Post Office Ltd. is required to consult Postwatch and other interested parties on its specific proposals for change.

The objective of the urban network restructuring programme is to ensure that ad hoc closures which would leave gaps in the network are prevented. It is envisaged that the restructured urban network will provide modernised and improved facilities which meet customers' needs and expectations and are in the right location for the local community.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received from the Post Office regarding the relocation of the main Elgin Post Office in the

constituency of Moray; if she will seek clarification on the future location of this post office; and if she will make a statement. [84003]

Mr. Timms: The Department has received no representations about the relocation of the main Elgin Post Office. Decisions on the location or relocation of individual post offices are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. Any proposal to relocate a post office is subject to consultation with the local community under the Code of Practice agreed between Post Office Ltd. and Postwatch.

Steel Production

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the required *(a)* capacity and *(b)* capability of steel production in the UK is in order to meet UK manufacturing needs. [83920]

Alan Johnson: The UK steel industry makes a wide, and increasingly sophisticated, range of products to meet the needs of the manufacturing industry in the home market and overseas. In 2001, UK production of primary steel products was 13.5 million tonnes, while capacity stood at 18.9 million tonnes at the end of that year. In the same year, UK demand for primary steel products was 13.7 million tonnes.

Multinational Companies

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to take steps as recommended by paragraphs 177 and 178 of the UN Expert Panel report to ensure compliance by UK-based companies and individuals with OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises. [81317]

Ms Hewitt: The proposal that countries, which are signatories to the OECD Guidelines, ensure their companies adhere to and act on the Guidelines, is one of a wide range of recommendations made by the UN Expert Panel report being considered by the Government. In consultations at the UN on 13 November 2002, a number of states asked for more information to be made available to substantiate the report's allegations. The UK has also asked the UN directly for more information, but has not yet received a response.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of whether UK-based companies have breached OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises in respect of activities in the DRC, as set out in the UN Expert Panel report. [81318]

Ms Hewitt: The claim that a number of UK companies are in breach of the OECD Guidelines in respect of their activities in the DRC is one of a number of violations alleged by the UN Expert Panel report, which is being considered by the Government. In consultations at the UN on 13 November 2002, a number of states asked for more information to be made available to substantiate the report's allegations. The UK has also asked the UN directly for more information, but has not yet received a response.

TRANSPORT

Public Highways

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list those categories of public bodies which can apply for the permanent closure of areas of the public highway to prevent use by motorised vehicles; [82465]

(2) in what circumstances individuals or organisations, other than public bodies, may apply for the permanent closure of areas of the public highway to prevent use by motorised vehicles; and in what circumstances this would be allowed. [82464]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Use of a public highway by vehicles may be prohibited or restricted by means of traffic regulation orders (TRO) made under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, while the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Highways Act 1980 include provisions for stopping up highways completely.

Responsibility for making TROs rests with the local traffic authority. It is open to anyone to make representations about the need to control vehicular traffic, but it is for the traffic authority concerned to decide whether the making of a TRO is appropriate. For local roads the making of a TRO is subject to the procedures set out in The Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 SI 1996/2489 and for trunk roads The Secretary of State's Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1990 SI 1990/1656. These regulations require prior notice of the proposed making of an order and allow for objections to be made which the traffic authority must consider in deciding whether to make the order.

Section 247 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides for the stopping up or diversion of highways in connection with development by means of an order made by the Secretary of State on the application of a developer who has been granted planning permission or by a government department. A section 247 order removes all highway rights. Applications must be made to the relevant Government Office. Section 249 of the Act enables the extinguishment of the right to use vehicles on a highway where a local planning authority has resolved to adopt such a proposal in the interest of improving the amenity of part of their area. Section 252 of the Act sets out the procedure for making orders under sections 247 and 249. Proposed orders must be advertised to allow for objections to be made and a public inquiry to be held if necessary.

Under the provisions of section 116 of the Highways Act 1980 a magistrates court may make an order authorising the stopping up or diversion of a public highway on the grounds that it is unnecessary or can be diverted so as to make it nearer or more commodious to the public. Such an order removes all highway rights. An application for an order may be made by the highway authority or that authority acting on behalf of another person where they are willing to grant a request by that person to stop up or divert a highway. The highway authority must give notice of an application for an

order. Persons aggrieved by the proposal to stop up or divert a highway under section 116 have a right to be heard by the court.

A180

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when resurfacing of the A180 with low noise materials will commence. [82919]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Shona McIsaacs dated 28 November 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when resurfacing of the A180 with low noise materials will commence.

The criteria for deciding the priority for applying quieter surfacing to concrete roads were announced in October 2001. These criteria are:

that wherever possible the application of quieter surfaces will fit in with normal maintenance needs;

that priority will be given to those sites where treatment would benefit the greatest number of people;

that the works will be carried out in such a way as to minimise disruption to general public and users of the network;

that priority will be given to roads, opened since June 1998, where actual noise levels turned out significantly higher than predicted at the time of Public Inquiry.

Resurfacing of two concrete sections of the A180, between Harborough and Stallingborough and between Great Coates and Pyewipe, is due to be undertaken by 2001 under the Ten Year Plan. Originally, both schemes were included in the list of roads to be resurfaced by 2005, based on an assessment that maintenance would need to be carried out by that date. However, current indications are that maintenance work will not be needed between Great Coates and Pyewipe before 2005 and it is probable that this work will be undertaken later.

I am afraid that it is not possible to provide a better idea of timing until the review of the maintenance programme is complete following the 2002 spending settlement. We will write to you again once the results of that review are known.

If you require any further information, please contact Mick Spink, the Highways Agency's Area Manager for the a180. He can be contacted on 1003 283 5397 or e-mail mick.spink@highways.gsi.gov.uk. Or for further information on resurfacing of concrete roads, visit our website at www.highways.gov.uk and use our search facility to find 'concrete roads'.

A316, Twickenham

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many speeding tickets have been *(a)* issued and *(b)* withdrawn from each of the speed cameras on the A316 within the constituency of Twickenham; and if he will make a statement. [83659]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not collected centrally.

A428, Bedfordshire

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the repair bill for the cracked whisper road surface of the A428 in Bedfordshire which was laid when owned by the Highways Agency will be met by Central Government. [83142]

Mr. Jamieson: The A428 in Bedfordshire was detrunked on 1 September 2001. At that time no specific road maintenance work (other than routine) had been identified by the Highways Agency in their forward programme and this was agreed with Bedfordshire County Council.

Funds have been provided for minor maintenance and routine works for the remainder of 2001–02 and for routine works in 2002–03. There have been no requests from Bedfordshire County Council for additional funding. Any maintenance or improvement works that have been identified by the Council since they became the Highway Authority for the A428 should be included in their annual Local Transport Plan updates.

Turvey High Street (Pedestrian Crossing)

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the repair bill for the eroded high friction dressing laid for the Highways Agency at the Turvey High Street pedestrian crossing in Bedfordshire will be met by Central Government. [83141]

Mr. Jamieson: The A428 in Bedfordshire was detrunked on 1 September 2001. At that time no specific road maintenance work (other than routine) had been identified by the Highways Agency in their forward programme and this was agreed with Bedfordshire County Council. Funds have been provided for minor maintenance and routine works for the remainder of 2001/02 and for routine works in 2002/03. There have been no requests from Bedfordshire County Council for additional funding. Any maintenance or improvement works that have been identified by the Council since they became the Highway Authority for the A428 should be included in their annual Local Transport Plan updates.

Airport (Hullavington)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he wrote to local authorities in Wiltshire formally as part of the consultation exercise, inviting them to submit representations in respect of the proposal to locate an airport at Hullavington; and if he will list the authorities concerned; [84073]

(2) if he will rank in order of closeness by proximity of each district local authority area within a 20 mile radius of the prospective airport at Hullavington; [84072]

(3) what reason he has not held public *(a)* meetings and *(b)* exhibitions in North Wiltshire as part of the public consultation on locating an airport at Hullavington; [84071]

(4) in which local authority areas his Department has initiated *(a)* public meetings, and *(b)* exhibitions as part of the public consultation in respect of locating an airport at Hullavington. [84070]

Mr. Jamieson: As I explained to the hon. Member in my answer of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 75W, the consultation on 'The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East', does not include any option for airport development at Hullavington.

Airport Capacity

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which RDAs have contributed to investment in airport terminal capacity; and how much was invested at each airport. [82546]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held centrally. Investment decisions are a matter for individual RDAs. We understand that some RDAs at least are supportive of airports' plans to expand terminal capacity and would consider investing in such projects, subject to EC state aid rules.

Cardiff and Bristol Airports

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action will be taken to open up routes to *(a)* Cardiff and *(b)* Bristol airports. [83387]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government encourages the use of regional airports. Community airlines are free to fly where they wish within the European Economic Area (EEA) under the "third package" of aviation liberalisation. In addition, since 1997 we have pursued a policy of offering foreign airlines from outside the EEA unrestricted frequencies to regional points in the UK on a reciprocal basis. It remains a commercial decision for airlines as to the services and frequencies that they offer.

Channel Tunnel Links

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received for direct links to the Channel Tunnel from the north-west for *(a)* passenger trains and *(b)* freight trains. [84058]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department receives representations from time to time about the development of passenger rail links to the Channel Tunnel. We are also considering proposals by Central Railway to construct and operate a dedicated freight link between Liverpool and northern France. We have received the Strategic Rail Authority's advice on this proposal and will respond to Central Railway in due course.

Cycling Helmets

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has recently assessed the change in the rates of injury from accidents for children cycling as a result of wearing helmets. [83897]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not available centrally. However, the Bicycle Helmet Initiative Trust has been running a cycle helmet promotion scheme in Reading since 1992. During that time, cycle helmet use by children has trebled and there has been a 45 per cent. reduction in the number of hospital treated head injuries. A recent study commissioned by the Department on the effectiveness of cycle helmets found that overall, evidence suggests that cycle helmets are effective at reducing the severity of head, brain and upper facial injuries for all ages, especially children. This report will be published shortly.

Jet Skis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatalities there have been in UK waters in each of the last two years involving jet skis. [83318]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* HM Coastguard incident reports record a total of 494 incidents involving Personal Watercraft between January 2000 and 22 November 2002 around the UK coastline. One fatality was recorded. A breakdown by year is provided in the following table.

Year	*Number of incidents*	*Number of fatalities*
2000	150	0
2001	179	0
2002[1]	165	1

[1] To 22 November 2002

Oil Tankers

Mr. Derek Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on banning single hull ships in EU waters. [82531]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The UK consistently supported measures to accelerate the withdrawal of single hull tankers which were introduced following the loss of the tanker ERIKA in December 1999. Jointly, with Denmark and the Netherlands, we took the lead in securing mandatory change in the International Maritime Organization's (MO) MARPOL Convention on an international timetable. The UK preferred a global programme to a regional arrangement, since coastlines outside the EU are equally deserving of protection, and also supported the consequential EU Regulation EC 417/2002, which imposed the IMO text in EU member states.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will propose international initiatives to bring forward the end of the use of large single-hulled oil tankers; [83027]

(2) if he will bring forward the date when single-hulled large oil tankers are to be banned from UK waters; and if he will make a statement. [83026]

Mr. Jamieson: The recent amendment to the MARPOL Convention agreed in the International Maritime Organization, and implemented within the EU by Regulation No. 417/2002, requires that single-hull tankers having no additional protection, such as the PRESTIGE, must be phased out in order of age between 2003 and 2007. Single-hull tankers fitted with partial protection must be phased out in order of age between 2003 and 2015. It will be necessary for each category of single-hull tanker to satisfy an additional requirement for a rigorous condition assessment survey to be able to operate after 2005 and 2010 respectively. Investment in the newer double-hull tankers depends on the stability offered by this timetable.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which employees of *(a)* his Department, *(b)*

the Strategic Rail Authority and *(c)* the Civil Aviation Authority are paid performance-related pay; and if he will make a statement on the nature and success of such schemes. [81740]

Mr. Spellar: All members of staff in my Department are eligible for performance pay which forms an integral part of my Department's pay systems. In addition, staff below the senior civil service may also receive special performance bonus awards to reward exceptional performance over a limited period in particularly demanding tasks or situations. Annual awards are subject to individual assessment against the level of achievement of pre-determined performance targets. Staff who are on fixed-term contracts are eligible to performance-related bonuses subject to the terms of their contract.

All Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) employees who are on standard SRA terms and conditions are eligible for performance-related pay.

All employees of the Civil Aviation Authority have access to performance related bonuses, but this is an internal matter for the CAA.

Rail Franchises

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which rail franchises are operated as a management contract; when each of these contracts began; why each was let as this type of contract in the first instance; and what changes to these franchises are planned. [81730]

Mr. Jamieson: The passenger rail franchises currently being operated as management contracts are set out in the table.

Franchise	*Start of management contract*	*Current franchise expiry date*
Anglia	March 2002	April 2004
Arriva Trains Merseyside	February 2001	February 2003
Arriva Trains Northern	February 2001	February 2003
First North Western	March 2001	April 2004
Wales and Borders	October 2001	April 2004
Wessex	October 2001	April 2004

None of these franchises was initially let as a management contract. Current arrangements have been negotiated by the SRA as interim measures to ensure the continued viability of services or to facilitate changes to the franchise map.

Road Closures (Greater London)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much trunk road and motorway lane mileage has been closed to cars in the Greater London area in the past 12 months. [82657]

Mr. Spellar: Since re-classification to the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN), there are no trunk roads in the Greater London area. There have been a total of 87 miles of motorway lanes, for which the Highways Agency is responsible, temporarily closed to cars in the past 12 months and no permanent closures. These closures included overnight routine maintenance work, off-peak daytime works and emergency closures to deal with incidents and carriageway/safety barrier repairs.

Roadworks

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trunk road excavations there have been in each constituency in each year since 1997; and what the cost was. [83184]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Mathews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Mathews to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 28 November 2002:

I have been asked by David Jamieson to reply to your recent parliamentary question about, how many trunk road excavations there have been in each constituency in each year since 1997, and what the cost was.

Unfortunately, I cannot provide this information. The Highways Agency does not currently collect this data and it could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost. However should you be seeking specific information we may be able to provide it.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on imposing time limits on companies engaged in construction work on existing trunk roads. [83185]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency uses a variety of different forms of contract to carry out maintenance and improvement construction work on the trunk road network in England. They all incorporate a time limit to undertake the work and have contractual mechanisms to help achieve compliance with the contract duration. In addition, the Highways Agency monitors the performance of its suppliers in this respect and takes this into account in determining future opportunities.

Ticketing

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been conducted by or for his Department on profiling users of the traveline *(a)* phone and *(b)* website services. [83524]

Mr. Jamieson: No research is currently available regarding the profiles of traveline users for either the telephone or for the website. However, the Department for Transport is currently funding a research project on behalf of the traveline partners that is partly looking at existing traveline telephone customers to find out who they are, why they are calling, what information they are requesting and what they are supplied with. The results will be available in April 2003.

The research will not look at profiles of those using the website.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other bodies on *(i)* branding and (ii) advertising the traveline (A) brand, (B) phone service and (C) website in each year since 1999; and if he will make a statement. [83525]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport spent £36,319 on traveline branding in 2000–01. It spent £1.025 million on an advertising campaign for the traveline phone service in 2001–02.

Advertising by traveline partners has included adding the traveline logo to paper timetables, on bus stop posters, to publications for example in Yellow Pages and on the backs of bus tickets. All traveline partners have been asked to include traveline branding in their publications and this is now widespread among bus operators and local authorities.

The Department has spent no monies on branding the website but has followed the traveline logo branding guidelines in devising the design of the web page. The Department has not advertised the traveline web address but this is being considered in future promotions.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many tickets have been sold through the traveline service in each year that it has been in operation *(a)* by telephone and *(b)* via the internet, broken down by mode of travel; and what the total value was of tickets sold in each case. [83575]

Mr. Jamieson: Traveline does not sell tickets for any mode of transport by either telephone or via the internet.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* web page impressions and *(b)* unique website visitors have been registered by the Traveline website in each year that it has been in operation. [83576]

Mr. Jamieson: The traveline website is not directly managed by the Department for Transport, but by the relevant traveline partners who provide information about usage of the site to the Department.

The website was launched in 2001 with links initially to local journey planners, however, several new regional journey planners have recently been launched and these are now linked to the traveline portal site.

As the traveline site is a portal or gateway to other websites, we are not aware of the number of web pages, however traveline partners are estimating the number of individual user sessions that take place each week. This has grown steadily over the year from nothing to about 3,000 individual user inquiry sessions per week. Continued growth in usage is expected over the coming months as further regional traveline journey planners are launched and linked to the portal, and as advertising of the traveline web address starts to appear.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the upgrade of the West Coast main line. [84056]

Mr. Jamieson: A draft strategy for upgrading the West Coast Main Line was published by the Strategic Rail Authority on 9 October 2002. Comments have been invited by 16 December 2002.

TREASURY

Overseas Aid

Mr. Walter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the UK Overseas Aid Development budget to reach the UN target level of 0.7 per cent. of gross national income. [83401]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 7 November, *Official Report*, column 738W.

Any timetable beyond 2005–06 for reaching the UN 0.7 per cent. target would properly be a matter for future parliaments. For this reason we believe that it is more important to look at what has actually been achieved and what is firmly budgeted for, and it is this record—rather than any aspirational timetable—that should be seen as the critical test of our commitment.

Capital Gains

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what review he is undertaking of the capital gains tax consequences of different dividend reinvestment practices in unit trusts and OEICS. [83425]

Ruth Kelly: The taxation of dividend reinvestment in United Kingdom authorised unit trusts and open-ended investment companies is long established and well understood. Tax is payable on the distribution in the same way that it would be, were the dividend actually paid out. This means that for individuals, because of the tax credit rules, only higher-rate taxpayers have any additional tax to pay.

There is no capital gains tax, or corporation tax on chargeable gains, payable until investors dispose of their units or shares. And then investors can normally treat the reinvested dividends as part of their allowable expenditure in calculating the capital gains.

The Chancellor has asked the Inland Revenue to review the taxation of investment in similar overseas collective investment schemes. He emphasised in the Pre Budget Report that the Government are committed to continuing constructive dialogue with fund managers and other stakeholders on the implementation of a new regime. In taking that work forward, the Government will listen carefully to all views. A key objective is to ensure that the competitiveness of the UK fund management industry is preserved without distorting the market for savings and investment products as a whole.

Census Data

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the detailed census data and analysis will be available. [83484]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Battle, dated 28 November 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking when the detailed census data and analysis will be publicly available. (83484)

The first detailed results—the Key Statistics for Local Authorities—are planned to be released in a report to Parliament on 13 February 2003. The report will present a selection of summary statistics covering the whole range of census topics. The information will also be available from the ONS website.

Further output, presenting more detailed results including those for smaller areas will follow in a series of reports and other products over a subsequent period of 32 weeks. Reports to Parliament for England and Wales will give results for local authorities, health authorities, Parliamentary Constituencies, urban and rural areas, and regions, with additional bi-lingual reports for Wales. These will present results in a succinct printed form, also available and supplemented by more detailed results on CD ROMs included with some printed volumes, with software for viewing and manipulation. Electronic versions will also be placed on the ONS Website—www.statistics.gov.uk and will accessible to all without charge.

Results for small areas which will comprise the bulk of output, will be in the form of standard local statistics issued as an integrated set of statistics, geography and metadata free at the point of use, and again via the ONS website and other means.

Child Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding changes that may be necessary to the child tax credit claim form. [83951]

Dawn Primarolo: The new tax credits claim form has been developed in consultation with a wide range of organisations and has been through extensive usability testing. The Inland Revenue continue to consult widely on a range of tax credits issues, including information materials.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which body will be responsible for dealing with *(a)* working tax credit and *(b)* child tax credit appeals. [83952]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax credits form part of the tax system and appeals will therefore be heard in the same way as tax appeals. However, tax credit claimants form a new client group for the tax appeals system. Consequently, appeals by claimants will continue to be heard by the Appeals Service for a transitional period, while the necessary changes are made to allow them to be dealt with effectively under the tax appeals system.

Customs and Excise Seizures

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many seizures were made of *(a)* species and *(b)* other material listed under the CITES regime the last year for which figures are available; how many prosecutions were pursued; and what the outcomes were of those prosecutions. [80870]

John Healey *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* In the year 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 Customs made 337 seizures of imports or exports subject to EU legislation on endangered species. The goods seized were:

Live Animals—6,345

Plants—8,734

Parts or derivatives—1,927,622

Items recorded by weight—1,042,872 grams

In the same period Customs prosecuted six persons for endangered species related offences of which five were convicted.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements are in place to ensure that cars seized by Customs and Excise have documentation to enable the return of such cars to their owners. [83447]

John Healey: Vehicles used to smuggle goods into the UK or used to transport such goods within the UK are liable to seizure. In certain circumstances Customs will offer to restore the vehicle for a fee. Normally such a restoration offer is made on-the-spot immediately after seizure and vehicle registration documents are not transferred. Vehicles seized that have been used in large scale or repeated smuggling attempts are not normally offered for restoration. Customs always seek to notify the owner of a seized vehicle of that seizure where they are not present at the time of seizure.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much compensation has been paid to owners of cars seized by Customs and Excise when the decision has been overturned on appeal. [83448]

John Healey: Customs have had the powers to seize means of transport used in smuggling attempts since the 19th century. Customs do not hold central records on the amount of compensation paid to owners of cars seized by Customs when the decision has been overturned on appeal.

In the last two years 1,586 seizure cases have been appealed to magistrates courts of which less than 1 per cent. were overturned.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cars seized by Customs and Excise in the last year were disposed of before an appeal to a tribunal. [83449]

John Healey: Customs' policy is not to dispose of seized vehicles until any appeal against seizure to a magistrates court has been heard. The time limits for such an appeal are specified in law. Once the time period for such an appeal has elapsed or the magistrates have rejected the appeal, it is Customs' policy to dispose of the vehicle as efficiently as possible.

An appeal to a tribunal may be made when Customs decide not to offer restoration. There is no time limit for restoration requests to be made and tribunals often take place many months or even years after the seizure. In the past two financial years,75 per cent. of vehicle seizures have not been appealed. Where a request has been made for restoration of the vehicle, Customs' decision has been upheld in 97 per cent. of the cases. Customs do not hold central records of the number of seized cars that were disposed of before an appeal to a tribunal.

Debt Relief

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of funding of the hold in trust policy for those countries yet to secure debt relief due to civil wars. [83193]

John Healey: The latest data show that the UK has been holding in trust a total of 1,057,200 for six countries still to secure debt relief because of civil wars,

external conflict or the absence of a poverty reduction programme. We continue to use international and bilateral meetings to urge other creditors to follow our lead on this policy.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he received the new pay and grading system for the Insolvency Service Submission; and when he will make an announcement. [83336]

Mr. Boateng: The Insolvency Service have been discussing the details of their proposals with us for some time. We would hope to be able to conclude the process shortly.

Landfill Tax (Moray)

Angus Robertson: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce a temporary suspension of the landfill tax for the flood victims of Moray. [83589]

John Healey: The Government has no plans at present to introduce a temporary suspension of landfill tax.

Mortgages

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* building societies, *(b)* banks and *(c)* other banking institutions offer mortgages without checking independently the salary of applicants for mortgages; and if he will make a statement. [83906]

Ruth Kelly: Information concerning lending decisions by mortgage lenders is not available to the Government, as these are purely commercial decisions. However, the Financial Services Authority (FSA) will be regulating mortgage business with effect from October 2004. As part of this process, the FSA has been consulting on rules in respect of responsible lending. In future, lenders will need to be able to show that account is taken of the consumer's ability to pay before entering into a mortgage contract.

Overseas Development Assistance

Mr. Caton: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he estimates that the UK will achieve the UN target for overseas development assistance as a proportion of national income by 2015; [83363]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of when the UK will reach the UN target for overseas development assistance as a proportion of the gross national income. [83365]

John Healey: The Government remains fully committed to reaching the UN 0.7 per cent. ODA7GNI target. In the 2002 Spending Review the Government set out its spending plans for the next three years up to 2005–06 and has made substantial increases to the aid budget. The UK's level of overseas development assistance will reach 0.33 per cent. of GNI by 2003–04 and 0.40 per cent. by 2005–06, up from 0.26 per cent. in 1997. This will place us well above the current G7 country average of 0.19 per cent. and the current OECD average of 0.22 per cent.

Any timetable beyond 2005–06 for reaching the UN target would properly be a matter for future parliaments. For this reason we believe that it is important to look at what has actually been achieved and what is firmly budgeted for—rather than any aspirational timetable—as the critical test of our commitment.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Credit

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the percentage of pensioners in the Kettering constituency who will benefit from the pension credit to be introduced in October 2003. [80419]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of pension credit entitlement are not available at constituency level due to the insufficient sample cases in the survey data used.

As at May 2002, there were 2,700 MIG recipients in the Kettering constituency.

Carers Benefit

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when new carers over the age of 65 will be eligible to apply for Carers Benefit. [80133]

Maria Eagle: As part of the benefit changes which are providing some £500 million over three years in extra help for carers, the upper age limit on claims for Invalid Care Allowance was abolished on 28 October 2002. This change means that new carers aged 65 and over can now claim the benefit. The overlapping benefit rules mean that only those with no, or with a low rate of State Pension, are likely to receive the benefit. However, carers with underlying entitlement to Invalid Care Allowance can gain access to the carer premium in income-related benefits such as the Minimum Income Guarantee, resulting in a significantly higher award of benefit. Invalid Care Allowance is to be renamed "Carer's Allowance" in April 2003.

Child Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the Department has drafted a letter for Child Benefit claimants regarding the legal obligation to ensure their children attend school; and if he will make a statement. [83950]

Malcolm Wicks: The letter to parents notifying them of their rate of Child Benefit from April 2003 will be accompanied in England by a leaflet from the Department for Education and Skills on education matters. The leaflet includes a message on parents' responsibilities in ensuring that their children attend school. The letters will be issued from early December. A copy of the leaflet will be placed in the Library.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of claims for Disability Living Allowance have been *(a)* refused and *(b)* granted after a review or appeal since April 2001. [80131]

Maria Eagle: The exact information requested is unavailable. However we do hold some relevant information and this is shown in the tables.

Number of applicants for Disability Living Allowance rejected on first application over the past two financial years in Great Britain

Number of DLA applicants rejected on first application	
2000–01	206,145

Number of applicants for Disability Living Allowance rejected on first application over the past two financial years in Great Britain

Number of DLA applicants rejected on first application	
2001–02	192,315

Notes:
1. Information is available only at a national level.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.

Source:
ASD Information Centre, data taken from 100 per cent. extract of monthly management information system.

Number of applicants for Disability Living Allowance that were granted on appeal and granted on review in Great Britain May 2001-May 2002

		of which:		
Quarter ending	*All claims where DLA was granted*	*Claims granted on first application*	*Claims granted on appeal*	*Claims granted on review*
May 2001	66,300	53,700	9,100	3,500
August 2001	63,800	53,100	7,400	3,300
November 2001	62,900	51,500	7,700	3,600
February 2002	59,700	49,400	6,300	4,000
May 2002	66,400	56,100	7,200	3,100

Note:
Figures are in thousands and rounded to the nearest hundred. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Source:
5 per cent. data taken from the AA/DLA computer system from quarter ending 31 May 2001 to quarter ending 31 May 2002.

The number of Disability Living Allowance appeals cleared at hearing, with details about those found in favour of the appellant at hearing, decided against the appellant and decision upheld at hearing with percentages from March 2001 to May 2002

Quarter ending	*Cleared*	*Found in favour*	*Percentage found in favour*	*Decided against*	*Percentage decided against*	*Decision upheld*	*Percentage decision upheld*
May 2001	22,800	11,940	52.4	15	0.1	10,655	46.7
August 2001	20,055	10,610	52.9	25	0.1	9,205	45.9
November 2001	19,950	10,565	53.0	50	0.3	9,135	45.8
February 2002	17,300	9,425	54.5	10	0.1	7,695	44.5
May 2002	19,865	10,710	53.9	15	0.1	8,940	45.0

Notes:
1. All figures are subject to change as more up to date data become available.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
3. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
4. Discrepancies between cleared and breakdown due to outcomes such as withdrawn or misconceived appeals.

Source:
100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System.

Disability Premium

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families on Income Support have more than one child which satisfies the criteria for entitlement to the disability premium. [83949]

Malcolm Wicks: In Great Britain, as at August 2002, there were 7,600 Income Support claimants with more than one child receiving either the Disabled Child Premium or both the Disabled Child Premium and Enhanced Disabled Child Premium.

Source:
Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, August 2002.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received regarding changes that may be necessary to the minimum income guarantee claim form. [83953]

Mr. McCartney: Extensive research and consultation were undertaken when developing the new, shorter, minimum income guarantee form (MIG1) however it is, as are all of the Department's forms and leaflets, kept under review.

We have received a request from Carers UK that the claim form be further amended to reflect that, since 28 October 2002, older carers have been able to claim invalid care allowance. The April 2003 re-print of the MIG1 will reflect this point, in the meantime staff handling MIG claims have been alerted to this change.

Post Office Card Account

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will announce the alternative arrangements for those people who will not be able to use the PIN number associated with a post office card account. [83208]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Customers who cannot or do not want to use a card and PIN may want to consider an account with a cheque

book or pass book. Customers will be supplied with information which clearly sets out their account options (including the key features of each type of account) and enables them to decide which account best meets their needs and circumstances.

The alternative arrangements are not needed until order books and giros cease in 2005 and we expect them to be in place in autumn 2004. Work is currently under way to achieve this. We will ensure that the method introduced will be secure, efficient and available from outlets including post offices.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what criteria are used to decide where the pilot scheme for the Post Office Card Account was to be held. [83650]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

Implementation of the Card Account, including any piloting arrangements, is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. within the terms of their contract with the spending departments.

I have therefore asked the Chief Executive of Post Office Ltd. to write direct to the hon. Member.

Voluntary Sector

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the Government plans to reform the rules on availability for work to make it easier for people out of paid employment to take voluntary work; and if he will make a statement. [80407]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have laid before Parliament draft regulations which will amend the rules on availability for work for jobseeker's allowance recipients. Subject to parliamentary approval, these regulations will extend from 48 hours to one week the period of notice before jobseekers who engage in voluntary work must be available to start employment. In order to ensure that they do not miss out on job opportunities, jobseekers who undertake voluntary work will still be required to be available for an interview at 48 hours' notice.

This relaxation in the rules should make it easier for people out of paid employment to make a greater commitment to volunteering by allowing them to give a week's notice before having to start a job. It should also make it more worthwhile for voluntary organisations to take on unemployed volunteers and offer them development and training opportunities.

We propose to introduce the changes nationally for a trial period of a year so that an evaluation can take place.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 2 December 2002

DEFENCE

Fire Training

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel were undergoing training on red fire engines; and how many fire engines were being used for such training before the outbreak of the firefighters' strike. [84223]

Mr. Ingram: The core emergency fire cover provided by the armed forces continues to be based around the fleet of Green Goddesses, and training was initially focused on them. Subsequent to the start of the strike, some 80 red fire engines have since been made available and military personnel have completed training on them.

Gibraltar

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what extra resources have been deployed in the defence of Gibraltar this year. [84382]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom retains a sizeable defence presence on Gibraltar. No significant extra resources have been deployed in the defence of Gibraltar this year.

Afghanistan

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Al Qaeda terrorists he estimates were *(a)* killed and *(b)* captured by British forces deployed in Task Force JACANA in Afghanistan. [84527]

Mr. Hoon: None.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the capabilities of the two new aircraft carriers will be; how many and what types of aircraft and helicopters will be on board; and if he will make a statement. [83224]

Dr. Moonie: The two new carriers (CVF) will have the capability to deploy offensive air power in support of the full spectrum of future operations.

The numbers and types of aircraft aboard CVF will depend upon the operational circumstances at the time. However, the CVF will have the capacity to operate a wide range of aircraft, including maritime airborne surveillance and control (MASC) platforms and helicopters in a variety of roles (for example, attack, surveillance, anti-submarine warfare and support.) As announced on 30 September 2002, the short take off and vertical landing (STOVL) variant of the F35 joint strike fighter (JSF) has been selected to meet the joint combat aircraft (JCA) role, operating either from the carriers or from land. Although CVF will, at the outset, operate the STOVL F35, it highly desirable that they could be modified to fly a further generation of aircraft, even beyond the F35, whether or not these too are STOVL. That is why we have decided they will be built to an innovative, adaptable plan.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what defence systems the new aircraft carriers will have; and what the minimum protection required will be from the surface fleet on operations. [83226]

Dr. Moonie: We are still evaluating the options for on-board self-defence systems on the carrier and no final decisions will be made until the main gate business decision late in 2003. We expect normal operating practice for the future aircraft carriers (CVF) to call for a multi-layered approach to defence, including escort ships, submarines and aircraft. CVF will also operate joint strike fighter (JSF) aircraft in both offensive and defensive roles, as well as Merlin anti submarine helicopters.

Unexploded Ordnance

Mr. Catón: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what ordnance management guidelines his Department has on the clearing of the Archers Post training ground in Kenya. [83702]

Mr. Ingram: The British Army mandates strict standards on the management of ordnance, which apply throughout the world. These regulations require all range conducting officers involved with unit live firing exercises to adhere to safe practices and range clearance procedures and include instructions on the reporting, recording and destruction of unexploded ordnance. The units undertaking the annual explosive ordnance clearance exercise in Kenya (Exercise PINEAPPLE) conform to these regulations.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the disposal cost of unexploded ordnance in the Archers Post training ground in Kenya is. [83703]

Mr. Ingram: It is not possible to provide costs for the ordnance clearance undertaken by the individual units on completion of their training activity at Archers Post. The cost of the annual explosive ordnance disposal exercise (Exercise PINEAPPLE) is estimated at approximately £35,000 per annum. This figure does not include either capitation or transportation costs, to and from Kenya, of the personnel involved in the exercise.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what depth the Ministry of Defence surveys when carrying out clean up operations in Archers Post, Kenya. [83706]

Mr. Ingram: The clearance of unexploded ordnance at Archer's Post is, in the main, carried out by visual search. Where there is evidence of unexploded ordnance in particular areas, instrumentation is used to conduct a more intensive search. There is, therefore, no specific survey depth employed for clearance of unexploded ordnance across the entirety of Archer's Post.

Army

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Army indicated when last questioned, that they were satisfied with *(a)* the amount

of entitled leave they are able to take, *(b)* the frequency of operational tours, *(c)* the length of operational tours and *(d)* intervals between operational tours; what percentage of those responding this represents; what percentage of actual strength this represents; and if he will make a statement. [82482]

Dr. Moonie: The Army has been conducting the Continuous Attitude Survey (CAS) for over 20 years. It is a valuable tool in understanding the current thinking of Army personnel and is used to help manage retention, exercise duty of care and report on progress with Army and wider Departmental initiatives. The latest survey, which was undertaken in March/April 2002, was only sent to a 4 per cent. random sample of the trained Army (excluding Gurkhas and Full Time Reserve Service personnel); 3,978 questionnaires were sent out.

The percentages of those who responded to the most recent CAS, that are satisfied, dissatisfied or do not have a strong opinion regarding Operational tours and leave, are shown in the table.

	Percentage satisfied	*Percentage neutral*	*Percentage dissatisfied*
Amount of leave	49	24	27
Frequency of operational tours	37	33	30
Length of operational tours	43	35	22
Tour intervals	30	36	34

I am unable to provide the percentage of the actual strength that this represents.

Missile Defence

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the cost to the United Kingdom of a possible ballistic missile defence system involving new weapons and the latest technology; what assessment he has made of the benefits of the system; what his policy is on the response of the UK Government to a country firing a ballistic missile at the United Kingdom; what his estimate is of a likely non-country actor obtaining and firing a ballistic missile at the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [83871]

Mr. Hoon: As I told the House on 17 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 503, it is right that we recognise the potential contribution of missile defence to a comprehensive strategy to deal with the threat from ballistic missiles. No realistic cost estimates can be made at this stage. The United States Government has made no specific decisions on the overall architecture of a US missile defence system. No decision has been taken on the acquisition of a missile defence system by the UK.

The firing of a ballistic missile at the UK from any source would be a clear act of aggression which would receive a proportionately serious response. We currently assess the possibility of a non-state actor obtaining and launching a ballistic missile at the United Kingdom as remote.

Car Parking

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81863]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The following table shows the numbers of vehicle parking spaces for departmental buildings within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone.

Location	*Vehicle parking spaces*
Main Building	68
Old War Office	24
St. Giles Court	32
St. Georges Court	12
St. Christopher House	26
Castlewood House	6
Hampton	3
Horse Guards	18
Rochester Row	5
TAVRA buildings	9
Total	*203*

Note:
For Whitehall buildings spaces are provided for official vehicles, shift workers and disabled staff. Members of staff who choose to drive to work are not permitted to use a parking space. For the duration of the redevelopment work at Main Building a temporary car park has been created in Embankment Gardens. The north and south car parks are not is use.

In addition, Wellington Barracks has 270 spaces of which 266 are allocated to residents.

Challenger

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his oral statement of 25 November, *Official Report*, column 129, on the contract for the desertisation of the Challenger 2 tank, on what date the contract was *(a)* let and *(b)* signed. [84291]

Mr. Hoon: A Post Design Services enabling agreement with Alvis Vickers Ltd., the Design Authority (DA) for Challenger 2, was authorised at the end of October 2002. A series of other contracts have been let with the DA since then, but I am withholding details of these under Exemption 1 (Defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. To provide such information would jeopardise our contingency planning and harm operational security.

Chief of Public Relations

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the expenditure of his Chief of Public Relations increased from 2000–01 to 2001–02. [84538]

Dr. Moonie: As shown in Table 27 of the Departmental Performance Report for 2001–02 (Cm 5661) expenditure by the Chief of Public Relations increased from £2.8 million in 2000–01 to £3.1 million in 2001–02. The increase was due mainly to increased costs in running press facilities in support of Operation VERITAS.

Combat Assault Boot

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what stock of the army's combat assault boot is held; and how long that stock will last. [84102]

Dr. Moonie: As at 27 November, there are currently 18,745 pairs of Combat Assault Boots held in stock, which equates to about eight weeks supply. Our stocks are replenished at about 6,000 pairs a week.

Mr. James Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers were issued with the combat assault boot in the last 12 months. [84103]

Dr. Moonie: For the period 1 November 2001 to 31 October 2002, 79,000 pairs of Combat Assault Boots were issued to Army units.

Mr. James Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers could not be issued with the combat assault boot in the last 12 months because of shortage of supply. [84104]

Dr. Moonie: There have recently been problems with the supply of Combat Assault Boots (CAB) as a result of production difficulties with the contractors concerned. These difficulties have now been resolved and stocks are being replenished. We do not hold information centrally on the number of boots issued to individuals at unit level. We do not believe any soldier was without CAB because of this difficulty.

Computer Theft

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many laptops and computers have been *(a)* stolen and *(b)* lost by his Department since December 2000; and how many in each category have been recovered. [84608]

Dr. Moonie: Since December 2000, there have been 260 reported cases of computer theft and six reported cases of computer losses across the Ministry of Defence. Details by category, distinguishing between laptops and other computers, and the numbers of each recovered, are not readily available, under current reporting arrangements and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. A new system of reporting is being introduced with effect from 1 April 2003. This will enable detailed data to be retrieved more readily.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings of the EU Council of Ministers are planned where defence and security issues will be discussed over the next 12 months. [84874]

Mr. Hoon: Defence and security issues are discussed in the General Affairs and External Relations Council. The dates of these meetings are set out each month in Written Ministerial Statements from the Minister for Europe, most recently today. We do not currently have any information about dates for meetings after June 2003.

Counter-Terrorist Checks

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Chief Executive of the Defence Vetting Agency on its performance in 2001–02 towards its key target 3 on counter terrorist checks. [84265]

Mr. Ingram: I am regularly consulted on the formulation of the Defence Vetting Agency's key targets, including the target for counter-terrorist checks. I am also briefed on the Agency's performance against those targets. As I explained in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Mr. Rapson) on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1223W, the Agency's performance would be depressed while a number of changes took place in the course of DVA collocation and an ambitious modernisation programme aimed at improving efficiency and responsiveness. I am satisfied that the necessary action is being taken to improve on last year's performance and have approved the key targets for the current year.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to *(a)* review the working of the Criminal Injuries Compensation (Overseas Scheme) as it applies to his Department and *(b)* to extend the Scheme to include all MOD civilians. [83520]

Dr. Moonie: The Criminal Injuries Compensation (Overseas) (CIC(O)) Scheme is designed to give members of the armed forces and their dependants who are deployed overseas comparable levels of compensation to those that would have been awarded by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) had the incident occurred in Great Britain. The operation of the CIC(O) Scheme is, therefore, analogous to that of the CICA.

The CICA has introduced a new scheme for applications received on or after 1 April 2001. The CIC(O) Scheme rules have been reviewed and changes made to reflect the changes to the CICA scheme.

There are no plans to extend the CIC(O) Scheme to include MOD civilians, as they are already covered by the provisions of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS). Claims under this scheme are assessed by the PCSPS Medical Advisers by analogy to the CICA Scheme.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims have been made by *(a)* members of HM forces, *(b)* dependants and *(c)* civilian MOD employees under the Criminal Injuries Compensation (Overseas) Scheme in each year since 1997. [83521]

Dr. Moonie: The number of claims made by members of HM forces and their accompanying eligible dependants under the Criminal Injuries Compensation (Overseas) Scheme in the financial years 1997–98 to 2001–02 is as follows:

Financial year	*Number of claims*
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	66
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999	69
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	74
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	70
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	47

The records of claims made by members of HM forces are not maintained separately from those made by their

dependants. Separate figures for each category could be produced only at disproportionate cost by individually examining each case record.

Civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence are not eligible to claim under the scheme. They are, however, covered in similar terms by the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS), as are locally employed civilians (LECs).

The number of claims under this provision is as follows:

Financial year	*Number of claims*
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	0
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999	2
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	3
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	1
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	3

Croatia

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support has been given to Mr. Terry Jeans to enable him to attend court in Croatia; and what further support is to be offered to enable him to attend a public hearing on the case on 5 December. [84008]

Dr. Moonie: Between September 1998 and July 2000, Mr. Jeans was afforded considerable financial assistance from both public and non-public funds to enable him to attend a number of court hearings in Croatia, in relation to his son, Private Simon Jeans, who died on 17 September 1996 following an assault by a number of Croatian civilians in Split. Administrative support was provided by the British Embassy and Defence Staff in Zagreb.

The Regimental Association of the Royal Logistics Corps, which provided the most significant contribution, is unable to provide any further financial assistance to Mr. Jeans. Mr. Jeans was not the nominated Next of Kin and is therefore not entitled to support from public funds. Exceptional authority was, however, granted by the Secretary of State for the funding from the public purse of Mr. Jeans' last trip to Croatia in July 2000, to enable him to hear the conclusion of the trial of those accused of assaulting his son. This was on the basis that it constituted his final trip to Croatia and that no precedent would be set. The latest hearing concerns an appeal by a Croatian state attorney against the later release of two of those who were accused of assaulting Private Jeans. While the Ministry of Defence recognises Mr. Jeans' desire to attend this latest hearing, I am afraid that no further financial assistance can be provided to him in this case.

Cruise Missiles

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy submarines armed with cruise missiles are available for deployment to the Gulf. [84368]

Mr. Ingram: Currently the Royal Navy has five submarines fitted for Tomahawk missiles, however, the specific operational status of each submarine is classified for security reasons and is being withheld in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Death Benefits

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many awards of death benefits for single soldiers have been made in each year since 1990; and what the cost was in each year. [83811]

Dr. Moonie: The number of death benefit awards for Army Single Soldiers, since 1990, including the cost in each year is in the following table:

Year paid	*Number of single person deaths*	*Amount (£)*
1992	64	811,416.67
1993	64	847,349.20
1994	56	734,072.80
1995	46	648,847.80
1996	28	414,395.53
1997	54	793,114.00
1998	43	644,226.00
1999	48	766,925.26
2000	41	769,065.08
2001	18	275,885.71
2002	30	530,951.27

Complete records are held on single soldier death benefit awards from 1992 only. These figures are for Army Other Ranks (soldiers) only. They do not include Army Officers or Navy and RAF Personnel.

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the recruitment policy of the Defence Export Services Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [83862]

Dr. Moonie: All permanent Civil Servants employed in the Ministry of Defence are recruited in accordance with the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code. There is no separate policy for recruitment of such staff to the Defence Export Services Organisation.

Departmental Resource Accounts

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the National Audit Office qualified his Departmental Resource Accounts for 2000–01. [84541]

Mr. Ingram: We have confirmed the hon. Member is referring to 2001–02. The Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) qualified the Departmental Resource Accounts for 2001–02 for the following reasons:-

The Department was not able to give sufficient information and explanation on:

Completeness of stock consumption and depreciation charges for assets held by contractors.

Charges relating to stock write off and impairment of capital spares on the supply systems at Air Environment.

The Department exceeded its voted net resources by £601.8 million in non-cash expenditure, primarily as a result of impairment of the valuation of certain equipment.

Further details are given in the published 2001–02 Departmental Resource Accounts published on 21 November 2002 (HC47).

Director General Training and Education Organisation

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the uncertainties over funding were which have delayed the establishment of the Director General Training and Education Organisation. [84540]

Dr. Moonie: The formation of a Director General Training and Education (DGT&E) organisation was a recommendation of the Defence Training Review (DTR), announced on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 545W by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. However, the DTR recommendations were approved by Ministers after Departmental spending plans for 2001–02 had been finalised, and it was not possible at that time to set aside funding for the formation of DGT&E. The organisation has now been established.

European Security and Defence

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, in the event of competing demands on UK forces from ESDP and NATO, to which organisation will he give priority. [84876]

Mr. Hoon: The Government make decisions on the deployment of United Kingdom forces on operations on a case-by-case basis. These judgments are based on factors such as operational need, what forces we and others have to offer, and any international treaty obligations that may be relevant, with NATO remaining the foundation of our collective defence.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is the policy of the Government that EU-NATO relations should be established so that all force planning and military command functions should be through NATO military headquarters at SHAPE. [84878]

Mr. Hoon: The Nice European Council in December 2000 decided that, for EU-led operations that make use of NATO assets and capabilities, operational planning will be carried out by NATO's planning bodies. For these operations, the Deputy SACEUR and SHAPE have been identified as the primary candidates for Operation Commander and Operation Headquarters. These arrangements are subject to finalising agreement on modalities for EU-NATO co-operation. For EU-led operations without recourse to NATO assets and capabilities, planning and command requirements would draw on existing national and multinational headquarters available to the EU.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of the Helsinki Headline Catalogue 2002 (HHC 2002) in the Library. [84873]

Mr. Hoon: This is a European Union document and thus not ours to publish. I am withholding it under Exemptions 1a and c (Defence, Security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

However, a summary of potential member state contributions to an EU-led operation was placed in the Library of the House in May of this year.

Eurofighter Typhoon

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his latest estimate is of when the Eurofighter will be ready for operational use by the Royal Air Force. [83905]

Dr. Moonie: We expect Eurofighter, which has been re-designated Typhoon, to be available for operational deployment in the second half of this decade.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what costs were incurred by his Department in providing military assistance in managing the foot and mouth epidemic. [84528]

Mr. Ingram: Additional costs of around £7 million were incurred. These costs have been reimbursed to the Ministry of Defence by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Future Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what fixed wing aircraft will be used on the future aircraft carriers. [84086]

Dr. Moonie: The future aircraft carriers (CVF) should initially operate the Short Take Off and Vertical Landing (STOVL) variant of the F35 Joint Strike Fighter. No decision has yet been taken on how best to meet our requirement for a Maritime Airborne Surveillance and Control (MASC) capability, and a range of embarked fixed wing air platforms remain under consideration.

Beyond this, it is impossible to say what fixed wing platforms might be used on CVF over its planned 50-year life. CVF will be built to an innovative and adaptable design, therefore, so that it can be modified to operate future generations of air platforms, whether or not these have STOVL characteristics.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of manufacture of the future carriers will be carried out in the UK. [84088]

Dr. Moonie: In line with Government policy, the carriers will be built in United Kingdom shipyards. It is still too early in the programme to be definitive about all of the carriers' sub-systems, as many of these have not yet been selected.

Green Goddesses

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to replace Green Goddess fire engines. [84161]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no current plans to replace the Green Goddesses, although the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has been giving consideration to

replacing the Green Goddess capability and has made arrangements to supplement the Green Goddesses with red fire appliances in the course of the current dispute.

Hawk Aircraft Order

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the order for Hawk AJT (MFTS) from BAE Systems, Brough Site will be confirmed. [82243]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 5–6W to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh).

HMS Manchester

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the firefighters' strike has had on the planned deployment of HMS Manchester on anti-terrorist patrol duties. [84369]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Manchester was due to deploy on 29 November to join the Activated Nato Task Group (Standing Naval Force Mediterranean) on Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean from 8 December to 15 January. HMS Manchester is, however, currently providing fire fighting cover during the dispute and thus will not sail as previously planned. The United Kingdom presence will be maintained through RFA Orangeleaf which will be on task throughout the period as the support tanker.

Ex-Servicemen (Housing Project)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham on 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 177W, what plans he has to use the housing project for ex-servicemen in Richmond, North Yorkshire, as a model for other projects in England. [84768]

Dr. Moonie: The purpose of the new Galleries short-term accommodation project in Richmond, North Yorkshire, is to provide the very small proportion of new Service-leavers who are vulnerable to homelessness with secure, short-term accommodation while they are helped to develop the confidence and independent living skills necessary to find permanent accommodation and employment in their chosen areas. The aim is to appraise the project carefully so that, where appropriate, lessons learned can be applied by the many government and voluntary agencies that are working in partnership to reduce the risk of homelessness.

Joint Force Logistic Component

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason he has not established a standing headquarters for the Joint Force Logistic Component. [84533]

Mr. Ingram: The Joint Force Logistic Component (JFLogC) concept does not require a standing headquarters. The organisation and composition of a headquarters would be determined by the circumstances of particular missions. This allows mission specific factors, such as the scale, duration and complexity, to be taken into account when determining the composition of the headquarters.

Married Quarters

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what relative priority Defence Housing Estates give to refurbishing married quarters in *(a)* a major garrison town and *(b)* in more remote individual barracks; [84101]

(2) when the married quarters estate at Hullavington Barracks is to be refurbished; and if he will make a statement. [84100]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive (DHE) aims to upgrade core housing stock (ie that required in the longer term) to Standard 1 For Condition (S1FC). No distinction is made as to whether the properties are within a barracks or part of a garrison town.

DHE plans to refurbish 110 family quarters at Hullavington Barracks. The project, which is designed to bring the properties up to SF1C, is due to start in early 2004.

Military Trucks Contract

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he will make an announcement on the company awarded the military trucks contract; [84084]

(2) how many companies bidding for the military trucks contract will base manufacture of the vehicle in the UK; [84085]

(3) if he will make a statement on progress being made with the tender for the military trucks contract. [84083]

Dr. Moonie: The tenders received for the military truck contract have been assessed and the four bidders have been invited to participate in a further round of tendering. Responses are expected early next year, and an announcement on the award of contract is planned for late 2003. Proposals for United Kingdom industrial participation have been included in all the bids.

Minesweepers

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the scheduled decommissioning dates for each of the last Hunter class minesweepers. [84378]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans the scheduled decommissioning dates for each of the Hunt class mine counter measure vessels in the Royal Navy are as follows:

HMS	*Planned operational decommissioning date*
Ledbury	2023
Cattistock	2022
Brocklesby	2020
Chiddingfold	2020
Middleton	2019
Hurworth	2020
Atherstone	2020
Quorn	2020

A further three hunt class ships with mine counter measure capability are now configured for use as patrol craft. They are Brecon, Cottesmore and Dulverton, with planned decommissioning dates of 2016, 2022, and 2020 respectively.

NATO HQs

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many NATO HQs are based in the UK. [84536]

Mr. Hoon: There are three NATO HQs currently based in the United Kingdom. Two at Northwood (Regional Headquarters Eastern Atlantic and Allied Naval Forces North) and one at High Wycombe (a combined air operations centre).

Northern Ireland

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength is of service personnel based in Northern Ireland. [84530]

Mr. Ingram: Out of the current total of 14,226 regular armed forces personnel (Army, Navy and RAF) permanently committed to operations in Northern Ireland, there were 14,042 deployed in Province on 28 November 2002. In addition, there are a further 1,039 armed forces personnel temporarily deployed to Northern Ireland as a result of the firefighters dispute under OPERATION FRESCO.

Nuclear Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the value of his Department's nuclear waste and decommissioning liabilities is; and what provision has been made to discharge them. [84266]

Dr. Moonie: The headline undiscounted liability figure which appears in the 2001–02 Departmental Resource Account is £16.6 billion. This compares to £16.0 billion at 31 March 2001. The headline discounted figure for which provision has been made is £3.9 billion. This compares to £3.6 billion at 31 March 2001. Further information is contained in paragraph 16.2 to the notes to the accounts of the Ministry of Defence Consolidated Departmental Resource Accounts 2001–02, which was laid before the House on 21 November 2002, as HC47.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent by his Department, in each year since 1972, on monitoring the health impact of radioactive emissions on British service people and medical auxiliaries from *(a)* atmospheric nuclear tests, *(b)* other nuclear tests and *(c)* radiological experiments. [84259]

Dr. Moonie: British atmospheric nuclear testing ceased in 1958. This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Operation Fresco

Mr. James Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) from which budget the additional costs of Operation Fresco will be drawn; [84105]

(2) what discussions he has had about use of the Contingency Fund to pay for Operation Fresco; [84107]

(3) what the estimated extra costs to the defence budget is of Operation Fresco; [84106]

(4) what extra funds *(a)* Defence Fire Services, *(b)* RAF Fire Service and *(c)* RN Fire Services will be granted to cover their contribution to Operation Fresco. [84108]

Mr. Ingram: Costs will initially fall to a wide range of Ministry of Defence budges, reflecting the many different areas of the Armed Forces involved in providing assistance. No extra funds will be made available to these areas, because MOD will recover the additional costs of the operation from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Because the defence budget will be reimbursed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has had no discussions about use of the Contingency Fund. It is too early to say how much the military assistance will cost, but in preparing for the strike MOD incurred costs of about 8 million, mainly on purchasing major items of equipment such as protective clothing, breathing apparatus and hydraulic cutting equipment.

Macedonia

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether NATO will extend its mandate in Macedonia beyond 15 December; and if he will make a statement. [82556]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* NATO has agreed to continue a military presence in succession to Operation Amber Fox in Macedonia commencing on 16 December for a limited period.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is government policy that the EU should not take over the peacekeeping mandate in Macedonia unless permanent arrangements for EU-NATO relations are in place. [82557]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The United Kingdom Government stands by the position agreed in the European Council at Seville that the European Union is willing to undertake an operation in Macedonia at the request of the Macedonian Government, once the EU-NATO permanent arrangements are in place.

Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantities of plutonium, arising from British experiments at Maralinga in South Australia, remain buried in the desert; what environmental monitoring is conducted of these sites; and what representations have been received from Aborigines who live in the area in respect of the impact on their land. [84268]

Dr. Moonie: The final report of the Maralinga Rehabilitation Technical Advisory Committee is expected to be published early next year. Estimates of the quantity of plutonium left at Maralinga will be in the report. The Maralinga Consultative Group is currently preparing a long-term management plan for the area, which includes routine radiation monitoring and surveillance. The Maralinga Tjarutja traditional owners

are represented on a consultative committee with the Commonwealth of Australia and South Australian governments. This has met throughout the project and serves as a forum in which to discuss and monitor the work being carried out.

Prague Summit

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what agreements were reached at the Prague NATO summit which will increase the defence spending of European members of NATO. [84875]

Mr. Hoon: Agreement was reached at Prague on enhancing NATO capabilities-through the Prague Capabilities Commitment, the new NATO Response Force, and a streamlined Command Structure-all of which will have resource implications for Allies.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what impact the conclusions of the NATO summit in Prague on 21 and 22 November have had on the Government's policy that no ESDP operation should take place until permanent relations between the EU and NATO have been established. [84877]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon Member to the answer I gave earlier today.

RAF

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons he has estimated the RAF experienced difficulties in maintaining the required levels of overall force element readiness. [84531]

Dr. Moonie: As stated in the Ministry of Defence Performance Report for 2001–02, the difficulties the Royal Air Force experienced in maintaining required levels of overall force element readiness were largely due to manpower shortages in some areas of employment, along with some equipment shortfalls. The RAF met its operational requirements in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002.

Refurbishment

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the original cost of the refurbishment of his Department's main building; and what the current estimated cost is. [84543]

Dr. Moonie: The costs to the Ministry of Defence will be some £55 million per annum at March 2000 prices over the 30 years of the Public-private Partnership contract. This encompasses the short-term decant arrangements, as well as the long-term provision of a wide variety of services to both the redeveloped main building and the Old War Office building. A fixed price has been negotiated for this PFI project, and only agreed changes to the requirement or deductions for non- performance will have any impact on the cost. To date, the cost has remained unchanged.

Royal Navy

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to address the shortage of trained Royal Navy personnel identified in his Department's Performance Report. [84532]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's Performance Report 2001–02, paragraph 81, identified a number of shortages in trained personnel. The overall shortage at the end of that year, of 4.3 per cent. in the trained strength against the requirement, had been reduced to 2.9 per cent. by 30 September this year. This has been the result of excellent recruiting performance, a firm control over the requirement and slow but positive progress to reduce outflow. Our efforts in these three areas will of course continue, together with the more flexible use of manpower resources including selective extensions of service, use of full-time reservists and the implementation of the TOPMAST project to reform manpower management. Turning to the specific shortfalls mentioned in the report, although recruiting of Lynx and Sea Harrier pilots is satisfactory, shortages are caused by outflow, and this is being addressed by implementation of the recommendations of the Aircrew Retention Review. For submarine branch personnel, a number of measures are in hand to improve both recruiting and retention. Recruiting for Royal Marines Other Ranks is healthy and retention has recently improved, but we are continuing work on retaining experienced junior ranks.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* the target and *(b)* the actual recruitment figures were for Royal Navy personnel in each of the past five years. [84371]

Dr. Moonie: The target and recruitment figures for the Royal Navy in each of the past five years are as follows:

Year	*Target*	*Actual Recruitment*
2002–03	5,060	2 470[1]
2001–02	5,042	3,013
2000–01	4,844	4,620
1999–2000	5,019	4,950
1998–99	5,088	4,770

[1] Figures quoted are intake as at 1 October 2002 and are rounded to nearest 10.

Service Deaths

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what proportion of victims of suicide and self-inflicted death in Her Majesty's armed forces were involved at the time of their death in disciplinary proceedings *(a)* as a witness and *(b)* facing charges; and how many of these victims had (i) gone AWOL and (ii) sought or received counselling in the six months prior to their death. [83813]

Dr. Moonie: Given the small numbers of suicides and self inflicted deaths in the armed forces each year, I have concluded that release into the public domain of the information requested would breach the rules of anonymity and confidentiality for the families of the individuals concerned. I am therefore withholding the information under Exemption 12 (Privacy of an Individual) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many boards of inquiry have been established to examine deaths in each of the HM armed services since 1990; what statistical information is compiled about the work of the boards; and in what

form the recommendations of the boards are *(a)* collected and *(b)* communicated to officers who may need to act upon them. [84872]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not immediately available. I will, therefore, write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Service Personnel

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of those discharged from the armed forces for the use of controlled substances could be liable to an enforced call-up to reserve forces. [82122]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* There are no foreseeable circumstances that would necessitate the call-out of former Service personnel discharged for the misuse of controlled substances.

Single Service Doctrine

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's *(a)* military and *(b)* civilian personnel are dedicated to working on doctrine. [84526]

Mr. Ingram: Across the Ministry of Defence there are four organisations whose responsibilities include leading on the development and production of Joint or single-Service doctrine. These are:

The Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre

The Maritime Warfare Centre

The Directorate General of Development and Doctrine

The Air Warfare Centre

Within each of these organisations a number of personnel are dedicated to working on doctrine. (We have taken dedicated to mean their primary or full time role). The figures for each organisation are:

The Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre : 11 military, 7 civilian

The Maritime Warfare Centre : 2 military

The Directorate General of Development and Doctrine : 7 military, 5 civilian

The Air Warfare Centre : 2 military, 1 civilian.

Additionally, the Joint Services Command and Staff College has one military officer established for doctrine work.

Within the Army, some doctrine work is carried out at a lower level, and each of the nine Arms and Services Directorates has one retired officer and one civilian clerk established for doctrine work, i.e. 18 staff.

This gives a total of 23 military and 31 civilians.

Suicide

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken since 1997 to provide suicide prevention and suicide awareness training programmes for members of Her Majesty's armed forces. [83812]

Dr. Moonie: There are no training programmes aimed specifically at suicide awareness or prevention within the services, but throughout their careers Officers and NCOs receive specialist training including programmes on welfare and management of personnel. Naval General Training has a number of instructional elements addressing deliberate self-harm and suicide, and related subjects such as coping with occupational stress; and the Royal Navy has produced guidance to personnel on the management of cases of deliberate self-harm. The Army also publishes a pamphlet on suicide awareness and prevention in a simple but useful format that is issued to all Commanders and NCOs. In addition all Army recruits are issued with a handbook which informs them of the welfare support available to them. During initial training all RAF recruits receive briefing on welfare issues including stress management.

Available statistics indicate that the incidence of suicide within the services is broadly compatible with that in the population at large. However, all three services regard even a low rate to be too high and take the issue of suicide and its prevention very seriously. Measures are in place, both within and independently of the chain of command, to enable vulnerable individuals to seek help.

Each service has its own particular systems for providing welfare support but a common theme in relation to the responsibility for prevention of suicide is the direct involvement of the Chain of Command, from Commanding Officers downwards. The services aim to provide a range of support options for those who may be vulnerable to suicide, and to ensure free and unfettered access at all times. This covers a wide range of issues including money, alcohol/drugs, marriage or domestic problems and work pressures. Since 1995 the support has included free confidential telephone lines manned by trained personnel who are able to offer counselling over the phone.

Commanding Officers are assisted by specific individuals and agencies with skills and training that can help. These include Medical Officers, Chaplains, Unit Welfare Officers, the Naval Personal and Families Service, the Army Welfare Service and external organisations and charities contracted for the provision of specific services. Among these are the WRVS, RELATE (marriage guidance counsellors), the Samaritans and the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association—Forces Help (SSAFA-FH).

Territorial Army

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason expenditure on the National Employers Liaison Committee (Territorial Army) decreased from 2000–01 to 2001–02. [84539]

Dr. Moonie: The National Employers Liaison Committee, which operates the Volunteer Reserve Forces Campaign, had a reduction in expenditure in the year 2001–02 absorbed by a reduction in the advertising budget for the campaign. The reduction was one of a number of readjustments in the overall budget for the Ministry of Defence and was taken out of cash expenditure not already committed.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evaluation has been made of the possible health impact on British service personnel and medical

auxiliaries of inoculations and other prophylactics provided to those being prepared to deploy to the Gulf region, to protect against chemical or biological toxins. [84264]

Dr. Moonie: No decision has been made to commit United Kingdom forces to operations in Iraq.

Medical countermeasures against chemical and biological agents routinely available to service personnel deploying on operations to the Gulf are licensed products that have been rigorously tested for safety and efficacy. We are confident there should be no significant adverse health effects associated with their use.

Procedures are in place for reporting and monitoring any health effects that do occur. Individuals who have elected to receive immunisation against anthrax are briefed on, and instructed to report, any adverse reactions to the vaccine under the Department's anthrax voluntary immunisation programme. Any adverse reactions reported to medical staff are recorded and made known to the Medicines Control Agency under the "Yellow Card" reporting scheme.

UN Peacekeeping Missions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK troops are committed to United Nations peacekeeping missions. [84196]

Mr. Ingram: Some 460 United Kingdom troops are committed to United Nations mandated missions, under UN command. These missions are in Georgia, Sierra Leone, Congo, Kuwait, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Cyprus.

Warships

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the terrorist threat to Royal Navy warships *(a)* in home waters and *(b)* overseas. [84365]

Mr. Ingram: The assessment of threat to HM ships, submarines and royal fleet auxiliaries from terrorist attack is kept under constant review. In common with other terrorist threats, this assessment is provided to the Ministry of Defence by the national authority, the Security Service. It is then the MOD's responsibility to determine what counter-measures need to be taken, both at home and overseas, taking account in home waters of the Government-wide terrorist alert state.

Warships (Suicide Attacks)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision he has made to protect warships from suicide attacks by terrorists in high-speed small craft. [84362]

Mr. Ingram: The protection of HM ships, submarines and royal fleet auxiliaries from terrorist threats of all kinds is kept under constant review, and appropriate measures are put in place.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the warships *(a)* currently and *(b)* scheduled to be fitted with low-angle, close-range machine guns for protection against suicide attacks. [84363]

Mr. Ingram: The requirement for force protection is kept under review. I am however, withholding full details of the Royal Navy capability in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Young Recruits

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many young service men have left the armed services in each of the last five years as a result of 2 "unhappy under 18s" regulations. [82937]

Dr. Moonie: The type of data held on this subject varies according to the schemes operated by each of the Services and is not, therefore, available in a common format. The information that is available is as follows.

Royal Navy

The number of young personnel who have left the RN (and Royal Marines) in 2002 and each of the past five years as 'unhappy juniors' or 'unable to settle during the first 12 months' is shown in the table.

Age	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*[1]
16	—	3	—	—	—	—
17	15	27	18	34	20	24
18	8	15	15	21	21	16
Total	23	45	33	55	41	40

[1] To end September 2002

Army

Statistics for exits under the 'unhappy under 18' scheme are recorded under the same code as other reasons for exit. The number of authorised discharges of under 18s in each of the past five years in the data category which will include 'unhappy under 18s' is shown in the table.

Year	*Total*
1999	74
2000	125
2001	202
2002[1]	292

[1] To end October 2002

There is no Army data held in this detail prior to 1999.

RAF

The RAF did not introduce an 'unhappy under 18' scheme until mid 2002, since when two people have left under its provisions. Prior to that, all those under 18s who left the RAF at their own request did so under 'Discharge as of Right' provisions; and the number of such exits in 2002 and each of the last five years is shown in the table.

Age	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*[1]
16	13	7	25	17	24	21
17	64	109	90	95	98	104
Total	77	116	115	112	122	125

[1] To end October 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Biodiesel

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Mortimer Report on Biodiesel will be published; and what contribution her Department made in influencing the content of the report. [83915]

Mr. Meacher: The report from Sheffield Hallam University was commissioned by the Department to provide an independent, comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of the comparative energy, environmental and socio-economic costs and benefits of biodiesel production in the UK. The terms of reference for the study were agreed with the Government-Industry Forum on the Non-Food Uses of Crops and with industry. A draft of the report was published for consultation in June this year and, in finalising the report, the authors have looked carefully at the points made and have taken account of new evidence put forward. We expect the report to be peer reviewed in December and published in January 2003. The Department has had no influence over the content of the report. For bioenergy, this Department plans and manages independent research through its Science Directorate to inform the development of policy. All research reports are published and clarity of presentation is the only factor considered.

Energy Crops

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial incentives are available for those who wish to grow biomass crops. [84198]

Mr. Meacher: This Department has allocated £29 million under the Energy Crops Scheme, part of the England Rural Development Programme, for establishment grants for short rotation coppice (SRC) and miscanthus and for SRC growers to set up producer groups. The Government are also providing £70 million of funding through a package of measures which will develop markets for biomass, including energy crops, in heat, combined heat and power and electricity generation. Short rotation coppice and miscanthus can be planted on set-aside land and receive payments under the Arable Area Payments Scheme. The European Commission has published initial proposals for further reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to take effect from 2004. Under these proposals, no crops would be grown on set-aside land. A new carbon credit of €45 per hectare is proposed for energy crops, to be paid to producers entering into a contract with a processor. The proposal includes a maximum guaranteed area of 1.5 million hectares eligible for this additional payment.

Building Specifications

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times the national building specification (Government works) standards format has been used for specification purposes on Government construction, redevelopment and refurbishment projects in the last three years; and what those projects were. [83926]

Mr. Boateng: This information is not available centrally.

Common Agricultural Policy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she has taken to ensure that organic farmers receive more subsidies under the CAP. [83912]

Mr. Meacher: None. It would not be consistent with our policy on agricultural production subsidies to put in place such payments for organic farmers. However, because of the environmental benefits organic farming delivers, we provide conversion aid to farmers under the Organic Farming Scheme and we intend next year, subject to approval from the European Commission, to extend the coverage of the scheme to organic farmers post-conversion. We also provide free advice to prospective organic farmers through the Organic Conversion Information Service and support an organic R&D Programme.

Climate Change Levy

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* relevant underlying agreements and *(b)* qualitative requirements set for the facilities are of those sector associations party to a Climate Change Levy umbrella agreement which have supplied her with information specified in part 2 of Schedule 3 of those agreements. [82815]

Mr. Meacher: No information has yet been supplied to the Secretary of State. Schedule 3 of the underlying agreements contain the qualitative requirements, and these are the same for all facilities. The framework underlying agreement can be seen on the Defra website.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which targets under climate change levy umbrella agreements and underlying agreements have not been met; of those, in respect of which targets she is considering whether they so appear; and if she will conduct a public consultation in advance of making a decision on such progress. [82818]

Mr. Meacher: Since no information has yet been supplied, the Secretary of State has no information on whether targets have been met. The circumstances under which progress made towards meeting the targets set for a facility is to be taken as being satisfactory are set out in clauses 7.2 to 7.6 of the umbrella agreements. The Secretary of State does not intend to hold public consultations in advance of making decisions as to whether the requirements of those clauses have been satisfied.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in respect of climate change levy agreements, which sectors have *(a)* met and *(b)* not met their targets. [82844]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* Under clause 6.5 of the umbrella agreements, sector associations are not required to submit information specified in Schedule 3 for the first target period until 31

January 2003, extended by agreement to 17 February. The Secretary of State has no information at present on whether targets have been met.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) which sector associations and operators have served a notice on her under climate change levy agreements in response to a notice served by her relating to variations to sector targets she proposes should be made, and on what dates; and if she will place copies of each such notice in the Library; [82846]

(2) on how many occasions she has failed to agree on a variation of sector targets under climate change levy umbrella agreements; and what disputes concerning failure to agree on a variation of sector targets under climate change levy umbrella agreements have been referred for adjudication; and on what date; [82848]

(3) what notices she has served on sector associations and operators relating to variations to sector targets under climate change levy agreements she proposes should be made, and on what dates; and if she will place copies of each such notice in the Library; [82845]

(4) what agreements have been made between her and sector associations under climate change levy umbrella agreements on a variation of sector targets, and on what date; and if she will place copies of each such agreement in the Library. [82847]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The procedure for varying sector targets as provided for in Schedule 6 to the umbrella agreements is triggered by the submission of information as required under Schedule 3 to the agreements. Since no data have yet been supplied, no notices relating to the variation of sector targets have yet been served, and therefore, there have been no agreements or disputes concerning failure to reach agreement.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Gerry Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the proportion of her administration budget in the current financial year which is allocated to matters formerly within the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. [82895]

Alun Michael: About 90 per cent.of Defra's administration budget in 2002–03 is allocated to matters formerly within the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Energy Using Sectors

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library a copy of the agreements reached between her predecessor and the largest 10 energy using sectors in December 1999 relating to the climate change levy. [82849]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* In December 1999, the Deputy Prime Minister reached agreement on a Memorandum of Understanding with each of the 10 largest energy using sectors relating to the climate change levy. These were not published. These have been replaced by Climate Change Agreements with the sector associations, and copies of each of these agreements have been placed in the Library.

Environmental Performance

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library the reports of FTSE 350 companies on their environmental performance. [82854]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* Information about the overall state of play on FTSE 350 companies' progress in reporting their environmental performance, was placed in the Library in July this year. The reports which companies produce are publicly available in various formats—for example, as free-standing documents, or contained within annual reports and accounts, or on corporate web-tes. Requests for up-to-date information and documentation should be made direct to the companies concerned.

Food Imports

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how frequently her Department checks the number and visibility of signs at ports and airports warning against the import of meat. [80466]

Margaret Beckett: New posters were produced and displayed in February. During the summer we conducted one general exercise to assess the number and visibility of the posters. Since then we have conducted a number of follow-up reviews of sites where posters were allegedly not displayed. Priority is given to checking those ports and airports which handle the greatest number of international passengers.

A further review will be initiated when the penalty posters and information leaflets are redesigned to reflect the new EU rules restricting imports of meat and dairy products from outside the EU from January 2003.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to amend the law on the penalties available to the courts for the illegal import of meat and meat products. [80468]

Margaret Beckett: The Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports) (England) Regulations 2002 already allow for a penalty of a £5000 fine per offence and/or three months imprisonment on summary conviction or an unlimited fine and/or up to two years imprisonment on conviction on indictment.

The Government's Action Plan commitment on deterrence will be reviewed taking into account the results of the risk assessment that the Government have commissioned into the risk of disease in imported meat affecting livestock. This review may include the introduction of fixed penalty notices.

Government Regional Offices (Staffing)

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many DEFRA staff are employed in each Government Regional Office. [83353]

Alun Michael: It is difficult to provide figures in precisely the form requested, since some staff in Government Offices will be undertaking DEFRA related work while other DEFRA staff may have applied for and been appointed to posts not related to DEFRA activities but would be identified as having DEFRA as their "parent Department". That explains the number of staff in the Government Office for London and the high number in the East of England. The only Government Office with any significant agricultural structural funds work is the Government Office for the South West where they administer the objective 1 agriculture programme in Cornwall. This explains the high number of staff in the South West.

Against this background the number of staff in Government Offices whose parent Department is identified as DEFRA at October 2002 was 93. The number in each Office was:

	Number
East of England	24
East Midlands	8
London	9
North East	6
North West	6
South East	8
South West	19
West Midlands	5
Yorkshire and Humberside	8

Meat Imports

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the ports where amnesty bins for illegal meat imports have been installed. [80464]

Margaret Beckett: No official amnesty bins have been installed at UK ports or airports.

An action group met on 22 August to discuss how we can utilise amnesty bins in our bid to reduce the risk of disease entering the country through illegal imports of meat, fish, plants and their products. Work will be taken forward in the light of my statement to the House on 6 November, that the lead responsibility for anti-smuggling measures will be transferred to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Non-food Crops Scheme

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many applications and how much money was awarded under the non-food crops scheme broken down by Government Office Regions in each year since the scheme was introduced. [83384]

Mr. Meacher: In the non-food crops sector the only support scheme currently run by this Department is the Energy Crops Scheme. This provides assistance for farmers through establishment grants for short rotation coppice (SRC) and miscanthus, and funding for SRC growers to set up producer groups. Details of the applications received and grants issued for each financial year since the scheme came into force in October 2000 are as follows:

	2001–01		*2001–02*		*2002–03*	
Government office region	*Number of applications received*	*Total value of grants issued (£)*	*Number of applications received*	*Total value of grants issued (£)*	*Number of applications received*	*Total value of grants issued (£)*
South West	—	—	—	—	—	—
South East	—	—	—	—	2	—
East of England	5	—	19	61,220	8	14,280
East Midlands	15	—	3	104,160	1	8,480
West Midlands	3	—	2	7,170	2	3,183
Yorkshire and the Humber	13	—	4	61,810	1	35,740
North East	—	—	5	—	—	6,000
North West	1	—	—	—	—	—
Total	37	—	33	234,360	14	67,683

Note:
In some cases, grants are paid in the year following receipt of the application.

Poultry

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the average cost was of a *(a)* conventionally and *(b)* organically produced *(i)* turkey, (ii) chicken, (iii) duck in (A) 1979, (B) 1985, (C) 1990, (D) 1995, (E) 2000 and (F) 2002; [81164]

(2) what the average cost was of a kilogram of *(a)* conventionally and *(b)* organically produced (i) potatoes, (ii) carrots, (iii) onions, (iv) cauliflower, (v) peas and (vi) mangetout in (A) 1979, (B) 1985, (C) 1990, (D) 1995, (E) 2000 and (F) 2002. [81163]

Mr. Meacher: Average UK farmgate prices for conventionally produced commodities are given in the following table.

Average farmgate price	*1979*	*1985*	*1990*	*1995*	*2000*	*2002 (January to October)*
Turkey (p/kg carcase weight)	N/a	141.1	120.5	124.3	129.6	116.4
Chicken and other table fowl (p/kg carcase weight)	N/a	89.5	87.0	84.0	70.8	67.7

Average farmgate price	*1979*	*1985*	*1990*	*1995*	*2000*	*2002 (January to October)*
Chicken and other table fowl (Price £ per bird)	N/a	1.37	1.33	1.30	1.10	1.07
Duck (p/kg carcase weight)	N/a	157.8	120.7	140.4	170.3	167.3
Potatoes (£/tonne)	58.9	52	99	188	83	89
Crop years		*1985–86*	*1990–01*	*1995–96*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Carrots (£/tonne)	N/a	88.90	224.53	204.63	242.63	119.32
Onions (£/tonne)	N/a	84.13	129.06	160.06	98.13	127.66
Cauliflower (£/tonne)	162.00	205.21	238.45	283.29	243.04	230.35
Peas for market (£/tonne)	N/a	252.90	515.66	453.29	567.24	567.83
Peas for processing (£/tonne)	N/a	216.74	217.24	203.30	255.58	254.47

The following tables provide the estimates for organically produced commodities as published by the Soil Association in their organic food and farming report. Data is only available for 1998 onwards.

Poultry (table birds) [1]

Price £ per bird	
6.16	1998
6.32	1999
6.52	2000
5.50	2001
5.00	2002

[1] Mainly chicken

Horticulture

Price £ per tonne

Vegetable	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Potatoes	240	300	247	250	200
Carrots	340	340	300	300	197
Onions	320	336	344	300	250
Cauliflower	[1]0.30	[1]0.40	700	700	600
Fresh peas	2,500	2,500	2,570	2,750	2,514

[1] Price per individual cauliflower
Mangetout data is not available
Mainly chicken

Rural Payments

Mr. David Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her target is for making payments under *(a)* the Vocational Training Scheme and *(b)* the Rural Enterprise Scheme; what proportion of payments meet those targets; and if she will make a statement. [80452]

Margaret Beckett: The Rural Development Service has responsibility for processing and authorising claims made under the Vocational Training Scheme and the Rural Enterprise Scheme. For both schemes the aim is to pay all complete claims, ie those submitted with the appropriate supporting documentation, within one month of receipt. Most recent available information indicates that around 90 per cent. of Vocational Training Scheme claims and 83 per cent. of Rural Enterprise Scheme claims are authorised within one month of receipt. The above-mentioned figures reflect the fact that a proportion of claims are submitted with incomplete supporting documentation in the first instance.

Soil Organisms

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken by her Department to investigate the impact of *(a)* conventional and *(b)* organic farming systems on soil organisms and the role they play in relation to *(i)* retention of moisture and carbon, (ii) delivering nutrients and (iii) the avoidance of soil erosion. [81901]

Mr. Meacher: The study of soil organisms in relation to aspects of soil fertility forms a significant part of the Department's R&D budget. The Department is spending approximately £1.2 million on Soil R&D in 2002–03. This includes work on soil fertility, quality, erosion and sustainable management. Examples include SP0130 which is investigating the long-term impacts of sewage sludge additions on soil properties; SP0519 which considers critical levels of soil organic matter for soil stability and function, and SP0524 an audit of all UK soil research. We fund monitoring of soil quality including the Representative Soil Sampling Scheme (current project SR0123) and the National Soil Inventory (current project SP0521). A recently completed project (OF0164) compared the soil fertility in soils farmed organically and conventionally. The project found evidence of increased levels of earthworms and beneficial nematodes in organic compared to conventional soils, but concluded that the differences in soil microbiology were subtle rather than dramatic. There is to be a review of our soil R&D in spring 2003. Future R&D is likely to consider soil function, soil biology and improved monitoring.

In relation to the effects of soil organisms on

(i) retention of moisture and carbon, research is proceeding on factors influencing the levels of organic matter in soils, which will in turn affect water retention;

(ii) delivering nutrients, a large amount of research has been funded on the effects of soil organisms in cycling nutrients within soils, and work is continuing in this area;

(iii) the avoidance of soil erosion, research on soil erosion has shown that soil structure can be an important factor and this in turn can be affected by soil organisms. However other factors, such as slope, crop, cultivation, soil type and rainfall intensity, are often of equal or greater importance.

Supermarket Trolleys

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of supermarket trolleys discarded off supermarket premises in the last year for which figures are available; what measures she plans to take to reduce off-site discarding of supermarket trolleys; and if she will bring forward proposals to levy an environmental charge. [83699]

Mr. Meacher: Figures for discarded shopping trolleys are not collected centrally. Legislation is already in place regarding abandoned shopping trolleys. Under section 99 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authorities can collect abandoned shopping (and luggage) trolleys, store them and charge owners for their return. Adopting a deposit system, installing obstacles that prevent trolleys being taken off the site, or publicising a trolley collection service, will help control this problem and prevent retailers being charged for trolley collections. Given these measures, we have no plans to levy an environmental charge.

Thailand

Mr. David Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on increasing the amount of Thai food produce imported into the United Kingdom. [81818]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Promotion of exports to the United Kingdom is a matter for the authorities of the country or countries concerned.

TRANSPORT

A316, Twickenham

Dr. Vincent Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will carry out a survey of traffic on the A316 in Twickenham, showing the number of vehicles using the road per hour per day; and if he will make a statement. [83660]

Mr. Jamieson: No. The A316 is the responsibility of the Mayor and Transport for London.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to review the ban on the use of vehicles which use LPG fuel from the Channel Tunnel. [83519]

Mr. Jamieson: Eurotunnel's original applications for operating certificates excluded the carriage of LPG and dual-fuelled vehicles. It is for the company to come forward with proposals to extend the range of its services to include these vehicles; Eurotunnel has been keeping its policy under review. If the company does seek to extend the scope of its services to include these vehicles, it will first need the agreement of the Channel Tunnel Intergovernmental Commission, acting on the advice of the independent binational Channel Tunnel Safety Authority, to its proposals.

Cliffe Airport

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) pursuant to his answers of 26 November, refs 82497 and 82787, with whom in Thurrock venue options were discussed for holding a public consultation exhibition on the Cliffe airport option; [84471]

(2) pursuant to his answers of 26 November, refs 82497 and 82787, what reasons underlay the choice of venues for public exhibitions on the Cliffe airport option. [84472]

Mr. Jamieson: No discussions were held with either individuals or organisations in Thurrock about possible venues for holding public exhibitions on the Cliffe option. As I set out in my answer on 26 November to my hon. Friend *Official Report*, column 206W, the main criteria applied in identifying suitable venues for all the exhibitions were proximity to the airport option and affected areas, venue capacity, accessibility and availability.

I also refer my hon. Friend to the statement given to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Transport on 28 November concerning the airports consultation.

Freight Policy

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to develop the use of freight facilities grants to encourage the movement of freight off roads. [83522]

Mr. Jamieson: Freight Facilities Grant (FFG), Water or rail freight facility grants are available to encourage these modes rather than road transport

On the water side, in April of this year we published a consultation document, 'Financial Assistance for Moving Freight from Road to Inland Waterway and Maritime Transport', which set out our ideas for the development of the water FFG scheme. There was broad industry agreement with our views. We will very shortly publish our final proposals. Copies of this document will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

We expect to introduce our widened water scheme by the end of 2003. As far as rail is concerned the Strategic Rail Authority, Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government who have responsibility for rail FFGs, are developing new grant schemes that will improve the targeting of support to encourage more companies to move freight by rail.

Low Cost Carriers (Aviation)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to regulate low cost carriers in the UK civil aviation industry; and if he will make a statement. [84770]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government has no plans to introduce legislation specific to low cost carriers. All UK operators are subject to the same regulations and to oversight by the Civil Aviation Authority.

London Underground

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his Answer of 25 November, *Official Report*, column 70W, what assessment he has made of the sufficiency of the long-term grant together with fare revenues to fund the proposed public private partnership. [84408]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's long-term grant offer will ensure that the Tube modernisation plans are properly funded. London Underground fares are a

matter for the Mayor. The grant offer, however, takes into consideration London Transport's planning assumption that fares would rise in line with inflation each year.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money was paid to *(a)* Deutsche Bank, *(b)* Slaughter and May and *(c)* Ernst & Young, during Railtrack Administration. [84270]

Mr. Jamieson: To date, the Department for Transport has paid £1.7million to Deutsche Bank, £5.9 million to Slaughter & May and £15.6 million to Ernst & Young in respect of fees incurred as a result of the administration of Railtrack pic. Further fee invoices have yet to be paid.

Railways (Disabled Access)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made towards identifying which facilities need to be improved by train operators to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [83455]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations made under Part V of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) set down technical requirements to be met by new trains that have entered service since 1 January 1999. The Department has also produced guidance for the industry on the application of those Regulations which provides practical advice on the application of the Regulations.

For stations, which are covered by the part III provisions of the DDA, the Strategic Rail Authority has published a Code of Practice and guidance to train operators about the preparation of Disabled Persons Protection Policies. It has invited each operator to prepare a gap analysis of the infrastructure changes which might reasonably be required to comply with the legislation. This will form the basis for the work to be done at each station.

Salisbury Bypass

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received regarding proposals for a bypass at Salisbury; [83572]

(2) what research has been *(a)* conducted by or for his Department and *(b)* assessed by his Department regarding the impact of a bypass at Salisbury; [83573]

(3) if he will make a statement on discussions his Department has had with interested parties with regard to proposals for a bypass at Salisbury; [83571]

(4) what the timetable is for construction of a bypass at Salisbury; and what the anticipated cost is. [83574]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State has received no such representations and has held no such discussion. No research has been conducted or assessed by my Department. There are no plans for a Bypass at Salisbury.

Seaports (Policing)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future policing of seaports. [82305]

Mr. Jamieson: All ports are subject to normal standards of policing provided by the relevant Home Office force. However, seven ports (Bristol, Dover, Falmouth, Felixstowe, Liverpool, Tees & Hartlepool and Tilbury) also have their own dedicated police forces. We have recently carried out a review of the management and accountability of these forces and will be issuing a discussion paper outlining our findings before the end of the year.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes have taken place to levels of staffing within the Strategic Rail Authority and its shadow predecessor; what requirements on levels of staffing have been placed on the organisation; and how the organisation has reacted to such directions. [81742]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 21 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 274W. The Authority reports on staff numbers in its annual report and accounts. Its 2001–02 report and accounts includes the following information:

Number of staff employed, excluding Board Members and Special Constables

	31 March 2002	*31 March 2001*
Strategic Rail Authority	354	284
BRB (Residuary) Ltd	52	108
Rail Passengers' Council	57	49
British Transport Police	2,302	2,215
Total	2,765	2,656

The numbers for the British Transport Police exclude Special Constables, of which there were 73 as at 31 March 2002.

In addition, there were 11 Board Members (one executive, 10 non-executive) at 31 March 2002 and 121 members of the Rail Passengers' Council and Committees.

When it was established in July 1999 there were approximately 165 members of staff in the central shadow Strategic Rail Authority.

Underground Stations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the Answer of 25 November, *Official Report*, column 74W, which London Underground stations are step free. [84769]

Mr. Jamieson: The 29 step free stations owned and operated by London Underground are:

Bermondsey
Caledonian Road
Chalfont & Latimer
Canada Water
Canary Wharf
Canning Town
Chesham

Chorleywood
Dagenham Heathway
Elm Park
Hammersmith (District & Piccadilly)
Hammersmith (Hammersmith & City)
Heathrow Terminals 123
Heathrow Terminal 4
Hillingdon
London Bridge
North Greenwich
Roding Valley
Southwark
Stanmore
Stratford
Sudbury Town
Tottenham Hale
Upney
Uxbridge
Woodford
West Finchley
Westminster
Woodside Park

In addition, the 8 step-free stations served by London Underground but managed by Train Operating Companies are:

Barking
Kew Gardens
New Cross
Olympia
Richmond
Upminster
Wimbledon
Willesden Junction

TREASURY

Advance Corporation Tax

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been raised by ACT in each year since its introduction. [84491]

Ruth Kelly: The yield from Advance Corporation Tax, which was charged on distributions by UK companies, can be found in "Annual Receipts of Inland Revenue Taxes: Table 1.2" at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax receipts/menu.html This table covers the period from the introduction of ACT in 1973 to its abolition in 1999.

Azerbaijan Pipeline

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the IMF regarding the use of funds from the Azeri Oil Fund for the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. [83727]

John Healey: Treasury Ministers have not had any contact with the IMF about the BTC pipeline. However, the IMF is working with the Azeri authorities to get Azerbaijan's PRGF programme back on track. This involves resolving a number of issues, including the Oil Fund. Once this has happened, the programme will come back for approval to the IMF Board, on which the UK is represented.

EU Budget Surplus

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has made to the European Commission in respect of the EU Budget Surplus in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and if he will make a statement. [84773]

Ruth Kelly: The Council's recommendation on discharge to be given to the Commission in respect of the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2000 included the following comment on EC budget surpluses:

> "The Council notes the persistence of significant surpluses at the end of the financial year. This tendency could affect the credibility and sound management of the Community budget.
>
> The origin of these surpluses lies in incorrect estimates of both revenues and expenditure. The Council urges the Commission, with the collaboration of member states, to make more precise estimates of sources of finance and to adapt expenditure estimates to real requirements."

The UK supported this recommendation.

The UK will press for the Council's recommendations to the European Parliament on discharge to the Commission for the 2001 budget to include use of the Supplementary and Amending Budget procedure to revise budgets in year, to prevent large surpluses materialising in future and to implement, in conjunction with member states, more realistic forecasts of projected Structural Fund payments.

EU Draft Savings Directive

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 26 November, ref 83459, if he will list the dates on which the Government have held discussions relating to compliance with the EU Draft Savings Directive with *(a)* the Cayman Islands and *(b)* Bermuda, since June 2001. [84487]

Ruth Kelly: HM Government held discussions with the Cayman Islands Government relating to the EU draft Directive on Taxation of Savings, on: 24–26 October 2001, 27 May 2002, 10 June 2002, 24 September 2002, 27 September 2002 and 26 October 2002.

HM Government held discussions with the Government of Bermuda relating to the EU draft Directive on Taxation of Savings, on: 21 May 2002, 24 September 2002, 27 September 2002.

HM Government also has regular contact on this issue with the Governor of the Cayman Islands and the Governor of Bermuda.

Euro

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce the *(a)* names and *(b)* terms of reference of the independent specialist assessors appointed to judge the tests on euro membership; and if he will make a statement. [84148]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to what I said in the House on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268.

European Union Contributions

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money the United Kingdom has paid to the European Union in total in each financial year since 1997; how much the UK has received from EU sources in each year; and how much has been returned under the terms of the Annual Rebate. [84383]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the United Kingdom's gross contribution to, abatement and public sector receipts from the EC Budget for the financial years 1997–98 to 2001–02 can be found at Table 3.1 (page 12) of the 2002 European Community Finances White Paper (Cm 5547).

Investment Ombudsman

Mr. Walter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints there have been about the Investment Ombudsman's handling of casework in the last two years; how many have been successful; and how many have failed. [84262]

Ruth Kelly: The Investment Ombudsman, together with seven other dispute resolution schemes for financial services, has been incorporated into a single financial services dispute mechanism, the Financial Ombudsman Service. The Financial Ombudsman Service assumed its full powers and responsibilities on 1 December 2001 under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.

Ahead of assuming its full powers on 1 December 2001, the Financial Ombudsman Service consolidated and revised the different procedures that the eight predecessor schemes had in place for handling complaints against themselves.

The Financial Ombudsman Service tells me that their Board appointed an Independent Assessor on 1 December 2001, and, in the period since his appointment up to 31 March 2002, he received 50 complaints. Of these, 12 were upheld (in whole or in part), 14 were rejected, eight were determined to be outside the Independent Assessor's terms of reference and 16 awaited a decision.

Since 1 April 2002 to date, the Independent Assessor has received a further 59 complaints. Of those on which he has made a decision, seven have been upheld (in whole or in part), 29 have been rejected and 15 have been determined to be outside his jurisdiction.

Landfill Tax Credit

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason recycling schemes other than pilot projects are not eligible for support under the landfill tax credit scheme. [82851]

John Healey *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* When the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme was introduced it was felt to be inappropriate for tax credits to be used for long-term projects. The Chancellor announced in the pre-Budget report on 27 November that the scheme will be reformed with approximately a third of the funding—about £50 million—continuing to be available for spending on community environment projects. The remainder will be allocated to public spending to encourage sustainable waste management.

Local Government Funding

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of central funding by the Government of *(a)* Cheshire county council, *(b)* Chester city council, *(c)* Vale Royal borough council and *(d)* Crewe and Nantwich borough council for each of the last five years; and what the average funding of city and borough county councils in England was in those years. [81034]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him by the Minister for Local Government and the Regions on 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 255–58W.

Lung Cancer

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people died as a result of lung cancer in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available. [82066]

Mr. Pearson: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is as follows:

(a) In 2001, there were 782 deaths registered in Northern Ireland attributed to lung cancer; and

(b) in 2001, in the rest of the United Kingdom there were 32,643 deaths attributed to lung cancer.

National Savings and Investments

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the target time is for response by National Savings and Investments to correspondence from members of the public; and what has been the performance of the Department in responding to letters in each of the last three months. [84466]

Ruth Kelly: National Savings and Investments sets a variety of internal targets for differing types of customer correspondence. These range from two to nine days dependant on complexity, with an average target (time from receipt of customer correspondence to despatch) of four days. For the past three months (August—October 2002) the individual targets have been met on 98.2 per cent., 99.2 per cent. and 99.8 per cent. respectively.

National Savings and Investments responded to 2.1 million customer letters or written instructions during the three months in question.

Pensions (Taxation)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the European Commission's Communication on taxation of pensions. [84400]

Ruth Kelly: In April 2001, the Commission issued a Communication on the elimination of tax obstacles to the cross-border provision of occupational pension. This encourages member states to strike a balance between their Treaty obligation to promote the internal market and their legitimate social policy aims, including occupational pensions. The Commission Communication itself has no legal status and nor does it advocate any Community legislation.

The Government recognise the Commission's efforts to make the single market operate effectively in provision of cross-border pension schemes, and is willing to work towards making this objective a reality. The Government support, in principle, removal of barriers to provision of cross-border pension schemes.

Sustainable Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has that timber provided by Jewson is obtained from sustainable sources. [83932]

Mr. Boateng: Jewson is committed to the responsible sourcing of timber. Through its parent company, Saint-Gobain Building Distribution Ltd., Jewson is a major member of the Timber Trade Federation and the WWF 95+ Group.

Saint-Gobain Building Distribution has declared that it will not source any timber prohibited under Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Jewson has been actively working toward achieving Chain of Custody for its internal timber supply sites at Hull and Newport. Hull was inspected by The Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA) in October 2002 and is awaiting its formal certification reference, while Newport is due for inspection by TRADA on 18 December 2002.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence is required by the Office of Government Commerce from companies to prove they are obtaining timber from legal and sustainable sources; and if he will make a statement. [83933]

Mr. Boateng: In line with the Government commitment made in July 2000 following a statement by the Minister for the Environment, Mr. Michael Meacher, the Office of Government Commerce, including OGCbuying.solutions, is actively seeking to ensure all timber supplied through its contracts is from legal and sustainable sources.

Wherever possible third party independent evidence from organisations such as the Forest Stewardship Council and the Timber Research and Development Association is provided. The exact form of this varies from contract to contract.

Treasury Publications

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much it cost to *(a)* publish and *(b)* distribute the explanatory leaflet that accompanied (i) the Budget and (ii) the pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [83838]

Ruth Kelly: The Budget 2002 summary leaflet cost around £72,000 to publish and around £136,000 to distribute. The pre-Budget report summary leaflet is estimated to have cost around £77,000 to publish and around £128,000 to distribute. All costs have been met from within Departmental Expenditure Limits.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Right to Buy (Agricultural Holdings Bill)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Advocate-General whether she has been asked to advise the Scottish Executive on the human rights implication of an absolute right to buy under the Agricultural Holdings Bill. [82450]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: The Advocate-General is the principal legal adviser to the Government on matters of Scots law, and it is not her role to provide legal advice to the Scottish Executive. The Scottish Executive has its own Law Officers, the Lord Advocate and Solicitor-General for Scotland.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Credit Card Debt

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to address levels of credit card debt; [80737]

(2) what discussions her Department has had with credit card companies regarding levels of credit card debt. [80738]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I recently published the results of research commissioned by the DTI into the cause, extent and effects of overindebtedness, which includes data on credit card use. The Task Force on Tackling Overindebtedness, which includes representatives from the credit industry as well as from consumer groups and Government, have considered this research as well as the results of several working groups looking at different ways of achieving more responsible borrowing and lending, including some relating to credit card facilities. I am now considering their recommendations for further action, in the light of the work we are doing on reviewing the consumer credit act, and will publish my response in due course.

Fishermen's Redundancy Scheme

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was paid out in the ex-gratia redundancy scheme for redundant fishermen in the 1990s; and how much was paid to fishermen in *(a)* Hull, *(b)* Grimsby and *(c)* Fleetwood. [83843]

Nigel Griffiths: The total amount paid out under the ex-gratia arrangements that operated between 1993 and 1995 was just under £14 million. No breakdown by port was kept at that time.

Nuclear Safeguards

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions since the 1977 Tripartite Safeguards Agreements between the UK-Euratom-IAEA came into force, that nuclear materials have been withdrawn from safeguards under the provisions of Treaty Article 14; what type and quantity of nuclear materials were involved in each case; and which withdrawals were permanent. [84135]

Nigel Griffiths: A paper containing detailed information on advance notifications of the withdrawal of nuclear material from safeguards up to the end of 1999 was placed in the Library of the House on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 1094W. Information on notifications during the period January 2000 to February 2001 was given in a written answer on 1 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 732–33W, and information covering the period February to December 2001 is available on the non-proliferation section of the DTI website www.dti.gov.uk/non-proliferation.

The website will be updated annually and data for withdrawals during 2002 will be available there early in 2003. Information on withdrawal notifications made so far during 2002 is however contained in the following table. The withdrawals involved only small quantities of nuclear material used in radiation detectors or to be used for analytical purposes or as radiological shielding. All are regarded as permanent, except that from High Technology Sources Ltd.

Summary of Advance Notifications of Withdrawals from Safeguards (January to November 2002)

Number of withdrawal notifications (by type of nuclear material involved) [1]	*Reason for withdrawal*
Two notifications involving plutonium (Pu), µg quantities	Material to be used for analytical purposes (eg samples, standards/tracers and/or instrument calibration)[2] (both from NPL Teddington)
Three notifications involving high enriched uranium (HEU), total - 6g	Material contained in radiation detectors[2] (all from Centronic Ltd.)
Four notifications involving depleted natural and low enriched uranium (DNLEU), total - 17kg	Two for material to be used for analytical purposes (eg samples, standards/tracers and/or in instrument calibration)[2] and two for material for use as radiological shielding (two from NPL Teddington and one each from UKAEA Harwell and High Technology Sources Ltd.)

[1] The tabulated information covers advance notifications of withdrawal approved by DTI and which resulted in the eventual withdrawal of nuclear material from safeguards.
[2] There are no facilities outside safeguards which manufacture material in such quantities and forms, and defence establishment requirements for these specialist materials have therefore been met by supply from civil organisations.

Arms Exports (India)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information the Government collates on the final destination of shipments of military aircraft spares shipped to India in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [81727]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

For all export licence applications, the exporter is required to provide details of the end user. The stated end user is one of the factors taken into account when assessing the application. We do not collate information on the final destination of shipments of military aircraft spares to India but our overseas posts have standing instructions to report on allegations of misuse, diversion or re-export of any UK-origin defence equipment, including aircraft spares.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what ECGD funds have been approved for purchases of products on the military list shipped to India during *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [81728]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* ECGD has provided no support for defence exports to India since 1998.

Brownfield Land (London)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will increase the target set for the London Development Agency to recover 30 hectares of vacant brownfield land per year in London. [83896]

Alan Johnson: LDA corporate plan targets are approved by the Mayor of London, in agreement with central Government. The LDA target for brownfield land for 2002–03 was 30 hectares.

I understand that the LDA has already reclaimed some 32.6 hectares of brownfield land for development this year and that it is revising its forecast for the remainder of 2002–03.

The LDA is currently preparing a new corporate plan for 2003–06 and will shortly be agreeing new targets with the Mayor and Government for the remediation of brownfield land during this corporate plan period.

Business Start-ups

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 1998 for achievement in 1999–2002, to secure an increase in the number of successful high growth business start ups. [83595]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* In 1998, a target was set to secure an increase in the number of high growth business start ups over 1999–2002. The latest figures are for 1997 (provisional) and estimate over 11,000 "high growth" firms. Provisional 1998 and final 1997 figures will be available by the end of the year. The Government made a commitment in the Competitiveness White Paper published in December 1998 to provide a new high-quality advice service designed to support 10,000 pre and start-up businesses a year in England (by the end of March 2002), who were identified as having high growth potential. The programme was managed and funded nationally by the Small Business Service but delivered locally via allocations to the 45 Business Links in England. £20 million of funding was committed between October 1999—March 2002.

By the end of March 2002 around 8,500 pre- and start-up businesses had received support. Support was provided across a variety of business sectors to people who are traditionally considered to face barriers in starting and growing a business including women, ethnic minorities and young entrepreneurs.

Financial support is continuing to Business Link Operators for the delivery of advisory services to pre- and early start businesses identified as having high growth potential. £10 million was included in the Business Link core budget allocation for 2002–2003.

Business Support Schemes

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the members of her Department's investment committee that will assume responsibility for business support schemes, together with their *(a)* corporate positions and *(b)* experience. [84158]

Ms Hewitt: Fields Wicker-Miurin will chair the Business Support Investment Committee.

Ms Wicker-Miurin is an international business executive with more than 20 years experience in the European media and financial services industries. She is Executive Director of Leaders Quest; a Non-Executive Director of United Business Media plc and of Savills plc; a member of the Nasdaq Technology Advisory Council; a Trustee of the London International Festival of Theatre, London Musici, and the Council of Tate Members; a Trustee of the Brogdale Trust; and a Council member of Kings College London, where she chairs the Audit Committee. She is also a member of the DTI's executive board.

The wider membership of the Committee has not yet been determined. It is proposed that it will comprise two to three external members drawn from the Department's new boards, a representative from the Treasury, a Regional Development Agency Chair and senior DTI officials.

Car Boot Sales

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures the Government are taking to end the illegal sale of goods at car-boot sales. [83587]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* Last year we introduced Stop Now Orders to give local authority trading standards departments, and other enforcers, stronger enforcement powers for use against a range of breaches of consumer protection legislation. We are strengthening the enforcement powers available to trading standards departments still further in the Enterprise Act 2002, which will extend the scope of Stop Now Orders when the Act comes into force next year.

Civil Nuclear Emergency Planning

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the last emergency exercise took place under the civil nuclear emergency planning programme; what the *(a)* budget and *(b)* actual cost was of the last exercise; what assessment of it took place; whether the results were made available to hon. Members; and if she will make a statement. [83656]

Mr. Wilson: The last exercise in the civil nuclear emergency planning programme took place on 7 November 2002 based on Chapelcross Power Station. Previously this year, exercises have also taken place based on Sizewell B on 25 September 2002, Hunterston B on 26 June 2002, Bradwell on 10 May 2002, Capenhurst on 26 April 2002, and Dungeness on 27 March 2002. All of these exercises were designed to test off-site arrangements and involved relevant local and national agencies. The Bradwell and Dungeness exercises were the major national exercises for 2002–03 and 2001–02 respectively.

Costs of exercises have generally been met by the individual responding organisations which see participation as part of their normal preparations to deal with an emergency. Information on budgets and costs are not collected or collated centrally, nor in many cases identified as a separate item. A report is prepared on the outcome of each exercise. Final reports on these exercises are routinely forwarded to the Libraries of the House.

Construction Industry

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support the Government has given to the British construction industry's recent focus on National Construction Week. [82730]

Mr. Wilson: National Construction Week aims to raise the profile of the construction industry to young people and seeks to increase awareness about the potential career opportunities construction has to offer. The Government welcomes this initiative and fully supports it. As Minister for Construction I attended a number of NCW 2002 events in London and Wakefield.

DTI and DfES have representatives on the NCW Steering Group. DTI's Construction Sector Unit has provided financial support for the Campaign to improve delivery and communications of NCW messages and to assist with the development of the NCW website.

The construction industry needs to attract and retain talented young people and the Government welcomes all activities that aim to raise awareness of the excellent career opportunities it has to offer.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the planned margin of excess generation plant capacity for electricity generation at peak demand for security of supply is; and if she will make a statement. [82900]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem does not set specific targets for reserve margins as it believes that the incentives in place under NETA and in the markets will provide participants with the appropriate signals for meeting customers' needs.

According to the October update of NGC's 7 Year Statement, the projected plant margin for the coming winter is 17.4 per cent. in England and Wales. However, this takes no account of some 7,000 MW of mothballed plant, a significant proportion of which could be returned to use for this winter if required. If just one quarter of the mothballed plant were to be included, the margin would reach 20 per cent.

The plant margin in Scotland is around 25–30 per cent. even with interconnectors treated as demand.

Monitoring the adequacy of generating capacity and the way that the industry is responding to market signals is one of the key tasks of the DTI-Ofgem Joint Energy Security of Supply working group, set up in July 2001.

Energy Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Energy Council held in Brussels on 25 November, what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [84004]

Mr. Wilson: I represented the UK at the EU Energy Council in Brussels on 25 November.

The Council considered several matters of interest to the United Kingdom. Chief among these was the internal market in electricity and gas on which there was agreement to full market opening by mid 2007.

During the discussion of the Gas and Electricity Directives, all member states agreed on the need for a firm date for full market opening, though one member state said that a final date should be subject to an interim review by the Commission.

The final agreement provides for the opening of the industrial and commercial market by mid 2004 and the opening of the market for all remaining consumers by mid 2007.

In discussions of the key issue of legal unbundling, the European Commission underlined that legal unbundling of distribution system operators and transmission system operators was a minimum requirement of a liberalised market while pointing out that it did not entail separate ownership of distribution and production. Some member states thought other approaches could also achieve the overall objective of market transparency and access to networks—arguing that member states should be allowed to retain measures having an equivalent effect to legal unbundling. The UK, supported by most other member states, disagreed and made it clear that legal unbundling was an essential part of the final package. The overwhelming evidence was that legal unbundling was essential to the development of a liberalised market with little evidence that alternative approaches would work as effectively.

The final agreement provide for legal unbundling of transmission system operators by mid 2004 and legal unbundling of distribution system operators by mid 2007. A Commission report published in 2006 will review the progress made towards liberalisation. It will also provide member states with the opportunity to request a derogation from the legal unbundling requirement for distribution if they can show that equivalent measures are just as effective. However, any such derogation will have to be decided by co-decision.

A Regulation on cross-border exchanges in electricity was also agreed as part of the compromise.

Revised criteria on support to projects under the Trans European Networks (TENS) energy programme were agreed.

Discussion of the EU's Intelligent Energy for Europe proposal, which provides for a new four-year programme of support for renewable energy and energy efficiency, centred on the budget. Agreement was reached on a figure of 190 meuro, a compromise between the 255 meuro sought by the European Parliament and the 150–160 meuro preferred by several member states.

Most member states supported the stated objectives of the Commission's Cogeneration proposal, which seeks to promote the cogeneration of heat and power in order to reduce energy demand as a means to both reduce dependency on external supplies of energy and contribute to the achievement of carbon savings, but thought the 50 MW upper limit on support restrictive, illogical and counterproductive, and that the proposal

involved bureaucratic and costly compliance burdens. The proposal will be taken forward by the Greek presidency.

Member states agreed on presidency conclusions on the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg.

The Commission made a presentation on its package of nuclear proposals, comprising directives on nuclear safety and waste management together with a proposal for an agreement between Euratom and Russia covering trade in nuclear materials. The Commission justified this largely on the grounds of EU enlargement and the need to reassure public opinion on safety and waste management. Although discussion had not been envisaged, several member states expressed doubts about the treaty base for the proposals, stressing the political sensitivity. One noted that the Euratom Treaty did not provide the Community with competence on nuclear safety, and challenged the proposals as unrealistic.

The Council noted Commission progress reports on the EU-Russia energy dialogue (with adoption of conclusions), the Energy Charter Treaty and the Northern Dimension.

Greece gave a presentation on its presidency priorities. It will concentrate on four main areas: security of energy sources (energy TENS and the EU's proposed oil and gas stocking directives); sustainable development (cogeneration directive and follow-up to Johannesburg); co-operation with third countries (EU-Russia, Energy Charter Treaty, Euro-Med and North Eastern Europe); and continuation of work on the nuclear package.

EU Single Market

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set by her Department in 1998, to enable transposition of 98 per cent. of EU Single Market measures into UK law by the end of 2000. [83691]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]*: The UK had transposed 97.3 per cent of EU single market measures due by November 2000. By March 2002, we had exceeded the 98 per cent. target (with 98.7 per cent). Our score in May 2002 was 98.5 per cent. and the November 2002 score was 98.6 per cent.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what ECGD funds have been approved for contracts involving *(a)* aircraft consultancy services and *(b)* Das Air since 2002. [81729]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* ECGD has no record of having provided any support in respect of contracts involving these entities.

Exports

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the targets set in 1998 for achievement in 1999–02, with *(a)* improving support for exporters, *(b)* raising the quality of service, *(c)* generating additional exports and *(d)* enhancing the business image of the UK. [83598]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* British Trade International was established in 1999 to bring together the work of my Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on international trade and investment; and to bring sharper focus to the Government's trade development activity.

Information on progress against PSA targets is published annually in the Government Expenditure Plans for British Trade International (Cm. 5415).

Fire and Safety Standards

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received regarding continuing costs relating to compliance with fire and safety standards British Standard EN 54.4 and EN 54.2. [82046]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None. Fire safety standards would normally be a matter for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Fireworks

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received during the last three months about the nuisance caused by fireworks; what steps she is taking to evaluate the extent of the nuisance; and when she will bring forward further controls on the sale and use of fireworks. [83046]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 27 November 2002]*: We have received significant representations during the last three months about firework nuisance and the situation is being monitored.

In relation to the introduction of further controls on the sale and use of fireworks, I refer my hon. Friend to an answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 17 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 889–90 announcing a package of measures to address problems caused by fireworks.

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to improve firework safety, with particular reference to the hazards of falling debris from display fireworks. [83400]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The weight of falling debris is specified in British Standard 7114 for certain types of firework. Steps are being taken to ensure that this is carried through to the forthcoming European standards for fireworks.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the fireworks manufacturers and vendors concerning the use and availability of fireworks; and if she will make a statement. [83534]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have had recent discussions with representatives of the British Fireworks Association prior to my announcement on the

17 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 889–90 of a package of measures to cut the number of firework accidents as well as noise and nuisance.

Prior to this year's Guy Fawkes night, the Department wrote to major retailers and representative bodies to urge compliance with the voluntary sales period.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 1998 by her Department for achievement in 1999–2002, to maintain the UK as the prime location in the EU for foreign direct investment. [83692]

Ms Hewitt*[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The United Nations Conference On Trade and Development (UNCTAD) World Investment Report 2002 (released in September 2002) reported that the UK is in top position in the EU for inward investment. The UK's share of inward foreign direct investment (FDI) stocks increased from 18.3 per cent at the end of 2000 to 18.8 per cent at the end of 2001.

Integrated Ocean Drilling Programme

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what decision has been made through EU Framework 6 (science funding) on the future of the Integrated Ocean Drilling Programme; what the position of the Government was; and if she will make a statement. [82080]

Ms Hewitt: The Government strongly supports the Integrated Ocean Drilling Programme, an initiative that could provide vital information on subjects such as climate change and its prediction; impacts of global change and management strategies; sub-seabed biodiversity; desertification; natural disasters and coastal zone management.

No formal decision has been taken by the European Commission on the work- programme for the thematic priority "Sustainable development, global change and ecosystems" under the Sixth Framework Programme (2002–06). However, the Government is encouraging the European Commission to ensure that the areas of activity envisaged for IODP would be eligible for funding under this thematic priority.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80772]

Mr. Timms: The core Department's internal IT system undergoes a regular cycle of security testing commensurate with its security policy.

No digital attacks were recorded in October 2002. During 2002 as a whole, one attempted attack was detected and defeated.

Manufacturing Sector

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has taken to ensure that Government contracts support UK manufacturing. [83924]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The Department is in discussion with the Treasury and the Office for Government Commerce to see how, while staying within EU procurement rules and the principle of ensuring value for money, we can make public procurement more open and accessible, especially for smaller firms. Significant progress has already been made in a number of areas of benefit to UK manufacturing, not least on construction, defence, textiles and SMEs.

In particular, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and Defence launched a new Defence Industrial Policy on 14 October 2002 (published by the Ministry of Defence as "Defence Industrial Policy (Policy Paper No. 5)").

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations she has received in the last 18 months on the timing of payment of claims to ex-miners for compensation for respiratory disease. [84284]

Mr. Wilson: The Department receives around 100 letters a month on timing of individual compensation payments. The various National Ministerial Monitoring Groups meet regularly and make representations on all aspects of both the respiratory and vibration schemes.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many successful prosecutions for failure to pay the national minimum wage have there been in Leeds. [83479]

Alan Johnson: The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 contains a number of provisions empowering enforcement officers to take civil action against non-paying employers and the Inland Revenue always uses these in the first instance.

Since the minimum wage was introduced in April 1999 the Inland Revenue has issued around 450 enforcement notices in the UK requiring employers to start paying the minimum wage and make good any arrears, and identified over £12 million in arrears. A minority of disputed cases have been considered by employment tribunals.

National minimum wage statistical data are not disaggregated to constituency level. Leeds falls into the Inland Revenue's Yorkshire/Humberside region and for the period referred to over £1.3 million in wages arrears was identified and 101 Enforcement Notices issued.

To date there have been no criminal prosecutions in relation to underpayment of the minimum wage in the UK.

OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects the UN panel of experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to present substantiated evidence regarding alleged breaches of the OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises committed by UK companies, as listed in Annex III of their report. [83730]

Ms Hewitt: The expert panel's mandate expired when it submitted its last report. There is currently no UN process or mechanism in place to follow up the report and supply the information the UK and others have requested. Discussions are under way in the UN on how to proceed. We are pressing for a resolution to this problem and continue to press for the information we have requested to be supplied as soon as possible.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W, for what reason guidance was necessary; when and by whom guidance was supplied; and if the wording was supplied by a different Government Department. [84485]

Ms Hewitt: It has been the practice, over successive Administrations, for the Cabinet Office to issue guidance to others on a range of issues, including answering parliamentary questions where appropriate.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W, if she will set out the criteria used to assess whether a parliamentary question is a round robin in respect of which guidance is expected. [84486]

Ms Hewitt: The term "round robin" is used by my Department's Parliamentary Branch to indicate to officials that the Member has tabled similarly worded questions to other Government Departments.

Regional Government Offices (Withholding Information)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidelines are given to regional government offices on withholding information from hon. Members. [84080]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Government Offices act in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Rural Gas Supply

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with OFGEM on facilitating the supply of mains gas to rural communities. [83876]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is in frequent discussions with a range of interested parties, including OFGEM, on measures to assist the fuel poor in non-gas areas, including rural areas.

Rural Post Office Network

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 25 November, *Official Report*, column 30W, on the Post Office, when she expects to announce the details of funding for the rural post office network; and what preliminary discussions she had with the European Commission on state aids clearance. [84579]

Mr. Timms: The Government are fully committed to supporting a rural network. As recommended by the Performance and Innovation Unit (in their report in June 2000: "Counter Revolution, Modernising the Post Office Network) we have asked the company to maintain the rural network and to prevent avoidable closures, in the first instance to 2006. This has been underpinned by the appointment of Rural Transfer Advisers by POL and a £2 million fund to support community post office initiatives.

As recommended by PIU the Postal Services Commission has advised us on options for supporting the rural network from 2003. Following detailed consideration of this advice and discussion with the company the Government are now committed to making a substantial financial contribution to the rural network.

£450 million will be made available (from 2003 to 2006) to help the rural post office network through the transition of benefit payment to ACT. The package will be funded from Royal Mail Holdings accumulated surpluses, as part of a package to put Royal Mail and Post Office Ltd. on a commercial footing.

This funding is designed to help Britain's rural post offices through the changes in the network's business over the next few years. It provides direct support to rural post offices, maintaining front line services in local communities. It will also give Post Office Ltd. the financial freedom to pilot new and innovative ways of providing post office services in rural areas.

The funding will be administered by Post Office Ltd. under contract to the Government. In return for this investment Post Office Ltd. will be required to maintain the rural network and prevent all avoidable closures, working through their Code of Practice for doing so in the first instance to 2006; and to provide reasonable access for all citizens to "over the counter" services in rural areas.

These services include:

Access to payment of the state pensions, tax credits and benefits

Access to cash through banking services.

Dispatch points for letters and parcels;

Postage stamp sales;

Renewal of licences (eg television);

Bill payments to utilities; Government information and services specified in service contracts between POL and individual Government Departments.

A total of £150 million will be invested in each of the next three years, all of it ring-fenced for the support of the rural network.

There will be three elements to the funding:

£66 million a year to maintain sub-postmasters income levels (by maintaining the AOP (assigned Office Payment) for rural sub-postmasters);

£79 million in the first year, and £74 million in years two and three, to fund the front line services that allow post offices to operate, including IT systems, cash delivery and direct marketing material;

A £25 million flexible fund (£5 million in the first year, rising to £10 million in the second and third years), to develop innovative, modern methods of delivering of services.

The flexible fund will enable Post Office Ltd. to:

Promote and finance innovative ways of delivering services, including compensation for the closure of offices replaced by pilots for these new ways of delivering services;

Make additional payments to sub-postmasters on a case by case basis to modernise and improve the individual business.

Our expectation is that POL will work closely with the National Federation of Sub-postmasters and other stakeholders to make best use of this fund.

We remain in dialogue with the European Commission on matters relating to Post Office Ltd., and we expect to submit a formal notification to the Commission this week. Subject to state aid clearance, funding will be in place in April 2003.

Small Firms

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the targets set in 2000 for achievement in 2001–04, to achieve *(a)* an increase in the number of people considering going into business, *(b)* an improvement in the overall productivity of small firms and *(c)* more enterprise in disadvantaged communities. [83688]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* Progress against the targets set in 2000 will be published shortly on the DTI website.

We will be able to report progress on the number of people considering going into business in early 2004, based on result from the 2003 Household Survey of Entrepreneurship.

SMEs productivity increased faster than all firms in the UK between 1999 and 2000.

Between 2000 and 2001 there was a narrowing of the gap between VAT registration rates in the most and least deprived wards in England.

Social Chapter

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many EU Directives have been brought in as a consequence of the UK signing up to the Social Chapter; and if she will list them. [84247]

Alan Johnson: The UK has transposed five Directives arising from the Social Chapter: the Parental Leave Directive, the European Works Council Directive, the Part-time Work Directive, the Burden of Proof Directive in Sex Discrimination cases and the Fixed Term Employees Directive. In addition the Information and Consultation of Employees Directive has to be transposed by March 2005.

Solar Electricity

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the case for the introduction of a support system for solar electricity by establishing a tariff that pays a higher price per KWh for solar electricity generated. [84216]

Mr. Wilson: The Renewables Obligation which the Government introduced from 1 April 2002 provides a substantial market advantage to most forms of renewable energy including solar electricity.

The possibility of a banded Obligation set at different levels for different forms of renewable energy was among possibilities explored in the consultations prior to the introduction of the Renewables Obligation, but a banded Obligation was rejected as too complex and requiring too great a degree of intervention in the renewable energy market.

The Government has, however, taken action additional to the Renewables Obligation to promote solar energy, in particular the setting up of the Major Photovoltaics (PV) Demonstration Programme on 26 March 2002. The Government has provided £20 million over three years for the first phase of this programme. Grants averaging 50 per cent. of costs are available both for small-scale applications between 0.5 and 5kWp and for medium and large scale installations up to 100kWp.

Prior to this, the Government provided £10 million for the Domestic Field Trial and Large-Scale Field Trial for Public Buildings, which will see a minimum of 500 homes and 15 larger non-residential buildings receive PV systems.

Sustainability Strategy

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what progress has been made towards the target set in 1998 for achievement in 1999 to 2002 to secure improvement in performance against a set of competitiveness indicators to be developed and published annually from 1999. [83599]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The most recent 'UK Productivity and Competitiveness Indicators' were published in October 2002. They show that there has been progress in terms of macroeconomic stability, literacy and numeracy, the competitive framework, and the science base. However, weaknesses remain in terms of intermediate skills and innovation performance. This is why the Government has implemented a series of measures to improve performance in both areas, including the R and D tax credit for large firms, extra resources for DTI innovation schemes, the Employer Training Pilots to boost skill development and the review of adult learning.

Trade Partners UK

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 2000 for achievement in 2001–04, to deliver a measurable improvement in the business performance of Trade Partners UK customers. [83686]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* Progress towards the target set in 2000 for achievement in 2001–04, to deliver a measurable improvement in the

business performance of Trade Partners UK customers will be reported in the Autumn Performance Report to be laid before Parliament in December 2002.

Value For Money

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 2000 for achievement in 2001–04, to achieve value for money improvements of 2.5 per cent. a year across the Department. [83685]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The efficiency savings achieved by my Department in 2000–01 have been calculated at £19.3 million. The figure represented a percentage saving of 4.6 per cent. of administration costs in that financial year. Savings for 2001–02 are currently being assessed and will be published in the Department's next Expenditure Plans Report in April 2003.

Water Project (Lesotho)

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what report ECGD received in 1994 about action taken by the Lesothan Government pending an audit of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project; what representations ECGD made to the Government of Lesotho; what action ECGD took; and if she will make a statement about progress with investigations involving bribery and that project. [82350]

Ms Hewitt: In December 1994 ECGD received advice that the Chief Executive of the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) and the Chief Delegate to the Joint Permanent Technical Committee (JPTC) had been asked to vacate their offices pending the outcome of a Management Audit of the LHDA. ECGD was not called upon to respond nor did it think it appropriate to make direct representations to the Government of Lesotho, as there was no suggestion of illegal acts on the part of these individuals.

As to the current situation, ECGD has contacted the companies who were members of the consortia involved in the project and which benefited from its support. We have sought and received assurances from them that they had no involvement in any unlawful conduct and we have been provided with no information to suggest that they were involved in corruption.

We are aware that there has been a guilty verdict against Acres International Canada, which we understand is subject to appeal. ECGD continues to closely monitor developments in relation to the Court action in Lesotho.

World Trade Organisation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the total cost was to the United Kingdom of sending a team to the WTO mini-ministerial meeting in Sydney on 14 November; and if she will make a statement; [83654]

(2) how many *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* staff attended the WTO mini-ministerial meeting in Sydney on 14 November; and if she will make a statement. [83653]

Ms Hewitt: The UK, along with the 14 other EU member states, was represented at the mini-ministerial by the European Commission. No UK officials or Ministers attended the mini-ministerial, so there was no cost to the United Kingdom.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the British members of the UNMOVIC inspection team in Iraq have experience with United Kingdom weapons of mass destruction. [84218]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: None. The only Briton in the current team is a biological weapons analyst from UNMOVIC headquarters in New York. This situation may alter if UNMOVIC call on other British experts on their roster.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the head of the United Nations Monitoring Verification and Inspection Commission on the availability of suitably qualified inspectors for its mission in Iraq; and whether the United Kingdom has assisted UNMOVIC with the provision of monitoring equipment. [84217]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have maintained regular contact with the Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC about preparations for the resumption of inspections in Iraq, most recently during his visit to London on 22 November. The issue of the availability of suitably qualified inspection personnel has been an integral part of our on-going dialogue.

UNMOVIC themselves are responsible for ensuring that they have all the necessary equipment to carry out effective inspections. We have, however, recently loaned them chemical agent monitoring equipment pending the delivery of goods procured commercially.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UNMOVIC inspectors in Iraq are British; and whether there are plans to increase that number. [84263]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There is one British member of the inspection team currently in Iraq.

Our most recent information is that there are 16 British citizens on the UNMOVIC inspectors' roster. It is likely that most of them will serve on future inspection teams. The staffing of individual inspection teams is a matter for UNMOVIC.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on support for Al Qaeda in Iraq. [84405]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We believe that there are Al Qaeda operatives in Iraq. Their links to the Iraqi regime are not clear. We know of no evidence of popular support for Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Austria

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Austrian election. [84185]

Mr. MacShane: The final shape of the new Austrian Government has yet to be announced. I congratulate Dr. Schussel on the success of the Austrian People's Party.

British Indian Ocean Territory

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what income from fishing licences was received in each of the last five years in the British Indian Ocean Territory. [84054]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Income from fishing licences in the past five years in the British Indian Ocean Territory is as follows:

Financial year	*Income (£)*
1997–98	1,573,094
1998–99	2,271,595
1999–2000	744,042
2000–01	1,108,072
2001–02	822,497

Against this, however, should be set the cost of management of the fishery including the fisheries protection vessel. In Financial Year 2000–01 fisheries expenditure was £1,559,678. For Financial Year 2001–02 it was £1,438,386.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the Convention of the Future of Europe. [84391]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) on 5 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 139.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals have been submitted by the Government on a Draft Constitutional Treaty of the European Union. [84384]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, as the Government's representative on the Convention on the Future of Europe, submitted to the convention a draft constitutional treaty produced by Professor Alan Dashwood of Cambridge University. Although this draft is not Government policy, it is a useful contribution to the debate. A number of other papers on specific tropics have also been submitted to the convention.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the timetable for the Convention on the Future of Europe. [84385]

Mr. MacShane: The convention remains on target to complete its work in time to report to the European Council in June 2003. The analytical phase will conclude before Christmas, with institutional questions due to be considered in the New Year. Discussions on elements of a draft constitutional text will continue, with a consolidated draft likely to appear by Easter.

Cyprus

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Cyprus regarding their accession to membership of the European Union. [83879]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I discussed Cyprus' accession to the European Union with Mr. Ioannis Kasoulides, the Cyprus Foreign Minister, when he visited London on 26 and 27 November. We welcomed Cyprus' progress in the negotiations and that it should be among those candidates which conclude negotiations next month. We made clear our strong preference for accession by a reunited island.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the UK Government will ensure that there is no division of Cyprus as part of a settlement. [84172]

Mr. MacShane: The Government welcome the UN's initiative to table a comprehensive proposal for a settlement to the Cyprus Problem.

Our aim remains for a reunited Cyprus to accede to the EU, to be able to speak with one voice internationally and to have a single international legal personality. We believe the UN proposals achieve this.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will visit Cyprus to discuss with the two communities the future of Cyprus and the EU. [84285]

Mr. MacShane: Neither I, nor the Foreign Secretary, have plans to visit Cyprus in the immediate future. But we are in very close contact with all the parties involved. The Foreign Secretary and I met the Cypriot Foreign Minister last week in London; the Foreign Secretary is visiting Ankara this week (to follow up his and the Prime Minister's meetings with the new Turkish leaders in London on 20 November and contacts at the NATO ministerial meeting in Prague); and the UK special representative for Cyprus visited Nicosia for talks with key players from both sides on 21–22 November.

The UK supports the UN Secretary-General's proposals for a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus problem. I urge both sides in Cyprus to make every effort to secure a settlement before the Copenhagen European Council on 12 December, at which key decisions on Cyprus' candidacy to the European Union will be taken.

Diego Garcia

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what applications have been received from the USA to allow construction of new aircraft facilities on Diego Garcia; and if he will make a statement. [84053]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK and US governments discussed improvements to US military facilities on Diego Garcia earlier this year. Work is underway on the construction of new aircraft facilities.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list landings on the Chagos Islands in each of the last five years that were not associated with US military activity on Diego Garcia. [84055]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We do not keep records of all individual landings on the outer islands of the Chagos Archipelago. It would be impractical to attempt to do so given that the Archipelago covers over 50,000 square kilometres of ocean.

Iran

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the US Administration regarding the potential development of weapons of mass destruction in the Islamic Republic of Iran. [83883]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has regular discussions with the American Administration and other governments on a wide range of non-proliferation issues, including in relation to Iran.

The UK is committed to combating the spread of weapons of mass destruction wherever it may occur.

Israel

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Israel regarding the illegal construction of settlements in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; and if he will make a statement. [83882]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK Government considers settlements illegal and an obstacle to peace. We have consistently called on the Israeli Government to freeze all settlement activity, including the 'natural growth' of Israeli settlements, as recommended in the Mitchell Report. Our Ambassador in Tel Aviv conveyed the Foreign Secretary's concerns expressed on 18 November in a press statement at reports of the Israeli Government considering extending settlements in Hebron to Prime Minister Sharon on 18 November.

I raised settlement activity with the Israeli Ambassador on 5 November, as did a Foreign Office official on 20 November.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in reviving negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. [84171]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Revival of these negotiations may best be achieved through determined implementation, by the parties and international community, of the roadmap now being finalised by the Quartet. We expect its publication in December and will do all we can to support its immediate implementation, leading to a final and comprehensive settlement.

Leg Irons

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures have been taken to prevent the export and manufacturing of leg irons in the UK. [84292]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As my right hon. Friend the then Foreign Secretary, announced on 28 July 1997 *Official Report*, column 65W, there is a complete ban on the export or transhipment from the UK of leg-irons, gang chains and shackles designed for the restraint of a human being. The necessary amendment to the Export of Goods Control Order came into force in December 1997.

The manufacture of leg-irons is not prohibited in the United Kingdom.

Missile Stocks

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what report he has received regarding the quantities of missile material stocks held by *(a)* each of the four nuclear weapons states party to the non-proliferation treaty, *(b)* Israel, *(c)* India, *(d)* Pakistan, *(e)* Democratic People's Republic of Korea and *(f)* Iraq. [84219]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Any national analysis of quantities of missile stocks would be heavily based on intelligence assessments. Under exemption 1*(a)* of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not Government policy to publish such information.

There are, however, unofficial assessments available from non-governmental sources, including the military balance produced by International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). Although the report by IISS will not have had access to Government information.

With regard to Iraq, the most reliable source of information on missile stocks remains the final report from UNSCOM, published in 1999.

National Missile Defence

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent approaches by the USA to the Government concerning preparation for participation in National Missile Defence. [84123]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 7 November *Official Report*, column 630W.

North Korea

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent admission by the Government of North Korea that they are in possession of weapons of mass destruction. [83881]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: North Korea has not to our knowledge explicitly stated that it possesses weapons of mass destruction. We understand that in bilateral

US/North Korean discussions on 4 October North Korean officials admitted that they had been pursuing a covert programme for the enrichment of Uranium.

The possession of nuclear weapons would be a breach of a number of North Korea's international obligations. On 17 October my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in press statement:

"This admission of a nuclear weapons programme is a serious violation of North Korea's commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, its safeguards agreement with the IAEA and the US/North Korea Agreed Framework.We are in contact with our international partners about the implications . . . World opinion is united in calling for North Korea to comply with its international obligations and to eliminate its nuclear weapons programme".

Pakistan

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Pakistan on the treatment of *(a)* Christians and *(b)* other religious minorities in that country; and if he will make a statement. [83916]

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Pakistani Government concerning the violence perpetrated against Christians and other minorities by Muslim extremists in Pakistan. [84406]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are deeply concerned about human rights violations against Christians and other minorities in Pakistan. On 15 July I raised our concerns directly with the Pakistani High Commissioner in London. Together with our EU partners, we also regularly raise our concerns with the Pakistani authorities in Islamabad. We will continue to take appropriate opportunities to urge Pakistan to pursue laws and practices which foster tolerance and mutual respect and to protect Christians and other religious minorities against discrimination, intimidation and attacks.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will urge the Pakistan Government to *(a)* take tougher action against extremists and *(b)* protect religious minorities. [84127]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had substantive discussions with President Musharraf in Islamabad and the then Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Inam ul Haque, and underlined the importance we attach to Pakistan's commitment to combat terrorism. We welcome the steps taken thus far by the Pakistani authorities to clamp down on extremists, including the banning of five groups, but remain deeply concerned about terrorist atrocities against Christian targets. Together with our EU partners, we will continue to urge Pakistan to intensify its efforts and provide better protection for Christians and other minorities.

Yemen

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Yemen regarding potential military intervention in Iraq. [83887]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had no recent discussions with the Government of Yemen, but officials have regular discussions with the Yemeni Government, including on Iraq.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what initiatives her Department is supporting in Afghanistan to help create alternative livelihoods for those growing opium poppies. [82929]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 319–20W.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the level of aid being provided to Afghanistan by the British Government. [84748]

Clare Short: At the Tokyo conference on Afghanistan's reconstruction in January, the UK pledged £200 million over five years. We have recently increased our allocation for the current financial year to £65 million for both humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, of which we have already distributed £52 million. In addition to this the UK Government have also allocated £1.8 million from the Mines Action Programme to address the problem of landmines, and a further £18 million from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool for Security Sector Reform.

Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the World Bank regarding the application for funds from the International Finance Corporation for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. [83732]

Clare Short: I have had no discussions with the World Bank about the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. No proposal for International Finance Corporation (IFC) support for the pipeline has yet been submitted to the IFC Board, of which the UK is a member. We understand that such a proposal is likely to be submitted in mid to late 2003, following completion of IFC processes for environmental and social appraisal. There may also be an informal board discussion of the project early in the new year.

Ethiopia

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with EU Ministers about trade rules with Ethiopia affecting *(a)* tariff and *(b)* EU farming subsidies, with regard to *(i)* coffee and (ii) other products. [83154]

Clare Short: At the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels on 18–19 November I took part in discussions, with fellow EU Ministers,

about the current state of the international coffee market. At this meeting I reiterated, with reference to Ethiopia as a case in point, some of the challenges facing a number of commodity dependent countries. I highlighted the need to assist these countries by promoting economic diversification as well as by delivering on CAP reform.

We recognise the damaging impact that trade-distorting subsidies have on developing countries agriculture sectors. At the Doha Ministerial meeting last year it was agreed that agriculture negotiations would aim to achieve "substantial reductions in trade-distorting domestic support". The UK fully supports these negotiations and is pressing for ambitious reform of the CAP to help the EU to participate effectively in the WTO negotiations.

While there is some preferential trade access to the EU for developing countries, more needs to be done to reduce the tariffs that the EU currently applies to a range of agricultural and non-agricultural products that offer potential alternative export trade opportunities for these countries. In order to tackle these barriers, the Doha meeting agreed that we should reduce barriers to trade in all products and particularly tariff peaks, high tariffs and tariff escalation. To ensure these negotiations result in liberalisation that benefits the world's poor, we are working to make these commitments become a reality.

Through our direct assistance programme we have worked with the private sector on a scoping study of opportunities and constraints relating to Ethiopia exporting horticultural produce to EU markets and are now planning some follow-up work.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she plans to have with EU Ministers with regard to delivering emergency aid to Ethiopia; and if she will make a statement. [83157]

Clare Short: The situation in Ethiopia was discussed briefly at the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) on 18–19 November. It will be discussed in more detail at the next GAERC on 9–10 December. Ministers agreed that we needed to monitor developments closely. I will continue to raise the matter with EU Ministers when appropriate.

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many companies have signed up to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. [84050]

Clare Short: The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative was announced by the Prime Minister at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. At that initial stage, BP, Shell, Rio Tinto, BhP Billiton and Anglo-American committed to developing a framework for transparency in the extractive industries.

Since then, we have drawn up a set of principles underpinning the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, which we will use to bring more companies and governments on board. A growing number of non-UK based oil and mining companies, industry bodies and UK asset fund managers have expressed interest in joining the multi-stakeholder coalition to devise mechanisms to make transparency a reality.

Fair Trade

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is giving to the promotion of fair trade. [84501]

Clare Short: Through the Development Awareness Fund, DFID has provided £120,000 to the Fairtrade Foundation (FTF) over three years (2001–03) in support of its efforts to target new consumers through its annual Fairtrade Fortnight campaigns. The Fortnight is designed to highlight the positive developmental impacts of fair trade and the range of fair trade products on offer.

DFID is also funding a project that addresses a recognised bottleneck within fair trade—namely the limited number of products for which international fair trade standards exist. This project (at a total cost of £300,000) aims to develop five new product standards, secure the registration of 20 new producer groups and help bring an additional 20 new fair trade products to supermarket shelves over the next two years. The target is to increase the retail value of fair trade sales in the UK to over £100 million by 2004, and by so doing, extend the benefits of fair trade to a greater number of producers in developing countries. By expanding the scale of fair trade activities, the project also aims to secure a sustainable future for the FTF, so that its core operational costs (including the cost of subsequent product development) are fully funded from the income it receives from licensees.

DFID's support to the FT movement is part of a broader programme to encourage wider adoption of ethical trading codes and standards by major transnational corporations, and continuing efforts to reform the international trading system.

Immunisation Programmes

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions her Department has had with the World Health Organisation regarding the availability of vaccinations for immunisation programmes in developing countries. [83733]

Clare Short: DFID and WHO are both board members of the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI), which is a major international initiative to enhance access to vaccines and immunisation in developing countries. The issue of vaccine supply has been extensively discussed within this forum. DFID has also held talks with Unicef, who are key players in the issue of vaccine procurement.

Overseas Aid

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the US Government calling for them to raise overseas development assistant to 0.7 per cent. of GNI. [75059]

Clare Short: I have made clear on many occasions to our own Government, to the USA and other developed countries, the need for donors to work towards the 0.7 per cent. target of official development assistance as a proportion of GNI. The Government itself has committed, in the Comprehensive Spending Review, to reaching a ratio of 0.4 per cent. by financial year 2006–07. I welcome the establishment by the USA of the Millennium Challenge Account, which will increase US development assistance by 50 per cent. in cash terms by 2006. I hope that the USA will continue to expand its development assistance programmes towards the levels of ODA/GNI achieved by most other developed countries. US Assistance has the potential to make a very significant contribution towards the reduction of poverty in the world.

Public Private Partnership

Gregory Barker: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 451W, if she will list the alternative ways her Department is exploring to achieve the objective of the CDC Public Private Partnership. [71208]

Clare Short: I refer to my Written Statement about CDC, on 28 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 36–38WS.

Southern Africa

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other aid the Government have given for the southern African crisis; when the contributions were made; what conditions were attached to such contributions; and what the recipient *(i)* countries and (ii) agencies were. [83545]

Clare Short: We have made the following commitments for the humanitarian crisis in southern Africa, since September 2001. In addition, we estimate that our contribution to commitments by the European Commission to date is approximately £21.42 million. No special conditions are attached to our contributions:

Date/country	*Description*	*Total (£ million)*
September 2001		
Zimbabwe	*NGO feeding programme*	*4.0*
Zimbabwe	*WFP emergency appeal*	*3.5*
Malawi	*Targeted inputs programme*	*3.75*
January-May 2002		
Malawi	NGO feeding programme	4.4
Malawi	Winter inputs programme	1.2
June 2002		
Zimbabwe	WFP regional emergency feeding operation	7.0
Lesotho	WFP regional emergency feeding operation	1.56
Malawi	WFP regional emergency feeding operation	5.0
Swaziland	WFP regional emergency feeding operation	0.25
Zambia	WFP regional emergency feeding operation	5.0
Zambia	NGO food for work programme	1.02
Region	WFP logistical support in Johannesburg regional hob, Lesotho and Zimbabwe	0.51
Region	SADC vulnerability assessments to improve targeting	0.2
Region	IFRC feeding HIV/AIDS affected people	2.5
Region	WHO regional health operation	0.13
Malawi	Targeted inputs programme	6.8
Zimbabwe	NGO agricultural inputs	5.0
Zimbabwe	WHO essential drugs and medicines	2.5
September 2002		
Zimbabwe	NGO feeding programme	16.0
Malawi/region	Nacala rail-link	4.1
October 2002		
Zambia	Agricultural recovery through NGOs and FAO	1.5
Zambia	Improved nutrition programme	1.2
Zambia	Support to the health sector	0.2
Region	OCHA southern African humanitarian information service	0.11
Region	Southern Africa humanitarian crisis unit for monitoring and liaison	0.5
Lesotho	Livelihoods recovery through agriculture programme	1.0
Zimbabwe	Epidemic preparedness	1.2
Zimbabwe	Improved nutrition programme	1.1
November 2002		
Region	SADC vulnerability assessments	0.2

Date/country	Description	Total (£ million)
Zambia	WFP EMOP	3.5
Lesotho	WFP EMOP	0.5
Total since September 2001	Humanitarian assistance and recovery programmes	85.43

Sudan

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to publish a country strategy paper on Sudan. [84051]

Clare Short: The UK has not had a development programme in Sudan for some years because of the on-going conflict. However, in line with progress made towards peace, we are now planning for a possible development programme in Sudan, to be implemented when there is a comprehensive agreement. This will be supported by the appropriate strategy document, drawn up after full consultation. In the first instance, this document may not be a full Country Assistance Plan, but an interim strategy, which would develop as our programme develops.

Zambia

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what help the Government is giving to Zambia to source non-GM food. [83544]

Clare Short: I have made clear to the Government of Zambia that I believe their decision on GM is ill advised and will make it more expensive and difficult to provide food to those who are starving in Zambia. We are nevertheless doing all we can to try to ensure that those in need are provided for.

DFID has provided £8.5 million to the World Food Programme to source food for the humanitarian pipeline and plans to provide £0.7 million to NGOs for the procurement and distribution of supplementary nutritional food supplies.

DFID's support to NGOs and International Organisations for conservation farming and drought recovery programmes will support the supply of non-GM food at the next harvest.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what analysis the Government has made of food availability in Zambia, in particular the availability of cassava; and whether the Government is supporting efforts to get such foods to areas affected by crop failures. [83546]

Clare Short: DFID has been working with the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to determine the availability of food for humanitarian distribution to those in most need.

Through its annual crop forecasts, GRZ has reported a surplus of cassava in the north where cassava is a major staple food for most communities. The redistribution of cassava to drought affected areas in the south is difficult for logistical, social and economic reasons. GRZ is using available funds to purchase surplus maize from the north rather than cassava, as this is the staple crop and preferred food for the south.

DFID has provided £8.5 million to the WFP to source food imports into Zambia and is working closely with GRZ and WFP to improve the distribution of food stocks existing in the country.

Zimbabwe

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has for food aid aerial drops in Zimbabwe. [83731]

Clare Short: Aerial drops are very much a measure of last resort, with risks to all involved. Food cannot be targeted reliably, and it is an expensive option. We will continue to use and strengthen the distribution systems already in place, which are working well in very difficult conditions. One of the major problems in dealing with the Zimbabwe crises is that the World Food Programme appeal for Southern Africa is only 56 per cent. funded and there is not enough food to distribute.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Arts Organisations

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many educational sessions undertaken by arts organisations took place in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [83752]

Dr. Howells: In 2001–02, arts organisations funded by the Arts Council of England and the Regional Arts Boards provided more than 200,000 education sessions and workshops for adults and children.

In addition to this, from April 2002 we are investing £40 million in Creative Partnerships. This programme is bringing together schools and cultural institutions across 16 deprived areas of England, enabling young people and their teachers to work on sustained creative projects.

There are no figures available for earlier years.

Public Service Broadcasting

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she has taken to ensure public service broadcasters sustain quality and range of output; and if she will make a statement. [83777]

Dr. Howells: The Communications White Paper affirmed the Government's commitment to maintaining the role of public service broadcasting in the digital age. The Communications Bill implements this commitment, by setting out a general public service broadcasting remit which applies to all public service broadcasters,

including the BBC. It will also establish individual public service broadcasting remits for Channel 3, Channel 4 and Channel 5, combining specific obligations for each broadcaster with a general obligation to contribute to the overall public service remit. OFCOM will report on the fulfilment of the overall public service broadcasting remit no less frequently than every five years. OFCOM will have backstop powers to intervene, up to and including removal of freedom to self-regulate, should a licensed broadcaster fail to fulfil its individual remit, or its contribution to the overall remit.

Digital Television

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment her Department has made of the impact of analogue switch-off on remote rural areas. [83718]

Dr. Howells: The Government are committed to ensuring that terrestrial analogue broadcasting signals are maintained until: everyone who can currently get the main public service broadcasting channels in analogue form can receive them on digital systems; switching to digital is an affordable option for the vast majority of people; and as a target indicator of affordability, 95 per cent. of consumers have access to digital equipment. The Digital Television Action Plan tasks the Government to determine and agree a target level of UK coverage for digital terrestrial public services post-switchover. We have consulted on this issue and are now considering our preferred spectrum planning option. Details of the consultation are available on the website: www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will exempt those in remote rural areas from the licensing fee following analogue switch-off if they are unable to receive digital television. [83719]

Dr. Howells: A television licence is required to install or use a television receiver to watch a television programme service on any platform. The licence fee is a payment for permission to receive television broadcasts and not for the service provided and is payable in full, irrespective of the use made of that service and the quality of reception. The Government have no plans to exempt viewers from the licence fee depending on the programme services available to them.

Film Industry

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what work she did with the British film industry to implement a new joint-funded strategy for the development of the industry by April 2000; and if she will make a statement. [83741]

Dr. Howells: Following a comprehensive review of film policy in 1998, my Department set up the Film Council in April 2000 to act as the Government's expert adviser on film, and help develop a sustainable British film industry. In its relatively short life, the Film Council has already put in place a number of initiatives to help deliver its goals. We also set up the Skills Investment Fund, which is administered by Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the audio-visual industries. All film productions in the UK are invited to contribute to the fund, which Skillset invests in training and skills development for the British film industry.

Heritage, Sport and Tourism

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what frameworks of support have been put in place by her Department for *(a)* heritage, *(b)* sport and *(c)* tourism; how much her Department has saved through these measures; and if she will make a statement. [83758]

Dr. Howells: We have conducted reviews of Sport England, English Heritage, and the British Tourist Authority as well as the framework of support for domestic tourism. We are now working with the bodies concerned on modernisation plans which should lead to improved value for money and significant savings, though it is not yet possible to quantify the savings. Plans for the reform of tourism structures were announced to Parliament on 13 May and 31 October 2002.

National Lottery

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department has taken to ensure devolution of decision-making for National Lottery funding grants; and if she will make a statement. [83783]

Dr. Howells: The National Lottery Act 1998 gave Lottery distributors powers to delegate funding decisions to a more local level and increasing use is being made of these powers. This Department is currently conducting a review of Lottery funding and published a consultation paper in July seeking views on how Lottery distribution could be improved and how more decisions about Lottery funding could be devolved to a local level. The Department is now looking closely at the responses received.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the maximum level is of National Lottery grant funding that can be spent by regional bodies; and if she will make a statement. [83749]

Dr. Howells: There is no statutory maximum. The Community Fund has delegated its grant-making powers to regional committees up to a limit of £1 million per grant. The Arts Council of England has delegated decisions on projects under £100,000 to its regional offices. The Heritage Lottery Fund delegates decisions to regional committees for award grants up to £1 million. Awards for All, the cross distributor awards programme supported by the good causes of heritage, arts, sports charities and the New Opportunities Fund has regional committees which make grant decisions up to a maximum award value of £5,000.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much National Lottery grant funding was spent by *(a)* region and *(b)* regional

body in the UK in *(i)* 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01 and (iv) 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [83778]

Dr. Howells: The following table sets out the total amount of Lottery funding awarded to each of the English regions and to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the relevant years. This is taken from the Department's awards database which is based on information provided by Lottery distributors.

My Department does not hold information about what proportion of this amount was awarded at a regional level.

Lottery Award Regional Totals

£

Region	*1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999*	*1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000*	*1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001*	*1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002*
East Midlands	40,805,628	40,888,110	67,376,238	70,266,135
Eastern	51,583,669	48,911,292	53,965,761	64,706,603
London	274,503,707	102,365,945	162,537,615	133,259,638
North East	48,989,336	99,211,191	46,893,035	60,494,311
North West	120,174,482	185,009,505	118,337,247	81,415,407
South East	98,523,440	78,058,630	98,869,911	90,404,696
South West	79,430,052	63,224,137	75,996,544	76,260,409
West Midlands	72,255,440	70,975,613	69,067,417	61,539,810
Yorkshire and Humberside	62,856,278	56,637,836	58,742,145	125,908,578
Northern Ireland	50,125,751	53,397,051	42,202,885	30,769,992
Scotland	104,722,477	122,940,815	87,481,599	136,634,195
Wales	64,110,173	82,798,156	63,164,837	62,103,710

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact of distributing bodies' strategic plans for National Lottery funding on *(a)* capital and revenue schemes and *(b)* variations in regions of the UK; and if she will make a statement. [83782]

Dr. Howells: Distributors were asked to indicate in their recently published strategic plans what proportion of overall awards were likely to be capital and what revenue, and to indicate levels of funding to be allocated to country, regional or local level. Distributors are asked to evaluate their achievements against the objectives set out in the plans.

These issues are also addressed in the consultation paper published by the Secretary of State on 29 July, and will be considered as part of the Review of Lottery funding.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham on 26 November, reference 83302, how many ex-servicemen's welfare organisations in West Sussex applied for National Lottery funding this year. [84767]

Mr. Caborn: The Community Fund is not aware of any such application.

Museums

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of museums' *(a)* collections care and *(b)* public access in each year since 1998; and if she will make a statement. [83735]

Dr. Howells: The museums and galleries sponsored by my Department take very seriously the duty of care for collection items in their ownership. This is reflected in the increasing percentage of collection items which are stored in the correct environmental conditions—rising from an average of 74 per cent. in 1998–99 to 78 per cent. in 2001–02. Similarly, the museums and galleries are making ever greater efforts towards heightening public accessibility—both actual and virtual—to their collections. The average percent of time open at the museums and galleries has risen from 56 per cent. in 1998–99 to 61 per cent. in 2001–02, and the number of collection items which are able to be viewed online has increased from an average of 4 per cent. in 1998–99 to 31 per cent. in 2001–02.

The following table shows data for each year between 1998–99 and 2001–02 for each of these areas across those museums and galleries sponsored by my Department.

	1998 to 1999	*1999 to 2000*	*2000 to 2001*	*2001 to2002*
Average percentage of collection items stored in the correct environmental conditions	74	74	76	78
Average percentage of time open	56	59	60	61
Average percentage of collection internet accessible	4	14	22	31

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* children, *(b)* pensioners and *(c)* others visited each major national museum funded by her Department in *(i)* 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01 and (iv) 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [83740]

Dr. Howells: Between 1998–99 and 2001–02, visitors in each of the three categories specified to all those museums and galleries sponsored by my Department have increased by: 31 per cent. for children; 32 per cent. for over 60s and 27 per cent. for others. The position for the major museums and galleries as requested is set out in the following table:

Institution	*1998 to 1999*	*1999 to 2000*	*2000 to 2001*	*2001 to 2002*
British Museum	a) 630,000	a) 616,000	a) 656,309	a) 671,505
	b) 315,000	b) 308,000	b) 323,137	b) 335,750
	c) 3,555,000	c) 3,476,000	c) 3,708,474	c) 3,802,745
Imperial War Museum	a) 352,347	a) 359,2 15	a) 398,849	a) 424,372
	b) 156,792	b) 145,757	b) 194,046	b) 174,594
	c) 864,964	c) 887,821	c)1,015,919	c) 1,008,963
National Gallery	a) 400,000	a) 398,129	a) 410,000	a) 461,000
	b) 625,000	b) 655,000	b) 626,000	b) 528,000
	c)3,275,000	c) 3,446,871	c)3,744,000	c) 3,870,000
National Maritime Museum	a) 136,367	a) 270,306	a) 272,572	a) 330,760
	b) 33,743	b) 98,506	b) 120,424	b) 137,322
	c)311,928	c)499,169	c) 399,224	c) 529,926
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	a) 257,878	a) 238,000	a) 2 11, 000	a) 246,371
	b) not available	b) 69,000	b) 69,000	b) 118,129
	c) 442,122	c) 349,000	c) 331,000	c) 458, 190
National Museum of Science and Industry	a) 914,902	a) 1,132,088	a) 1,075,032	a) 1,290,498
	b) 130,367	b) 158,918	b) 231,000	b) 263,391
	c)1,117,731	c) 1,563,994	c) 1,519,481	c) 1,566,024
Natural History Museum	a) 628,205	a) 585,389	a) 562,165	a) 693,595
	b) 35,897	b) 43,182	b) 79,767	b) 97,625
	c) 1,130,768	c)1,118,288	c) 1,049,068	c) 1.405,346
Tate	a) 394,359	a) 289,720	a) 961, 450	a) 767,609
	b) 273,017	b) 241,209	b) 839,551	b) 552,156
	c) 2,366,151	c) 1,951,593	c) 4,932,690	c) 4,190,635
Victoria and Albert Museum	a) 215,097	a) 202,894	a) 216,827	a) 291,406
	b) 126,478	b) 89,614	b) 117,044	b) 249, 192
	c) 1,118,345	c) 986,622	c) 1,048,208	c) 1,318,023

a) number of children
b) number of over 60s
c) others
Note:
'Major' has been defined as those museums and galleries in recept of £10 million or more grant in aid of the current financial year.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of her Department's efficiency review of national museums and galleries; and if she will make a statement. [83761]

Dr. Howells: The Efficiency Review of national museums and galleries sponsored by my Department, and which was undertaken in 1999–2000, has been instrumental in improving the quality of performance measures included in the funding agreements that my Department negotiates with its sponsored museums and galleries, and in the development and refinement of targets for each museum and gallery. Through the funding agreements my Department is better able to assess the performance of sponsored museums and galleries in the delivery of key Government priorities.

National Stadium

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the Wembley project and the funding programme for the project. [84060]

Mr. Caborn: Financial close on the Football Association's English National Stadium project at Wembley was achieved on 26 September and demolition of the existing stadium commenced on 30 September. Full details of the National Stadium project's costs and funding are set out in the final report of the English National Stadium Review led by Patrick Carter, copies of which were placed in the House Library on 16 October and which can be downloaded from my Department's website at http://www.culture.gov.uk/sport/.

Art (New Opportunities)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many new opportunities to experience the arts were introduced in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [83748]

Dr. Howells: We have contacted the Arts Council of England to request the information required, and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of her letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Performing Arts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many new visitors attended the performing arts in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [83737]

Dr. Howells: We have contacted the Arts Council of England to request the information required, and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of her letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sports Budget

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Department's Exchequer budget for sport and related projects was in each of the last three years; how much underspend there was in the Exchequer budget; and how much funding was carried over under end-year flexibility arrangements. [80963]

Mr. Caborn: The information the hon. Gentleman requested is as follows:

£000

	Budget	*Spend*	*Underspend*
1999–2000	51,958	51,593	365
2000–01	52,609	52,571	38
2001–02	68,829	63,898	4,931

Since 2000–01 the Department has also jointly provided funding for Spaces for Sport and Art.

The Department's contribution is as follows:

£000

Year	*Budget*	*Spend*	*Underspend*
2000–01	15,000	13	14,987
2001–02	60,000	579	59,421

Amounts eligible for End Year Flexibility (EYF) carry forward are based on unspent Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) provision less, where appropriate, DEL Reserve claims agreed during the course of the year. Resource underspend from 1999–2000 and 2000–01 was carried forward in full; but as published in the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper 2001–02 (CM5574) the Department's Resource EYF carry forward from that year, other than for administration costs, is nil. However, the Department is covering UK Sport and Sport England's Resource underspend from current year provision.

All the Department's unspent Capital DEL is available to carry forward. This includes Spaces for Sport and Art underspend.

Tourism

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of her Department's promotion of quality tourism development which *(a)* is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable and *(b)* supports the Government's employment objectives; and if she will make a statement. [83744]

Dr. Howells: Good quality accommodation, attractions and service are all vital pre-requisites for a flourishing, sustainable tourism industry. The existing accommodation quality assurance schemes are good but have insufficient impact on the consumer, and so we intend shortly to commission a review of quality to address that. We are already pursuing our Fitness for Purpose initiative to tackle quality issues at less satisfactory premises, to provide assurance to customers that sub-standard accommodation will not be tolerated. We are also working with other Departments on establishing a Sector Skills Council for the tourism, hospitality and leisure sector, and in increasing the number of New Deal clients who find work in the hospitality industry. This will help build a more positive image of the sector and attract and retain good quality staff.

Underwater Archaeology

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department has taken to transfer responsibility for underwater archaeology; and if she will make a statement. [83754]

Dr. Howells: The National Heritage Act 2002 extended English Heritage's powers, with effect from 1 July 2002, to include ancient monuments in, on, or under the seabed within the seaward limits of the UK territorial waters adjacent to England and gives English Heritage powers to provide assistance in relation to wrecks protected under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 which are situated within the seaward limits of UK territorial waters adjacent to England.

Section 3 of the National Heritage Act 2002 gives the Secretary of State power to direct English Heritage to exercise administrative functions on her behalf in relation to ancient monuments in, on or under the seabed within the seaward limits of the UK territorial waters. DCMS is in the process of drafting directions, in consultation with Historic Scotland, Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland and English Heritage. Formal transfer of responsibility is expected to take place shortly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

IFI/Richardsons Plant

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he plans to investigate the closure of the IFI/Richardsons Plant in Belfast; and if he will make a statement. [83001]

Mr. Pearson: I have taken a keen interest in the situation and have asked Invest NI to work with the liquidator to try to identify an investor for the Belfast factory. I have also met with representatives of the shareholders, the Irish Government and ICI, to stress the need for the Belfast workers to be treated in a fair and equitable manner following the closure and to secure their entitlements. In addition, officials from the Department for Employment and Learning have been in close contact with the Belfast employees to ensure that they are kept fully aware of their entitlements.

Asbestos

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the extent of asbestos used in the construction of school buildings. [84457]

Jane Kennedy: At this time full details of schools buildings that have asbestos are not available. However, in accordance with the new Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (which come into force in 2004),

Education and Library Boards will be undertaking a phased programme of audits across the schools' estate to determine the extent of asbestos in schools and other premises.

Belfast City Hospital

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken to ensure there are enough specialised nursing staff in the neurology department of the Belfast city hospital. [83041]

Mr. Browne: The Royal hospitals trust manages neurology services with a limited service provided to the outpatient department of the Belfast city hospital. This includes specific clinics for multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease and a muscle clinic.

£300,000 has been provided from Priorities for Action moneys to support regional neurology services throughout NI and this included £25,000 for a specialist epilepsy nurse for outpatient activity.

Also included was a sum of £28,000 to support six outpatient clinics-two in NHSSB, two in SHSSB and two in EHSSB.

A sum of £100,000 was recently allocated to support multiple sclerosis nursing infrastructure in NI.

Children's Commissioner

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will lay before Parliament draft legislation for *(a)* the establishment of a Children's Commissioner in Northern Ireland and *(b)* housing. [83104]

Mr. Paul Murphy: A draft Housing Support Services Order was laid on 15 November. It is expected that draft Orders on a Commissioner for Children and Young People and on Housing should be laid early in the New Year.

Down Lisburn Trust (Dermatology)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland *(a)* how many people are waiting for an appointment for the dermatology clinic in the Down Lisburn trust; *(b)* what the average waiting time for an appointment is; *(c)* what the longest time an individual has waited for an appointment is; and *(d)* what further measures will be taken to reduce waiting times for an appointment with the dermatologists in the trust. [83709]

Mr. Browne: The information is as follows:

(a) 654 patients are waiting for an appointment at the dermatology clinics in Down Lisburn trust.

(b) It is not possible to provide an average waiting time for appointment as this depends on the clinical priority of the patient. However, urgent cases are normally seen within six weeks of referral.

(c) The longest time an individual has waited for an appointment is two years.

(d) A number of measures are being taken to improve dermatology services in the Down Lisburn trust. These include the monitoring and redistribution of patients on consultants' waiting lists; the setting up of a dermatology sub-group of the Eastern Health and Social Services Board Cancer Implementation Group; and a current review of consultant workloads and waiting lists across the board area.

Executive Programme Funds

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how Executive Programme Funds will be administered following the suspension of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. [83103]

Mr. Pearson: The Executive Programme Funds will continue to be administered in accordance with the procedures previously agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive. There are no plans to change the established arrangements.

Fire Service

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who will be responsible during direct rule for deciding the proportion or level of contribution from Northern Ireland rates for the Fire Service. [84470]

Mr. Pearson: In Northern Ireland the Regional Rate, for which the Department of Finance and Personnel is responsible, is not dedicated to specific services. There is no fixed amount in the rates that can be identified as contributing directly towards the cost of providing particular services such as the fire service.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the institutional relationship of the employers' side of the negotiating body for Fire Service personnel within Northern Ireland with the employers' side of the negotiating body involved in the Fire Brigade dispute. [84473]

Mr. Browne: The Joint Standing Sub Committee (JSSC) of the National Joint Council is the negotiating body directly involved in the current dispute. A Member of the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland has observer status during the JSSC Employers discussions, but is not involved in the direct negotiations with the FBU.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who constitutes the employers' side of the negotiating machinery for the Fire Service of Northern Ireland; and who appoints them. [84475]

Mr. Browne: The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland have two seats on the National Joint Council. The Fire Authority does not have seats on the Joint Standing Sub Committee, which negotiates pay and conditions of service.

The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland representatives are elected by the Board at the Authority's Annual General Meeting. The current representatives are Mrs. Rosemary Craig and Professor James Shields.

Hospital Services (Belfast)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what work has been carried out to assess the change in demand for services at the Belfast City and Royal Victoria hospitals if the proposals to downgrade services at Whiteabbey and the Mater hospitals in North Belfast are proceeded with. [84516]

Mr. Browne: The proposals set out in the consultation paper. "Developing Better Services: Modernising Hospitals and Reforming Structures", were based on a preliminary analysis of the current levels of demand and an assessment of the most effective profile of services to ensure safe services and improved outcomes in the future. Following consideration of the responses to the consultation paper, there will be a detailed assessment of the capacity implications of the decisions which I will then be taking.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure the retention of accident and emergency care at Whiteabbey hospital in North Belfast. [84517]

Mr. Browne: The Department is currently considering the responses to the proposals in the consultation paper, "Developing Better Services: Modernising Hospitals and Reforming Structures", which included proposals for future services at Whiteabbey hospital. I hope to reach final decisions on the proposals for modernising hospitals in January.

Planning Applications

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with reference to Planning Applications A/1999/0879/0, A/2001/0661/RM and A/2002/0167/RM, for what reason the Planning Service in Northern Ireland did not act to require this new development to comply with original planning permission guidelines as far as it impinges on the rights and privacy of the existing residents. [83793]

Angela Smith: An Outline Planning Application for 2 Detached Dwellings at the rear of 4 Steelstown Road, Londonderry was received by the Department on 12 November 1999. Planning applications may be in outline form, where the general principle of development is being tested and where full details of development are submitted at a later date by way of a Reserved Matters Application; or in the form of a full application where full details of siting, design, external appearance, means of access and landscaping are submitted. This Outline Planning application was approved on 9 March 2000.

A Reserved Matters Application was received on 12 June 2001. A Reserved Matters Application is a detailed proposal where the full details of siting, design, external appearance, means of access and landscaping are submitted. This application was approved on 5 February 2002, with a condition that the existing mature trees on the site boundary be retained. There were further conditions regarding planting proposals.

In early February the Department became aware that work had commenced on site which was not strictly in accordance with the planning approval. A further reserved matters application was received on the 19 February 2002. Following discussions between planning officials, the developer and local residents further revisions to the plans were received on the 28 May 2002 which accurately reflected the detail of the development that had occurred.

Planning Service is satisfied that the development, as built, is acceptable in planning terms. As you are aware the Planning Service brought the application to Derry City Council on 5 November 2002 with an opinion to approve. Planning Service agreed that a further period of 10 days would be allowed for any further representations to be made.

Further representations have, since been received and no decision will be made until these representations have been fully and carefully considered

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement regarding his policy on protecting the rights of existing residents when the Planning Service are considering granting planning approval for new housing developments. [83794]

Mr. Andrew Smith: When considering proposals for new housing development in existing residential areas, the Planning Service of the Department of the Environment pays particular attention to their potential impact on the neighbourhood to ensure that appreciable harm is not caused by such development to the amenities enjoyed by existing residents and to the existing character and environmental quality of the area.

Since the introduction of the Quality Initiative in 1996 to promote better quality and more sustainable housing development, a comprehensive range of policy and guidance documents has been put in place to raise the quality of new residential development generally, with particular attention being paid to ensuring that the drive to promote more housing in existing urban areas does not lead to any significantdiminution of the quality of life in established residential areas.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) published in September 2001 provides the overarching strategic framework for the formulation of development plans and planning policy in Northern Ireland.

In support of urban renaissance and more sustainable forms of development, the RDS sets an ambitious regional target of 60 per cent. for the share of urban housing to be provided within urban limits, and seeks to encourage an increase in the density of urban housing appropriate in scale and design to the cities and towns of Northern Ireland.

However, the RDS stresses that the aim of achieving an overall increase in town densities must not be interpreted as a broad mandate to try and force overdeveloped and unsympathetic housing schemes into established residential areas. In such areas the overriding objective has to be to avoid any significant erosion of the environmental quality, amenity and privacy enjoyed by existing residents.

In established residential areas, the RDS encourages harmonious housing schemes of various densities in accordance with a local community focused approach sensitive in design terms to the people living in the existing neighbourhood, taking account of the Strategy's Local Development Guidelines and Planning Policy Statement 7 Quality Residential Environments.

Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7), Quality Residential Environment published in June 2001, clearly states that in established residential areas, proposals for housing development will not be permitted where they would result in unacceptable damage to the local character, environmental quality or

residential amenity of these areas. All proposals for residential development are expected to take full account of the surrounding context, particularly those proposals for infill housing, backland development or redevelopment schemes in established residential areas. PPS 7 points out that in such areas great care is needed to ensure that the individual orcumulative effects of such development proposals do not significantly erode character and amenity, for example by inappropriate design or overdevelopment. The Department will need to be satisfied in considering such proposals that the design and layout will not create conflict with adjacent housing areas and that there is no unacceptable adverse effect on existing or proposed properties in terms ofoverlooking, loss of light, overshadowing, noise or other disturbance.

The Department's Supplementary Planning Guidance, 'Creating Places—achieving quality in residential developments' (May 2000) and Development Control Advice Note 8 'Housing in Existing Urban Areas' (June 2002), provides detailed design advice and guidelines intended to amplify and clarify policy guidance wherenecessary. Both documents emphasise the importance of a design-led approach to create imaginative, safe and attractive housing. In existing urban areas this embraces the philosophy of working with context, 'fitting' development in with the prevailing character and appearance of the neighbourhood and ensuring that infill, backland and redevelopment proposals are successfully integrated with existing housing without appreciable harm to the character and amenity their residents currently enjoy.

The above documents provide clear and robust policies and guidance for developers in formulating development proposals for housing in established residential areas and clearly set out the criteria under which such proposals will be assessed by the Planning Service. The Planning Service will seek whatever additional information is necessary to properly assess and determine such planning applications, the overall objective being that high quality and sustainable housing can be provided in existing residential areas without detriment to the residents of those areas.

MV Princess Victoria

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what proposals the Northern Ireland Office has to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the sinking of the Princess Victoria off the coast of County Antrim. [85032]

Angela Smith: The Department for Regional Development has agreed outline arrangements for a small commemorative event at Donaghadee Harbour where survivors were landed by the local lifeboat. Ards Borough Council will erect a memorial plaque adjacent to the RNLI berth and the Department plans to erect a flagpole resembling the foremast of the MV Princess Victoria. These events will complement local church services, the laying of wreaths at sea by the Donaghadee and Campbeltown lifeboats and a commemorative event planned by Larne Borough Council, Larne being the port to which the MV Princess Victoria was steaming when she sank.

Regional Museums

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the joint response from the Department for the Environment and Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to the Review of Regional Museums; and when he will issue a statement on this matter. [84125]

Angela Smith: Officials in the Departments of Environment and Culture, Arts and Leisure are currently working on a joint response to the Local Museums and Heritage Review.

I have asked that the joint response should be presented to me as quickly as possible, after which I want to decide how to proceed.

Telecommunications Mast

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to remove the disused telecommunications mast located on property at Killinchy Primary School. [84452]

Jane Kennedy: I understand from the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that it is now its policy not to have telecommunication masts on school property. The contract for the mast at Killinchy Primary School was terminated but, despite repeated requests, the owners have so far failed to have the mast removed. The Board has recently been advised that, contrary to previous assurances, the equipment is still active. The Board is now proposing to initiate immediate legal action to compel the owners to remove the mast.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Children's Fund Projects

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the mental health effects on children of projects funded by the Children's Fund. [83171]

Mr. Denham: The latest available statistics show that of the 584 Children's Fund services funded during April–June 2002 in Wave 1 areas, 73 services were explicitly targeted at children with mental health difficulties. Of these 73 services, 44 provided statistics on the number of children they had regularly supported over this quarter—with an average of 85 children regularly supported in each service.

The CYPU have not so far conducted an assessment of the mental health effects on children of projects funded by the Children's Fund. However, as part of the national evaluation, there will be an assessment of impact of the Children's Fund on a number of key outcomes, including impacts on children's mental health. Furthermore, each of the 149 partnerships in England are allowed to conduct their own local evaluations, and another task of the national evaluation will be to draw together key findings from these local evaluations, including any findings in relation to impacts on mental health.

Adult Learning

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much financial support the Government has given, in the past three years, for initiatives to promote lifelong learning and adult education to *(a)* the BBC, *(b)* ITV companies, *(c)* Channel 4, *(d)* Channel 5 and *(e)* independent local radio stations. [82886]

Margaret Hodge: The direct spending of my Department over the last three years to promote lifelong learning and adult education has been:

£000

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
BBC	93	64	123
ITV companies	915	4,994	7,767
Channel 4	336	2,037	3,747
Channel 5	96	562	1,113
Independent local radio stations	—	—	—

These figures do not include promotional activity undertaken by Non Departmental Public Bodies as we hold no central records of their activity in this area.

Advanced School Programme

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the New Advanced School programme for secondary schools and how it differs from the Beacon School programme; and whether existing beacon schools will automatically transfer to advanced school status. [80992]

Mr. Miliband: The proposed Advanced schools programme intends to build on the success of the Beacon programme by ensuring the further development of enhanced collaborative partnerships and innovative practice. Guidance was posted on the Diversity website on 23 October setting out the scheme and a notice inviting applications was placed in the November issue of Spectrum, a departmental information source for schools.

It is our intention that any existing secondary Beacon school would be able to apply to transfer to the new programme but would need to meet the criteria in the same way as any other school. The Beacon programme will be phased out in the secondary sector by 2005. Those secondary schools due to renew their status from September 2003 will be given the opportunity to do so until August 2004.

Anti-Semitism

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to deal with anti-Semitism on university campuses and in student unions; and if he will make a statement. [82954]

Margaret Hodge: Speech, and behaviour generally, whether on campus or elsewhere, must be within the requirements of the law, including common law. Common law provides a remedy against actions likely to cause a breach of the peace. Further, the Public Order Act 1986 makes certain types of unlawful speech a criminal offence. This includes the offences of using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour intended or likely to stir up racial hatred. The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act introduced last year increased the maximum penalty for inciting racial hatred from two years to seven years imprisonment. It also extended racially aggravated offences to cover offences aggravated by religious hostility.

Chief Constables are responsible for maintaining law and order on campus and elsewhere. They will, of course, co-operate with university Vice-Chancellors and governing bodies to do so.

Under the Education Act 1994, the governing body of an higher education institution is responsible for taking such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that any students' union operates in a fair and democratic manner.

The Government is committed to tackling anti-Semitism and racism in Britain wherever it exists. We will continue to work closely with the police, the Community Security Trust and community leaders to do so.

Asylum Seekers (Education)

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assessment his Department as made of the implications of an education separate from their local community schools for asylum seeker children; [83424]

(2) what systems will be put in place to ensure that the standard of education in accommodation centres for asylum seekers will be equivalent to those in mainstream schools; [83432]

(3) what representations he has received from teaching professionals on the proposed education plans in accommodation centres for asylum seekers. [83433]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Government's policy to educate the children of some destitute asylum seekers within accommodation centres provides an opportunity to deliver a specialised and rich curriculum tailored to the needs of the children within a safe environment. It also provides a good induction into the British education system for those who will remain and a valuable experience for those who will not.

We are working closely with Home Office colleagues to ensure this and we have been talking to the Local Government Association and LEAs in the areas where accommodation centres are planned. The education provision in the accommodation centres will be inspected by Ofsted against similar criteria to those used in a mainstream school to ensure that the standard is equivalent.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland met with representatives of the NASUWT and NUT on 4 November and has since received a letter from the NASUWT taking up her offer to continue discussions to ensure effective implementation of the education provisions of the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act.

Breakfast Clubs

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial support his Department has given to breakfast clubs in schools; and if he will make a statement. [84076]

Mr. Miliband: Breakfast clubs are available in many schools as part of study support or child care provision. They can provide learning opportunities for pupils, promote healthy eating, and help working parents by offering a safe and stimulating environment for their children. In "Investment for Reform" we said that by 2006 all schools should be providing breakfast clubs or other forms of study support.

My Department assists breakfast clubs primarily through the Standards Fund grant for study support: £75 million in 2002–03. Schools can fund them too from programmes such as the Pupil Learning Credits pilot, child care, or Education Action Zones. Other Government Departments, the New Opportunities Fund, voluntary organisations and commercial sponsors also support them. Education Extra, a national charity for out-of-school-hours learning grant-aided by DfES, runs a Breakfast Club Award Scheme sponsored by Kellogg's and helps with clubs' setting-up costs.

Children and Young Persons Unit

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what projects he is funding within his Children and Young Persons Unit; whether these projects are on time and on budget; and if he will make a statement. [82114]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* A full list of the individual projects funded by the Unit could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Children and Young People's Unit has a total budget of £850 million for the period 2001–02 to 2005–06. The bulk of the Unit's funding goes towards a range of local projects distributed as follows:

(a) Children's Fund Programmes bringing together local voluntary organisations, statutory agencies, community and faith groups, children and young people and their families, to deliver a range of locally co-ordinated preventive services for 5–13 year olds at risk.

(b) the Local Network Fund for Children and Young People enabling community groups to provide activities and services for children and young people experiencing poverty and lack of opportunity.

(c) the Identification, Referral and Tracking project, in the context of work with local authorities on Local Preventive Strategies, to support all local authorities in developing systems to ensure that children and young people at risk do not fall through the gaps in services.

(d) smaller scale initiatives for specific purposes, such as recent development work to test approaches to preventing young people running away and supporting them when they do; and community cohesion work with children from seven cities around the country to discuss what it means to be British.

The Unit also holds a small central budget for research and evaluation requirements, communications and the effective dissemination of emerging good practice.

Projects within the Unit are being rolled out at a pace which will enable them to spend their budgets in full by 2005–06.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the estimated cost is to his Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81886]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Any additional costs to my Department as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travel and other costs.

Deaf Children (Education)

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what steps are being taken to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing children can access the deaf accommodation model of inclusion in education; [83160]

(2) what steps are being taken on behalf of deaf and hard of hearing children to ensure that they are placed in mainstream schools with a significant deaf peer group. [83161]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Local education authorities make provision for deaf and hearing impaired children in a range of settings appropriate to their own needs and preferences and the preferences of their parents. Placement can be in a mainstream class, with or without a learning resource base for the deaf and hearing impaired, a maintained special school, or an independent or non-maintained special school.

Specialist teachers and support staff play a key role in ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils. The law requires specialist teachers of the deaf to have an additional qualification equivalent to the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People Stage 1 qualification. Tools such as the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education's Index for Inclusion, which was sent to all schools in April 2000, can be used to identify barriers to learning and participation. Early indications are that schools adopting this sort of approach have seen standards rise for all their pupils.

Suitable accommodation must be available. The Department has already published Building Bulletin 94, Inclusive School Design, which provides guidance on accommodating pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in mainstream schools. Consultations are currently taking place on a further building bulletin focusing on the acoustic design of schools.

Degrees

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what discussions he has had with private institutions or organisations on the award of degrees; [83872]

(2) what recent representations he has had from private organisations on the award of degrees. [83874]

Margaret Hodge: I have had no meetings or discussions with private institutions or organisations on the award of degrees. The Privy Council is responsible for the granting of degree awarding powers and I can confirm that they have received applications from private organisations for the granting of degree awarding powers which are currently being considered under the Quality Assurance Agency's process of scrutiny.

Early School Leavers

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the rate of early school leavers was in England in the last year for which figures are available. [83200]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* By law, children in England should not leave full-time education in school until the last Friday in June in the school year in which a child reaches 16. Figures are not available centrally on those that do leave early, for whatever reason. Some indication can be obtained by comparing pupil numbers from the same cohort at ages 14 and 15 in successive Annual Schools Censuses. The difference between the numbers of pupils aged 14 in 2001 and aged 15 in 2002 registered at all schools in England as shown by the Department's Annual Schools' Census was 9,600—a fall of 1.6 per cent. However, this comparison will be affected by the net impact of population migration, differences in the numbers of pupils educated other than at school and those on remand or in Young Offenders institutions; it will also exclude pupils leaving school after the Census date (in January) but before the regulations entitle them to do so (in June).

Education Funding

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the new system for funding schools will require local LEAs to spend at SSA level; whether it will link the ACA factor to real salary costs in schools; and whether it will narrow the funding gap between the highest and lowest funded schools. [82428]

Mr. Miliband: LEAs cannot be required to spend at the level of their assessment. We will expect them to take that level into account, but our principal expectation will be that they should pass on increases in schools funding to their schools budgets. The top up for Area Costs is designed to take account of pay costs and also the extra funding needed for recruitment and retention. The new system will be based on evidence of need.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on when the disparity in funding per student in higher and further education will be ended. [82690]

Margaret Hodge: We have no plans to equalise unit funding per student for Higher Education and Further Education. Different funding levels reflect the differences between the costs of higher education and further education courses. We have announced significant additional resources for FE over the next three years to meet the needs of the sector and will be setting out our strategy and the outcomes of the spending review for HE in January.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many young people have received the education maintenance allowance in north-east Lincolnshire. [82920]

Margaret Hodge: The number of students in North East Lincolnshire receiving an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in each academic year, since the pilot began, is set out in the table.

Academic year	*Number of students receiving EMA payments*
2000–01	733
2001–02	[1]1,344
2002–03	[1]1,041

[1] Includes students who started courses in the previous year.

Exclusions

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils have been excluded from *(a)* state secondary schools and *(b)* state primary schools in *(i)* the Ribble Valley and Fulwood, (ii) Lancashire and (iii) the north-west of England in each of the last five years. [82378]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information on permanent exclusions is shown in the following table. Information on fixed term exclusions is not held centrally.

Number of permanent exclusions in maintained primary and secondary schools [1]

1996–97

	Maintained primary		*Maintained secondary*	
	Number of exclusions	*Percentage of the school population*[2]	*Number of exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population*[2]
Ribble Valley	1	0.01	25	0.33
Lancashire	42	0.03	353	0.40
North West	234	0.03	1,649	0.38
England	1,573	0.04	10,463	0.34

1997–98

	Maintained primary		*Maintained secondary*	
	Number of exclusions	*Percentage of the school population*[2]	*Number of exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population*[2]
Ribble Valley	1	0.01	21	0.27
Lancashire	43	0.04	240	0.33
North West	265	0.04	1,530	0.34
England	1,539	0.03	10,187	0.33

1998–99

	Maintained primary		*Maintained secondary*	
	Number of exclusions	*Percentage of the school population*[2]	*Number of exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population*[2]
Ribble Valley	0	0.0	14	0.18
Lancashire	32	0.03	209	0.29
North West	225	0.03	1,324	0.29
England	1,366	0.03	8,636	0.28

1999–2000

	Maintained primary		*Maintained secondary*	
	Number of exclusions	*Percentage of the school population*[2]	*Number of exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population*[2]
Ribble Valley	1	0.01	6	0.07
Lancashire	19	0.02	144	0.19
North West[3]	194	0.03	1,072	0.24
England[3]	1,226	0.03	6,713	0.21

	2000–01			
	Maintained primary		Maintained secondary	
	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[2]	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[2]
Ribble Valley	2	0.02	21	0.25
Lancashire	34	0.03	207	0.28
North West[3]	204	0.03	1,139	0.25
England[3]	1,436	0.03	7,305	0.23

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) pupils in primary and secondary schools.
[3] Permanent exclusions for 2000/01 are estimated as a number of local education authorities have not confirmed the data for their schools.
Source:
Annual Schools Census

Free School Meals

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schoolchildren in Leeds West are in receipt of free school meals; and what this number is as a percentage of the total. [81490]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Maintained nursery, primary[1], secondary[1] and all special schools: school meal arrangements
January 2002
By Leeds West Parliamentary Constituency and England

	Maintained nursery and primary schools[2]			Maintained secondary schools[2]			All special schools[2,3]		
	Number on roll	Number known to be eligible for free meals	Percentage known to be eligible for free meals	Number on roll	Number known to be eligible for free meals	Percentage known to be eligible for free meals	Number on roll	Number known to be eligible for free meals	Percentage known to be eligible for free meals
England	4,405,639	754,511	17.1	3,260,931	486,353	14.9	87,734	33,695	38.3
Leeds West	7,932	1,999	25.2	4,093	1,007	24.6	193	80	41.5

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] Excludes boarding pupils.
[3] Excludes pupils who are also registered at a mainstream school.

Further Education Funding

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the unit costs are of educating students in further education in *(a)* vocational and *(b)* academic courses in England. [83935]

Margaret Hodge: In 2002–03 we plan for total funding of £4,090 per full time equivalent student in further education sector colleges.

This figure is for students on all courses, as the Department does not allocate money separately for vocational and academic courses. The figure includes additional funds for 2002–03 announced in June for the 'Success for All' strategy, and in September for the Teaching Pay Initiative and the College Pay Initiative.

Graduate Incomes

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the total income over the average working life of *(a)* graduates and *(b)* non-graduates; and what the sources are for this information. [82773]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Using Labour Force Survey data from the four quarters autumn 2000 to summer 2001, we have estimated that, on average, graduates whose highest qualification is a first degree earn around £1,075,000 over a working life. This figure relates to Great Britain, and is based on gross earnings from main job. The equivalent figure for graduates and non-graduates, collectively, is around £675,000. Average lifetime earnings for only non-graduates would be significantly lower than this figure.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the difference between the incomes of non-graduates and graduates in the five years after graduation. [82947]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The information requested is not available.

However, using Labour Force Survey data from the four quarters autumn 2000 to summer 2001, we estimate that first-degree graduates earn on average around £73,000 over the five years between the ages of 20 to 24 years inclusive. This figure relates to Great Britain, and is adjusted to take into account the likelihood of being in employment. The equivalent figure for graduates and non-graduates, collectively, is around £55,000. Average earnings over the ages of 20 to 24 years for only non-graduates would be significantly lower than this figure.

Graduates (Gender Balance)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what gender balance is in graduates of mathematics, science and technology in England. [83201]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The latest available information is shown in the table.

First degree graduates in mathematics, science and technology—higher education institutions in England 2000–01

	Numbers			Percentages	
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Medicine and dentistry	2,446	2,254	4,700	52	48
Subjects allied to medicine[1]	12,428	3,159	15,587	80	20
Biological sciences	9,260	5,393	14,653	63	37

First degree graduates in mathematics, science and technology—higher education institutions in England 2000–01

	Numbers			Percentages	
	Female	*Male*	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*
[1]Veterinary science	300	127	427	70	30
Agriculture and related subjects	1,091	715	1,806	60	40
Physical sciences	4,262	6,620	10,882	39	61
Mathematical sciences	1,442	2,185	3,627	40	60
Computer science	2,449	8,655	11,104	22	78
Engineering and technology	2,623	14,379	17,002	15	85
Architecture, building and planning	1,277	3,564	4,841	26	74
Total	37,578	47,051	84,629	44	56

[1] Includes nursing.

Literacy Levels

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the levels of literacy in coalfield areas are, and how this compares with the national average for citizens born in the United Kingdom. [82248]

Mr. Miliband: The information is as follows:

(a) Levels of literacy in coalfield areas

The following table shows estimated literacy levels in the main coalfield districts (those districts with more than three 'coalfield wards').

District name	*Percentage of population with 'low', 'lower' or 'very low' literacy*
Dover	23.9
Cannock Chase	25.6
Lichfield	21.0
Newcastle-under-Lyme	25.1
Staffordshire Moorlands	23.0
Stoke-on-Trent	27.6
Tamworth	26.7
North Warwickshire	23.2
Nuneaton and Bedworth	26.0
Amber Valley	25.0
Bolsover	27.6
Chesterfield	26.2
Erewash	24.3
North East Derbyshire	23.7
South Derbyshire	22.1
Hinckley and Bosworth	22.3
North West Leicestershire	24.1
Ashfield	27.0
Bassetlaw	24.4
Broxtowe	22.3
Gedling	22.2
Mansfield	26.6
Newark and Sherwood	24.0
Selby	22.3
Barnsley	28.3
Doncaster	27.2
Rotherham	27.5
Sheffield	25.8
Calderdale	26.3
Salford	27.6
Wakefield	26.8
Wigan	25.9
St. Helens	26.4
Middlesbrough	28.9
Chester-le-Street	25.3
Derwentside	27.4
Durham	27.4
Easington	30.4
Alnwick	26.2
Blyth Valley	26.6
Castle Morpeth	21.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	25.8
Wansbeck	29.1
South Tyneside	29.0
Sunderland	28.8

National average = 24 per cent.

Note:

Data at ward level are available as a searchable database on the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) website at www.basic-skills.co.uk/datasite/, which also contains data by parliamentary constituency and by local Learning and Skills Council area.

(b) Levels of literacy of citizens born in the United Kingdom

The most detailed survey of basic skills in Britain is "Adult Literacy in Britain", published in 1997. This reported that 20 per cent. of the UK population born in the UK had low levels of literacy, compared with 41 per cent. of those born outside the UK.

The categories of skills referred to in the table above are defined as follows:

'Average or Above'—Someone in this category will be able to satisfactorily complete most tasks, given that they were straightforward and commonly encountered in everyday life. Respondents were allowed to make some mistakes without being classified as below average or in need of help.

'Low'—These respondents will be regarded as on the borderline of functional literacy and could attain the national standards in literacy and numeracy with relatively limited coursework or assistance.

'Lower'—These respondents have limited literacy and numeracy skills and would need directed assistance in order to reach the national standards. They would be expected to have difficulties in coping with at least some of the everyday literacy and numeracy requirements they encounter.

'Very Low'—These people have severe literacy and numeracy problems and would need intensive assistance to reach national standards.

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total budgetary deficit is for each higher education institution. [83938]

Margaret Hodge: In 2000–01, there were 48 higher education institutions with budget deficits out of a total of 130. Higher education institutions include their accounts in their published annual reports.

Medical Students

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students who took up

medical degrees in *(a)* this academic year and *(b)* in each year since 1997 were from overseas, and what proportion this represents. [83278]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The latest information is shown in the table. Figures for autumn 2002 entry will be released by the Universities and Colleges Admissions (UCAS) service in January 2003.

Students entering first degree medical courses by domicile higher education institutions in the UK

	Home	*Overseas*	*Total*	*Percentage overseas*
1997–98	5,328	605	5,933	10
1998–99	4,676	468	5,144	9
1999–2000	4,560	446	5,006	9
2000–01	5,185	487	5,672	9
2001–02	5,635	581	6,216	9

Recruitment (Over-50s)

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people employed in his Department are aged over 50. [81689]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: 940 out of a total of 4,529 staff employed in the Department for Education and Skills are aged over 50.

Research Grants

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the block grant to each of the higher education institutions was for research in the last year. [84394]

Margaret Hodge: The research grant allocated to each of the higher education institutions funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2002–03 is as follows:

University	*HEFCE research grant*
Anglia Polytechnic University	369,996
Aston University	4,739,803
University of Bath	11,696,494
Birkbeck College	6,356,682
University of Birmingham	29,314,995
Bournemouth University	453,947
University of Bradford	5,439,649
University of Brighton	3,174,399
University of Bristol	28,833,167
Brunel University	6,199,814
University of Cambridge	67,815,439
University of Central England in Birmingham	971,690
University of Central Lancashire	902,907
City University	4,942,344
Coventry University	880,828
De Montfort University	4,187,608
University of Derby	233,690
University of Durham	15,939,398
University of East Anglia	11,022,718
University of East London	1,368,279
University of Essex	7,642,647
University of Exeter	9,156,817
University of Gloucestershire	854,067
Goldsmiths College	6,206,767
University of Greenwich	1,940,965
University of Hertfordshire	2,061,217
University of Huddersfield	1,134,142
University of Hull	5,064,625
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	60,692,241
Keele University	4,834, 720
University of Kent at Canterbury	5,585,307
King's College London	37,500,846
Kingston University	1,157,466
Lancaster University	11,884,500
University of Leeds	30,972,773
Leeds Metropolitan University	676,231
University of Leicester	12,561,900
University of Lincoln	180, 941
University of Liverpool	21,741,046
Liverpool John Moores University	2,268,923
London Guildhall University	200,068
Loughborough University	10,975,201
University of Luton	313,199
University of Manchester	38,929,069
University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology	12,821,087
Manchester Metropolitan University	3,164,334
Middlesex University	1,756,066
University of Newcastle	22,884,565
University of North London	550,422
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	1,265,803
University of Nottingham	25,284,000
Nottingham Trent University	2,675,485
Open University	6,248,694
University of Oxford	64,923,006
Oxford Brookes University	2,137,811
University of Plymouth	2,998,359
University of Portsmouth	3,297,150
Queen Mary, University of London	12,645,553
University of Reading	16,371,430
Royal Holloway, University of London	9,426,576
University of Salford	5,561,665
University of Sheffield	30,211,758
Sheffield Hallam University	3,003,902
University of Southampton	30,965,099
South Bank University	1,713,812
Staffordshire University	819,509
University of Sunderland	1,382,446
University of Surrey	14,179,884
University of Surrey Roehampton	1,035,712
University of Sussex	11,761,037
University of Teesside	399,677
Thames Valley University	36,003
University College London	66,788,665
University of Warwick	20,031,902
University of West of England, Bristol	2,100,493
University of Westminster	2,112,509
University of Wolverhampton	731,183
University of York	14,544,637
General colleges	
Bath Spa University College	245,427
Bolton Institute of Higher Education	242,356
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College	330,847
Canterbury Christ Church University College	191,069
Chester College of Higher Education	129,189
University College Chichester	180,424
Edge Hill College of Higher Education	45,882
King Alfred's College, Winchester	172,886
Liverpool Hope	89,645
University College Northampton	295,534
St. Mary's College	109,625
Southampton Institute	31,779
University College Worcester	70,425
York St. John College	8,968
Specialist institutions	
Bishop Grosseteste College	0
Arts Institute at Bournemouth	0
Institute of Cancer Research	8,556,017
Central School of Speech and Drama	0
Cranfield University	4,668,054
Cumbria College of Art and Design	0
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama	0

University	HEFCE research grant
Dartington College of Arts	138,341
Institute of Education2	5,216,80
Falmouth College of Arts	130,096
Harper Adams University College	81,348
Kent Institute of Art and Design	114,275
University of London	1,967,255
London Business School	3,295,361
London School of Economics and Political Science	11,945,666
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine	4,691,417
The London Institute	5,599,850
Newman College	0
Northern School of Contemporary Dance	0
Norwich School of Art and Design	4,288
School of Oriental and African Studies	4,583,785
School of Pharmacy	1,998,527
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication	0
RCN Institute	0
Rose Bruford College	0
Royal Academy of Music	319,195
Royal Agricultural College	51 ,948
Royal College of Art	1,989,117
Royal College of Music	229,406
Royal Northern College of Music	167,331
Royal Veterinary College	2,446,890
St.George's Hospital Medical School	3,425,229
College of St. Mark & St. John	26,994
St. Martin's College	57,155
The Surrey Institute of Art and Design, University College	144,887
Trinity and All Saints	37,255
Trinity College of Music	0
Wimbledon School of Art	759,692
Writtle College	0

Source:
pp8–14, 'Recurrent grants for 2002–03, Final allocations,' ref:2002/44, Higher Education Funding Council for England, October 2002.

School Access Initiative

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent on the Schools Access Initiative programme in each year since it was introduced; and which schools are not eligible to apply for financial assistance under the programme. [83168]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The following table gives details of the amount spent on the Schools Access Initiative each year since the scheme was introduced in 1996. A further £100 million per annum will be available in each of the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Special schools are currently ineligible to benefit from the Initiative. However, from 2003–04, the initiative will be delivered through the Single Capital Pot, which will give LEAs greater flexibility in how they spend the funds. Special schools, as well as mainstream schools, will be eligible to apply.

Allocations under schools access initiative, 1996–97 to 2002–03

£ million

	Schools Access Initiative allocation
1996–97	10
1997–98	4
1998–99	11
1999–2000	20
2000–01	30
2001–02	50
2002–03	70

School Admissions

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received from London boroughs concerning limiting secondary school admission to children resident in their own borough; and if he will make a statement. [84119]

Mr. Miliband: It is unlawful for local education authorities to limit admission to their schools to children living within their own borough, and we are not aware of any that do so. We have, however, received a representation from one London borough about a proposal on which Camden local education authority is consulting schools and parents, to give some priority in its admission arrangements to children who attend Camden primary schools. We do not believe that to be unlawful.

Admission arrangements are determined at the local level and it will be up to Camden LEA, after statutory consultations with other admission authorities in the area and neighbouring LEAs, to decide whether to adopt the proposed change to its admission arrangements.

Secondments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* head teachers, *(b)* other school teachers, *(c)* other school staff and *(d)* other local education authority staff are seconded to his Department *(i)* full time and (ii) part time at the most recent date for which information is available. [81957]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested, to 31 October 2002, is set out in the table:

Secondments to DfES at 31 October 2002

	Head teachers	Other school teachers	Other school staff	Other local education authority staff
Full time	2	—	1	43
Part time	—	—	—	5
Total	2	—	1	48

Section 91 Agreements

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he will review the decision to abolish Section 91 agreements; and if he will make a statement; [84245]

(2) how many Jewish schools have Section 91 agreements with their LEAs: what representations he has received on behalf of Jewish denominational schools in respect of the abolition of Section 91 agreements; and if he will make statement. [84246]

Mr. Miliband: The repeal of Section 91 came into force on 1 October. This will enable pupils to access maintained school places which were previously left unfilled. We do not know how many schools have section 91 arrangements, as my Department does not keep records of these local agreements. However, 10 Jewish schools and the Agency for Jewish Education have written to the Department in support of retaining section 91 arrangements. My Department has made

enquiries of these schools' maintaining LEAs and has found that only one of these schools has such an arrangement.

Student Finance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of debt incurred in the course of doing a university degree as a proportion of lifetime income, as an average for graduates. [82775]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Information on student loan accounts is held by the Student Loans Company, and relates to publicly owned debt or to debts held in the private sector following the two Government debt sales. Information on students' private sector debt such as overdrafts and other commercial loans is not available centrally.

The second cohort of students on a three-year degree course who entered higher education under the new student support arrangements are due to enter repayment in April 2003. The average debt of a borrower with a new income contingent loan entering repayment in that year is estimated to be some £7,380. This includes borrowers who have completed three years of study from 1998 as well as those on shorter courses or who have left higher education early.

The figure provided is very small when compared to the estimated average lifetime earnings of graduates whose highest qualification is a first degree, which is, undiscounted, around £1,075,000. All of these figures relate to Great Britain.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive regarding his Department's inquiry into funding for students in higher education. [82417]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* My right hon. Friend holds regular discussions with my Scottish counterpart on a range of issues of mutual interest. I have also spoken with the hon. Gentlemen regarding higher education issues.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will estimate the level of funding required if university grants had been maintained at their final level in *(a)* real terms and *(b)* actual terms in *(i)* 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01, (iv) 2001–02 and *(v)* 2002–03, broken down for students originating in (A) England and (B) Wales. [83011]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Under the "Mandatory Awards" scheme in operation up to academic year 1997–98 students received two forms of grant:

(i) an award for maintenance, and

(ii) an award paid by LEAs to Higher Education Institutions towards tuition fee costs.

Tables 1 and 2 show the estimated funding required for LEA expenditure on awards for fees and maintenance in real and cash terms for each of the financial years 1998–99 to 2002–03, assuming that the grants available in 1997–98 had continued thereafter.

Table 1: Estimated Grant Funding in real[1] terms

£m

Year	England	Wales	Total
1998–99	1,815	11	1,926
1999–2000	1,812	111	1,922
2000–01	1,795	114	1,909
2001–02	1,823	115	1,935
2002–03	1,841	116	1,957

[1] Figures have been converted to 1998–99 price levels using the September 2002 GDP deflators.

Note:

Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Table 2: Estimated Grant Funding in cash terms

£m

Year	England	Wales	Total
1998–99	1,815	111	1,926
1999–2000	1,855	114	1,969
2000–01	1,880	119	1,998
2001–02	1,950	123	2,073
2002–03	2,018	128	2,145

Note:

Figures may not sum due to rounding

These are approximate estimates derived by applying the grant arrangements in 1997–98 to numbers of England and Welsh students for the academic years 1998–99 to 2002–03. Costs for English and Welsh students have been pro-rated on the basis of numbers of students from each country.

Tables 3 and 4 shows the award payments for fees and maintenance made by LEAs in real and cash terms under the "Mandatory Awards" scheme for each of the financial years 1998–99 to 2002–03.

Table 3: Outturn Grant Payments in real[1] terms

£m

Year	England	Wales	Total
1998–99	1,491	91	1,582
1999–2000	672	41	713
2000–01	268	71	8
2001–02	71	4	75
2002–03	8	1	9

[1] Figures have been converted to 1998–99 price levels using the September 2002 GDP deflators.

Note:

1. Figures may not sum due to rounding
2. Figures for England and Wales have been estimated.
3. 2000–01 outturn is provisional.

Table 4: Outturn Grant Payments (cash terms)

£m

Year	England	Wales	Total
1998–99	1,491	91	1,582
1999–2000	688	42	730
2000–01	281	18	298
2001–02	76	5	80
2002–03	9	1	9

Note:

1. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
2. Figures for England and Wales have been estimated.
3. 2000–01 outturn is provisional

Costs for English and Welsh students have been pro-rated on the basis of numbers of students from each country.

In addition, students also receive a subsidised loan towards living costs.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking to minimise overpayment of student loans under the Inland Revenue collection arrangements. [83940]

Margaret Hodge: The Student Loans Company (SLC) has this month introduced a special service for borrowers who have nearly completed repayment of their income-contingent loans. Based on a projection of earnings from the borrower, the SLC will tell the Inland Revenue when repayments should stop being collected. This "self-predictor" model is designed to prevent employers collecting too much and the borrower having to obtain a refund.

My officials are also working with the SLC on more advanced web-based approaches as part of our programme to modernise the delivery of student support.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking in conjunction with the Student Loans Company to improve availability of information on the amount of outstanding loan liabilities for individual graduates. [83941]

Margaret Hodge: Borrowers under the pre-1998–99 scheme of mortgage style loans receive annual statements from the Student Loans Company (SLC) showing what has been repaid and the outstanding balance owed. Borrowers can call or write to the SLC at any time, and be given an up to date statement.

For most borrowers under the current income-contingent loans scheme, repayments will be collected by their employers through deductions from their earnings, with tax and national insurance contributions. These borrowers receive a statement from the SLC after the end of the tax year, once it has received details of what has been collected by the Inland Revenue.

As well as the yearly statement, borrowers' payslips contain details of their repayments. If a borrower contacts the SLC, it can provide an estimate of the amounts repaid and what is outstanding using the information on the borrower's payslips. Borrowers can contact the SLC over the phone for this information.

The SLC has this month introduced a service for borrowers under the income-contingent loan scheme who have nearly completed repayment of their loan. Based on a projection of earnings from the borrower, the company will tell the Inland Revenue when repayments should stop being collected. This is designed to prevent employers collecting too much and the borrower having to obtain a refund.

Self-employed borrowers receive their statements after making their self-assessment return to the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will pay interest on repayments in cases where individual graduates have overpaid their student loan liabilities. [83942]

Margaret Hodge: Borrowers who have overpaid their student loans, through deductions from their salaries, are entitled to a full refund of the amount overpaid with interest. The interest is paid at the same rate as it is charged on the loan—at the rate of inflation—and is tax free.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and if he will make a statement on how it has changed since the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg. [83499]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Sustainable development is an integral part of the Department's annual planning cycle, which is subject to mid-year review. We were one of the first Departments to do this.

We have embraced sustainable development in our Strategic Framework to 2006 "Education and Skills delivering results; A Strategy to 2006", where we have said publicly that we will deliver:

> "A Departmental Investment Strategy for schools, colleges and universities in England which encourages sustainable development and modernises the estate, helping to enrich communities and make towns and cities better places to live and work in."

This recognises the significant impact on the social and economic aspects of sustainable development through our core business of raising educational standards and improving skills, including education for sustainable development (ESD). Specific actions include a statutory entitlement to ESD in the revised National Curriculum in England and the introduction of Citizenship as a new National Curriculum subject from September 2002. We are ensuring that we build on this progress through our joint sponsorship with DEFRA of the Sustainable Development Education Panel and through specific school initiatives such as Growing Schools, which promotes the outdoor classroom.

Furthermore, the Learning and Skills Council have funded 11 pilots to identify and share good practice on education for sustainable development in the Further Education sector, and have plans for a further 12 pilots. While in higher education, we are supporting the Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability (HEPS) project through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which aims to develop a sustainability reporting system for the higher education sector.

We have reported progress made by the Department for Education and Skills estate in the recent Sustainable Development in Government Report for 2002, launched on 27 November, and towards the UK Sustainable Development headline indicators in the Government Annual Report on Sustainable Development. This Department has a direct influence on two headline indicators: H5—Qualifications at age 19; and H4—working age people with no qualifications, as well as eight lower level "national" indicators.

In line with new targets set out in the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate, we will be reporting, along with other Departments, on our various sustainable development impacts, progress and achievements by April 2003. This will take the form of a new website bringing together the various sources

of information about the Department for Education and Skills' sustainable development impacts and achievements in one easily accessible place.

Outcomes from the World Summit on Sustainable Development and first views on follow-up will be reflected in the Government Annual Report on Sustainable Development for 2002. We will consider the outcomes, along with other Departments and will contribute where necessary.

Teachers (Housing Costs)

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements are being made to help teachers in Further Education Colleges with their housing costs. [82475]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* We recognise that staff in the further education (FE) sector need to be able to find affordable homes within a reasonable distance from their work place.

On 19 November the Secretary of State announced that the total funding for FE is set to rise by £1.2 billion between 2002–03 and 2005–06, a real terms increase of 19 per cent. From next year, colleges which have demonstrated their effectiveness will have three year funding deals allowing them to plan on a longer-term basis, with increases linked to performance. We will also consolidate the funds provided for the Teaching Pay Initiative into core funding. The substantial real terms increases in core funding, over and above the costs of additional students and inflation, and the three year funding agreements should enable colleges to deliver the improvements in pay that staff deserve.

The Government is also making an additional £1.4 billion available in the period 2003–06 to help improve the supply of affordable housing. As part of this, the Starter Homes Initiative (SHI) aims to help key workers to buy homes in areas where the high cost of housing is undermining recruitment and retention. While FE teachers are not identified as a priority for the SHI, they may be eligible for loans or cash grants in some areas because of local flexibilities in delivering the scheme.

Universal Career Service

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to develop a universal career service. [82887]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Through the Connexions Service, all young people aged 13 to 19 in England will have access to a Personal Adviser (PA). One of the key roles of the Connexions PA is to provide independent information, advice and guidance on learning and career options. Support may be delivered in class or small group settings, or through one-to-one interviews, depending on the young person's needs. The Connexions Service is now operating in 44 Partnership areas and there will be complete coverage (in all 47 areas, i.e. in all 150 English local education authorities) by 2003.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Claim Packs

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit claim packs are issued by his Department which refer claimants to Citizens Advice Bureau for advice and assistance. [84227]

Malcolm Wicks: During 2001–02, over 21.5 million benefit claim packs were printed and issued to the Department's local offices. The Department does not keep records of the number of these packs which have been issued to members of the public or requested by the Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Our staff offer people the help and advice they need to claim the benefits they are entitled to, and the support those who are able to work need to find jobs. In accordance with the express wishes of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, many of our claim packs and leaflets advise people that they can receive independent advice from their local Citizens Advice Bureau. The Department has no information on the number of people who seek such advice and does not keep records of the number who are directed by staff to a Citizens Advice Bureau or other local advisory services.

Disabled People's Rights

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on how many occasions the Ministerial Taskforce on Civil Rights for Disabled People has met since its establishment; and if he will list its membership. [84436]

Maria Eagle: The Disability Rights Task Force met 17 times between 16 December 1997 and 15 November 1999. It no longer exists but its membership when it completed its work was as follows:

Chair: Margaret Hodge—Minister for Disabled People
Stephen Alambritis—Federation of Small Businesses
Bob Benson—Disability Scotland
Jane Campbell—National Centre for Independent Living
Elizabeth Clarke—former Business Research Officer, Institute of Directors
Caroline Gooding—Trade Union Disability Alliance
David Grayson—National Disability Council
Rachel Hurst—Rights Now
David Jenkins—Wales Trade Union Council
Su Jenkins—Member, Confederation of British Industry
Brian Lamb—SCOPE
Colin Low—Royal National Institute of the Blind
Joe Mann—National League for the Blind and Disabled
Bert Massie—The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation
Brian Pomeroy—Deloitte and Touche Consulting Group
Philippa Russell—Council for Disabled Children
Liz Sayce—former Policy Director, Mind (National Association for Mental Health
Susan Scott-Parker—Employers' Forum on Disability
Ranjit Sondhi—former Deputy Chairman, Commission for Racial Equality
James Strachan—The Royal National Institute for Deaf People
Richard Taylor—Lifespan Healthcare NHS Trust
Roy Taylor—Community Services, Kingston-upon-Thames Local Authority

Keith Welton—Mid Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ltd

Monica Wilson—Disability Action (Northern Ireland)

Richard Wood—British Council of Organisations of Disabled People

The titles and organisations named are those relating to the members' positions at the time.

Funerals

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when funeral payments were last capped; and when he will implement the recommendation of the Social Security Committee that the cap on funeral payments should be increased. [83238]

Malcolm Wicks: The present Social Fund funeral payments scheme was introduced in 1997. On 27 November, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his pre-Budget report that a further £15 million will be made available for the scheme. This means that from this coming April, the amount allowed for funeral expenses not specified in regulations will rise from £600 to £700.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the outturn figures were for *(a)* the Jobcentre Plus Customer Service Target and *(b)* the Jobcentre Plus Employer Outcome Target for 2002–03; and if he will make a statement; [82509]

(2) if he will place in the Library the report on the pilot of the Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target scheme conducted by his Department; [82512]

(3) what the outturn figure was in respect of the national Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target points score for 2002–03, broken down by client group; and if he will make a statement; [82514]

(4) what the outturn figures were in respect of the Jobcentre Plus Business Delivery Target for 2002–03; and if he will make a statement; [82520]

(5) how many job entries have been achieved in relation to each of the Jobcentre Plus priority client groups in 2002–03; and if he will make a statement; [82510]

(6) what job entry target points scores were set for each Jobcentre Plus district for 2002–03; what the latest available outturn figures in respect of the target are for each district, broken down by client group; and if he will make a statement. [82837]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive, Leigh Lewis. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from L. Lewis to Mr. Oliver Heald, dated 28 November 2002:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions concerning Jobcentre Plus performance. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

You raised a number of detailed questions about Jobcentre Plus performance against our Performance and Resources Agreement (PRA), which I will cover in this reply. You also asked a number of questions about the criteria applied to how job entry points were allocated to specific client groups. I understand the Secretary of State will be responding separately to these as they relate to the underlying policy.

Before turning to your specific questions it may be helpful if I explain that the Jobcentre Plus Performance and Resource Agreement is a formal annual agreement between the Secretary of State and Chief Executive of the Agency. It sets out clearly the aim, purpose and objectives of the Agency and the targets to be met in this operational year. There are five high level targets and details of these were laid before the House on 19th March 2002.

I am pleased to say that Jobcentre Plus has made a good start. To the end of October we were 10.6% ahead of our job entry points target profile. This equates to helping 786,116 people into work in our first seven months. You asked for a breakdown of job entries by priority client group:

Priority Client Group 1: 87,078

Priority Client Group 2: 207,727

Priority Client Group 3: 177,219

Priority Client Group 4: 222,670

Priority Client Group 5: 91,422

At the mid year stage we were 5.3 and 1.7 percentage points respectively above our Customer Service and Employer Outcome targets. However, the latest interim figures for the Business Delivery target are showing that we are around two percentage points below the target of 93.4%. This is an area where we are making special efforts to improve performance.

You have specifically asked for the latest outturn figures, by Jobcentre Plus District, for Job Entry points and latest national outturn figures for Customer Service, Employer Outcomes and Business Delivery. This information is set out in the tables which will be placed in the Library.

You also asked whether the the report on the pilot of the Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target structure will be placed in the House Library. We have undertaken a series of studies examining the piloting, and the national implementation, of job entry points. A comprehensive summary report combining findings from the three research studies has been commissioned. This report will be published in March 2003 and a copy will be placed in the Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Ministerial Visits (East Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times he has visited East Lancashire in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82398]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have made one visit to East Lancashire since my appointment in May of this year-to the Pensions Centre in Burnley.

New Deal

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* young people, *(b)* people aged over 50 years and *(c)* people with disabilities have signed up to the New Deal in the Cleethorpes Constituency. [82918]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

	Total number of participants in Cleethorpes[1]
New deal for young people	1,750
New deal 50 plus	250

[1] Up to the end of September 2002.

[2] From January 1998.
[3] From April 2000
Source:
New deal evaluation database.

Information at constituency level is not available for the new deal for disabled people.

New Deal for Lone Parents

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 210W, on the New Deal for Lone Parents, how many lone parents have found work on the New Deal for Lone Parents, broken down *(a)* monthly and *(b)* by gender. [84441]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is published in the New Deal for Lone Parents Statistical First Release, which is available in the Library.

Pension Benefits

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the relative benefits payable in respect of equal contributions under *(a)* the Graduated Retirement Benefit Scheme and *(b)* contracted out equivalent pension benefits; and if he will make a statement. [84435]

Mr. McCartney: People who contracted out of the Graduated Retirement Benefit Scheme did so on condition that the occupational scheme offered equivalent pension benefits.

The Graduated Retirement Benefit Scheme and contracted out equivalent pension benefits ended in April 1975. From November 1978 the value of benefits payable under the Graduated Retirement Benefit Scheme has been uprated each year. However, there is no similar requirement that contracted out equivalent pension benefits should be uprated.

Retirement Benefits

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people *(a)* contracted out of graduated retirement benefit and *(b)* were reinstated; and if he will make a statement. [84434]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available.

Social Fund

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people who applied for a budgeting loan in 2000–01 in Leeds West had an outstanding Social Fund Loan. [83481]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on Budgeting Loan applications is not collected at Parliamentary constituency level and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, during 2000–01, in the Leeds Social Security district, 22,876 decisions were made on Budgeting Loan applications, of which 14,411 were applications from people with existing Social Fund debt. These figures may include cases where a person has made more than one application.

Notes:

1. Existing Social Fund debt includes Crisis Loan debt.

2. The existence of Social Fund debt does not necessarily affect decisions on Budgeting Loan applications.

Source:

100 per cent. scan of the Social Fund computer system.

State Pension

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate what the state pension would be for *(a)* a single person and *(b)* a married couple, if the link with average earnings had not been broken. [83117]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

The value of the state pension for (a) a single person and (b) a married couple if the link to average earnings had not been broken (£ per week)

	Basic state pension at November 1979	Actual amount in April 2002	Amount in April 2002 if the link to average earnings had not been broken
Single	23.30	75.50	105.70
Couple	37.30	120.70	169.00

Notes:

1. Rates are taken from November 1979 as the earnings link was broken in November 1980.

2. The Retail Prices Index (all items) has been used as published by the Office for National Statistics.

3. Average Earnings Index Whole Economy (Non Seasonally Adjusted) as published by the Office of National Statistics.

4. From April 1994 the basic rate of retirement pension has been increased by 50p on a single person and an additional 20p on a pensioner couple to reflect VAT on fuel.

5. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 pence at each uprating.

Source:

Information Centre, Information and Analysis Directorate.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of average earnings the State Pension is for *(a)* a single person and *(b)* a married couple. [83118]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

The percentage of average earnings the State Pension is for (a) a single person and (b) a married couple

	Rate of basic state pension at April 2002 (£ per week)	Rate as a percentage of average earnings
Single	75.50	16.2
Couple	120.70	26.0

Note:

Average weekly earnings of full time adult workers (from New Earnings Survey) as published by the Office of National Statistics.

Source:

Information Centre, Information and Analysis Directorate.

PRIME MINISTER

Gibraltar

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit Gibraltar. [84747]

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Sweden

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the Prime Minister of Sweden. [85150]

The Prime Minister: I met the Prime Minister of Sweden at the Party of European Socialists meeting on 15 November in Warsaw.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police

25. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to encourage local police forces to improve response times. [82327]

Mr. Denham: A key message of the National Policing Plan, published on 20 November, is the Government's determination to remove the barriers which prevent the police from providing the public with the best possible service.

The police are well aware of the importance of providing a rapid response to an emergency call. Also, public satisfaction on response times for emergency calls is one of the Best Value Performance Indicators for police authorities. Authorities set targets on the indicator and are required to publish their force's performance in annual Best Value performance plans.

27. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to *(a)* recruit part-time police officers and *(b)* allow full-time officers to change to part-time if they wish to *(i)* before and (ii) after they have completed 30 years' service. [82329]

Mr. Denham: All new recruits may apply to work part-time, as may established police officers of all ranks, regardless of whether officers have completed 30 years' service or not. Managers must give full consideration to all requests to change to part-time working, taking into account operational needs.

As part of the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) Agreement of 9 May, part-time working will be made easier for officers in all ranks, regardless of whether they have completed 30 years service or not. We plan to remove the 16 hour a week minimum requirement for part-time working by 1 April 2003; together with the requirement for job sharing in respect of middle and senior ranks. The position of part-time probationers will be given further consideration in PNB.

30. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of Lancashire Constabulary's large-scale arrest of drug dealers. [82332]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We have been kept fully informed of the Lancashire constabulary's activity against drug dealers, most notably Operation Nimrod. This has so far resulted in over 100 people being arrested and dealt with by the courts. Seizures of class A drugs have risen considerably in comparison to last year. The constabulary has commissioned both an internal evaluation of Operation Nimrod as well as an external evaluation by Lancaster university on its impact within the community. These reports are due at the beginning of March.

35. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to meet Chief Police Officers to discuss rural policing. [82337]

Mr. Denham: I meet regularly with Chief Police Officers and discuss a wide range of issues with them.

39. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to enable police officers to spend more time on the beat during their working day. [82341]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to tackling the administrative burdens and inefficient working practices that keep officers off the streets. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary established a taskforce, under the chairmanship of Sir David O'Dowd, to identify ways in which forces can free up the time of front line officers. The taskforce's report was published on 17 September this year and contained 52 recommendations to increase the presence of police in communities. We have now set up a steering group, co-chaired by the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office, to take forward these recommendations.

Two recommendations of the taskforce have already been introduced in the Criminal Justice and Sentencing Bill to allow police officers to grant 'street bail':

Police officers will be provided with the option to offer an arrested person immediate bail at the scene rather than immediately having to take the person to a police station.

The requirement to list all property taken into custody is to be removed so that the custody officer would secure all possessions in a scalable property bag and only make a few supporting comments.

We are also consulting with the judiciary on a provision to be included in the Bill, which will allow officers to obtain search warrants by video, by telephone and by fax. We are reviewing each and every Code of Practice issued under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to cut unnecessary bureaucracy. A new code A is to commence in April 2003, and new codes B-E are likely to commence by May 2003.

CCTV

19. **Colin Burgon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evaluation he has made of the effectiveness of CCTV in reducing crime levels. [82321]

Mr. Denham: Under the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative, a potential of £170 million will be spent funding 684 public area CCTV schemes, including £60,000 for cameras in Wetherby.

As a condition of funding, each scheme is required to undertake an independent evaluation of its effectiveness as a tool to assist the police and reduce crime and the fear of crime. These evaluations will cover implementation, impact and cost effectiveness. In addition, to help ensure maximum impact and sustainability of CCTV, a £1.5 million Home Office funded national evaluation programme is being carried out by the Scarman Centre, University of Leicester, on 17 approved CCTV Initiative schemes.

Police operational experience and various other research studies show that CCTV has considerable crime reduction and detection potential, particularly when used as part of a wider strategy.

22. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce portable CCTV systems to small towns; and if he will make a statement. [82324]

Mr. Denham: The Department provides a variety of funding which may be used to establish and run Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) schemes in both large and small urban areas, residential or rural locations. For example, under the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative a potential £170 million is being invested in 684 CCTV schemes of which 41 are mobile. Decisions on whether to invest in static or mobile CCTV and precise deployment within specific areas are matters for determination by the relevant local crime reduction partners.

Antisocial Behaviour

20. **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to tackle anti-social behaviour which does not constitute a criminal offence. [82322]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to combating anti-social behaviour in whatever form it occurs. We have already introduced measures to increase effectiveness of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, created community support officers and strengthened powers to issue fixed penalty notices for anti-social behaviour. We are working closely across government to build on these and to identify what else we need to do, including new legislation where appropriate.

Child Protection

21. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the protection of children from *(a)* vicious attacks and *(b)* sexual assault. [82323]

Hilary Benn: The "Protecting the Public" sets out proposals to tighten the requirements of the sex offenders' register, improve monitoring of offenders and build in new safeguards against evasion. It also outlines a range of new offences to better protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation including an offence to catch adults who groom children over the internet, with the intention of meeting them and engaging in sexual activity. This offence is designed to protect children from predatory activity, whatever form it takes.

Extradition

23. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to implement new extradition procedures. [82325]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Extradition Bill, which will modernise our extradition laws, was published on 14 November.

28. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on whether the European Arrest Warrant should allow a UK citizen to face trial in another country where there would be a presumption of guilt. [82330]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: All countries to which the European arrest warrant will be extended operate a presumption of innocence. There will be a hearing before a British Judge and a right of appeal where concerns about any breach of rights under the European Convention on Human Rights can be revised, prior to any extradition request being carried out.

Witness Intimidation

24. **Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to protect vulnerable witnesses from intimidation. [82326]

Hilary Benn: In July we started a phased implementation of special measures, such as live TV Links, video recorded evidence, and screens to help vulnerable or intimidated witnesses give their best evidence in court. The Criminal Justice and Sentencing Bill will introduce several changes to the rules of evidence and tighten up magistrates' granting of bail to encourage witnesses to give evidence. Guidance has been issued to the police on tackling witness intimidation in the community, and this is also reflected in the new Anti-Social Behaviour Order Guidance published on 12 November.

37. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to provide better treatment for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. [82339]

Hilary Benn: In July, we started a phased implementation of special measures, such as live TV links, video recorded evidence and screens to help vulnerable or intimidated witnesses give their best evidence in court.

The Criminal Justice and Sentencing Bill will introduce several changes to the rules of evidence to encourage witnesses and make their experience easier:

in future, witnesses will be able to have in court their original statement that they made to police and refer to it to refresh their memories while giving evidence;

any witness, if there is a good reason, will be able to give evidence by live television link; and

the defence will have to prove to the judge that evidence of a witness's previous misconduct, or other bad character evidence, is clearly relevant to the case before they bring it up.

The Bill tightens up magistrates' granting of bail, partly to prevent re-offending, but also to protect victims and witnesses from intimidation in the run-up to a trial. When considering whether to grant bail, magistrates will have to take into account whether an offender has broken bail conditions before. At the same time, if there is a threat that the offender will intimidate a victim or witness, we are encouraging the prosecution to use this as grounds to challenge bail. We are also extending the prosecution's power to appeal against bail from more serious offences (with a top sentence of five years' custody or more), to any imprisonable offence.

Guidance has been issued to the police on tackling witness intimidation in the community. All forces have been issued with a training video and a series of prompts which should enable them to identify potential intimidated witnesses and how they should respond to reports of crime without themselves placing witnesses at risk. Home Office Circular Number 12/2001, issued in May last year, advised the police to take immediate positive action to prosecute offenders in cases of intimidation and harassment of witnesses.

From 2 December, the courts will be able to order an immediate stop to anti-social behaviour. This should reduce the scope for witness intimidation. The new Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) guidance, published on 12 November, stresses the importance of offering protection and support to witnesses (as well as victims) of anti-social behaviour.

Crime (Gravesham)

26. **Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of recorded crime in Gravesham in the last 12 months. [82328]

Mr. Denham: According to the most recent published recorded crime figures, in the 12 months to March 2002, crime in Gravesham fell by 4 per cent. This includes a fall of 8 per cent. in domestic burglary; a fall of 11 per cent. in thefts of a motor vehicle and a fall of 7 per cent. in thefts from a motor vehicle.

Terrorism

29. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of support for terrorism among fundamentalist Islamist sects in the United Kingdom. [82331]

Mr. Blunkett: The police and security forces closely monitor the activities of those who seek to promote the views of proscribed organisations of whatever background.

Youth Crime

31. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what international evidence he has taken into consideration in developing policies to tackle youth crime. [82333]

Mr. Denham: Our broad approach to preventing youth crime is to focus on those factors which research and experience, both from within the United Kingdom and abroad, tell us are most likely to increase the risk of criminality, as well as targeted preventative work with the most at risk young people in high crime areas. The risk factors are to do with the family, environment and school, and include behavioural factors such as early drugs and alcohol misuse.

In October this year we hosted an international seminar on youth crime, bringing together leading academics, practitioners and policy makers, to identify experience and evidence from across the world to inform our approach to youth crime. We shall take forward the outcomes of the seminar in the context of the Green Paper on children at risk announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 30 October, and they will inform other parts of our programme, such as our drive against antisocial behaviour.

Prisons

32. **Patrick Mercer** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what is *(a)* the prison population and *(b)* the maximum capacity of prisons. [82334]

Hilary Benn: As at 21 November 2002, the prison population stood at 72,477. On the same date, useable operational capacity within prisons was 72,882.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners are sharing *(a)* two to a cell designed for one and *(b)* three to a cell designed for two. [82135]

Hilary Benn: At the end of October 2002, 19.6 per cent. of the prisoner population were sharing two to a cell designed for one (doubled).

The number of prisoners sharing three to a cell designed for two is not collected separately. However, at the same date, 22.2 per cent. of the total population were held in overcrowded conditions. This includes prisoners doubled those held three to a cell designed for two and any prisoners overcrowded in dormitories and larger cells.

Data are provisional and subject to validation by prisons.

Street Crime

33. **Mr. Plaskitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of pilot schemes to reduce street crime. [82335]

Mr. Denham: On 14 October 2002, my right hon Friend the Home Secretary announced the results of the Street Crime Initiative to date. The figures show that since the start of the Initiative, street crime has fallen by 16 per cent., during the period April to September in the 10 police forces which accounted for over 80 per cent., of the robbery problem. For robbery, the more serious offence, the number of offences in September 2002 was 25 per cent. lower than March for the 10 forces as a whole.

The figures illustrate that what was an escalating trend has been reversed over the period since the launch of the Street Crime Initiative. There has been a 10 per cent. reduction (4,600) offences in the number of robberies during the period April to September compared to the same period last year.

Neighbourhood Watch

34. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide central Government funding for Neighbourhood Watch schemes. [82336]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office does not provide funding to individual Watch schemes, but directs it towards national initiatives designed to support the sort of local activity which Neighbourhood Watch represents. It also pays for the production of a range of Neighbourhood Watch publications, including a training manual for scheme co-ordinators.

It would not be possible to fund every local scheme, invidious to choose between them. The essence of local partnership is local people getting together with the police and their local authority to solve local problems.

Drug Addicts

38. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of waiting times for access to detoxification treatment for drug addicts. [82340]

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Waiting times for drug treatment were not systematically reported before the establishment of the National Treatment Agency in 2001. Drug Action Teams are now required to report annually on their progress against NTA waiting time targets.

Waiting times for drug treatment have already been reduced considerably. In 2001, before the NTA was set up, the average waiting time for inpatient detoxification was 12 weeks. This had fallen to seven weeks by April 2003 and 31 per cent. of DATs have already achieved the NTA's 2003 target of a maximum four week wait. The NTA has set a further target of reducing this to two weeks by 2004.

Reducing waiting times is key element of our strategy to get more people into treatment. Between 1998 and 2001 the number of drug users entering treatment increased from 45,912 to 66,327. We are on track to meet our target of doubling the number of people in drug treatment by 2008.

Arnley Prison

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average population of Leeds Prison, Arnley, in 2001–02 was; what the average length of stay was; and what the *(a)* daily and *(b)* weekly percentage turnover of inmates was. [83475]

Hilary Benn: The average population of Leeds Prison during 2001–02 was 1,233. The information on average length of stay is not recorded: Neither is the daily or weekly turnover of prisoners for that period. The current average daily intake of prisoners is around 40.

Arson

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many successful prosecutions there have been for arson in each year since 1992. [83138]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is contained in the table.

Persons found guilty of arson at all courts, England and Wales, 1992 to 2002

Year	*Number*
1992	1,604
1993	1,419
1994	1,508
1995	1,433
1996	1,283
1997	1,582
1998	1,393
1999	1,380
2000	1,436

Information for 2001 is not yet available.

Burglary

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been jailed in each year since 1999 under the provisions of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000, section 111, for a third offence of burglary. [84299]

Hilary Benn: Information reported to the Home Office shows that no sentences under section 111 of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 (previously section 4 of the Crime (Sentence) Act 1997) for a third offence of burglary were passed by the end of 2000.

An offender would have to be apprehended, prosecuted and convicted on three separate occasions since 1 December 1999 to be subject to the mandatory sentence. Such action is likely to take some time.

Information for 2001 is due for publication shortly.

Children's Commissioner

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes appointing a children's commissioner for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the Commissioner for Wales. [83219]

Mr. Denham: Responsibility for appointing a children's commissioner rests with the devolved Administrations—my responsibility in this regard is solely for England.

The Northern Ireland Assembly have drafted a Bill to establish a children's commissioner, and following the suspension of the Assembly in Stormont, this Bill is expected to pass through Westminster as an Order-in-Council before March 2003. A Bill is expected to be published soon to establish a children's commissioner in Scotland.

As far as England is concerned, the possibility of establishing a children's commissioner is still under consideration. We are considering what role a Commissioner or Ombudsman-type function could play in achieving cultural and political change. There is no one model of a commissioner being developed in the UK—we are seeing in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland three different approaches to the idea. Of the UK's 14 million children, 11.9 million of those live in England, and we would need to be sure that any new structure added value to the existing mechanisms in place for children.

The Commissioner for Wales is due to publish his first annual report on 28 November, and I look forward with interest to reading about his work over his first year in post.

Corporate Manslaughter

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received in support of the introduction of a corporate manslaughter charge in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [84049]

Hilary Benn: We have been unable on the information available to identify the number of representations we have received in support of the introduction of a

corporate manslaughter charge in the last 12 months. These have taken the form of letters, a very large number of telephone calls, e-mails etc. The proposals have attracted and continue to attract a lot of interest from a variety of sectors in society, with varying views being put forward.

DNA Profiles

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK citizens have their DNA profiles stored in the Home Office database; and what the net number of additions was in each of the last two months. [82590]

Mr. Denham: The national DNA database does not store information relating to the nationality of an individual.

The total number of profiles held on the database at 31 October 2002 was 1,919,173. The Forensic Science Service calculate that these profiles relate to 1.73 million different individuals.

The number of profiles added to the database during October 2002 was 39,803.

The number of profiles added to the database during September 2002 was 36,004.

East Lancashire

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times he has visited east Lancashire in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82404]

Mr. Blunkett: I have not so far had the opportunity to visit east Lancashire but my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes) have both visited Burnley as part of their work on community cohesion.

Elderly People (Fear of Crime)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to protect the elderly from fear of crime. [82974]

Mr. Denham: The British Crime Survey data have consistently shown that older people are less likely to suffer from both household and personal crimes than other age groups. However, they also tells us that older people are greatly affected by fear of crime.

The Home Office is working closely to reduce fear of crime with record numbers of police on the streets, new community support officers and greater numbers of community and street wardens, in addition to its wide range of crime reduction programmes being delivered locally.

Levels of fear of crime among older people are still too high; we are committed to reducing them, and we have been working with charities such as Help The Aged and Age Concern to find new and better ways of tackling fear of crime among seniors as well as crimes against them.

European Arrest Warrant

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will seek legal advice on Council of the European Union Framework Decision 2002/584/JHA on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between member states with regard to *(a)* its implementation in Scots law and *(b)* whether its implementation is a reserved matter; [84225]

(2) what legal advice he has received on Council of the European Union Framework Decision 2002/584/JHA on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between member states with regard to *(a)* its implementation in Scots law and *(b)* whether its implementation is a reserved matter. [84228]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: It is a long-standing convention that the Government do not disclose the content of legal advice they have received or even that legal advice has been obtained.

Extradition is a reserved matter under Schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998. However, Scottish Ministers have responsibility for casework where the fugitive is in Scotland.

The Scottish Parliament passed a Sewel Motion on the Extradition Bill on 21 November 2002 agreeing that the provisions in the Bill conferring functions on Scottish Ministers should be considered by the United Kingdom Parliament.

Extradition Bill

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which clauses of the Extradition Bill officials from the Scottish Executive played a role in drafting. [84226]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Officials from the Scottish Executive have been involved at all stages of the drafting of the Extradition Bill.

Female Prisons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to convert men's prisons to house the female prison population; how many *(a)* establishments are to be converted and *(b)* places will be provided, and when they are due to open; [82880]

(2) what plans he has for new women's prisons; how many *(a)* establishments and *(b)* places are planned; and when they are due to open. [82879]

Hilary Benn: It is planned that the new prison scheduled to open at Ashford, near Heathrow, in 2004 will be a female prison of 450 places. It is also planned

that the new prison scheduled to open at Peterborough in Cambridgeshire in 2005 will have 840 places: 360 female and 480 male places.

There are currently no other plans to open new female prisons, or to convert any male prisons into female prisons.

Humberside Police

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian support staff were employed by Humberside Police in *(i)* 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [82921]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Year (as at 31 March)	*Number of police officers*[1]	*Number of civilian support staff*[1,2]
2000	1,932	840
2001	1,917	808
2002	2,058	816

[1] Full-time equivalent numbers

[2] Excludes traffic wardens

Humberside Police has been allocated 137 Crime Fighting Fund recruits over three years from April 2000 (47 in 2000–01, 41 in 2001–02 and 49 in 2002–03).

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average age of retirement of police officers was in the Metropolitan Police in each of the last five years; and what the cost to public funds of pensions for all retired staff was in each of the last 10 years. [82477]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that:

(a) the average age of retirement of police officers was in the Metropolitan Police:

	Average Age
1997–98	52.3
1998–99	52.6
1999–2000	52.6
2000–01	52.2
2001–02	52.5

(b) the net cost of pensions for police officers and civil staff and dependent pensions, death benefits and pension transfer (comprising pensions paid, lump sums, widows and widowers payments) of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) was as follows.

£000

	MPS net pensions total
1992–93	127,698
1993–94	144,923
1994–95	178,331
1995–96	174,062
1996–97	208,457
1997–98	229,585
1998–99	253,074
1999–2000	254,528
2000–01	259,673
2001–02	280,872

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the detection rate was in the Metropolitan police area for each of the last three years; and what guidance he gives for estimating detection rates. [82480]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The requested details are given in the table.

Percentage

Metropolitan police	
Year ending March	*Detection rate*[1]
1999–2000[2]	16
2000–01[3]	15
2001–02	14

[1] Detection rates: the ratio of offences detected in a year to offences recorded in the year.

[2] There was a change in the guidance for counting detections on 1 April 1999 (See below). Detection rates after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

[3] On 1 April 2000, the Metropolitan police transferred parts of its area to three surrounding forces; Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey. This boundary change would have affected the number of offences recorded and detected by the Metropolitan police. The figure given here incorporates the effects of the boundary change.

The counting rules for detections introduced on 1 April 1999 provide more precise and rigorous criteria for recording a detection, with the underlying emphasis on the successful result of a police investigation. The most significant of these criteria is that there must be significant evidence to charge the suspect with a crime (whether or not a charge is actually imposed) so that, if given in court, it would be likely to result in a conviction. Detections obtained by the interview of a convicted prisoner are no longer included, and any detections where no further police action is taken generally have to be approved by a senior police officer or the Crown Prosecution Service. An offence is said to be cleared up/or detected in the following circumstances:

(a) a person has been charged or summonsed for the offence.

(b) a person has been cautioned.

(c) the court has taken the offence into consideration (TIC).

(d) where no further action is taken, the case is not proceeded with e.g. because the offender is under the age of criminal responsibility, the offender has died, because the victim or an essential witness is permanently unable to give evidence, or no useful purpose would be served by proceeding with the charge.

Some offences have much higher detection rates than others because there is a high likelihood of the victim being able to identify the offender, e.g. assault, and the majority of sexual offences. This would have an affect on the overall detection rate, therefore, it would be a better measure to look at specific offence detection rates rather than the overall rate.

The Home Office counting rules for recorded crime were again revised as from April 2002 in order to incorporate the new National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS), which aims to introduce a greater degree of consistency to the ways in which crime is recorded in different police forces and to take a more victim orientated approach to crime recording. The effect will be to increase significantly the number of crimes in the recorded crime count which in turn may affect detection rates. Some police forces introduced the new Standard in advance of national implementation, but figures given above for the Metropolitan police will not be affected as the force adopted the principles of the Standard in April 2002.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 26 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Mohammad Tavs. [82019]

Mr. Blunkett: A reply was sent to my right hon. Friend on 27 November 2002.

National Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the National Probation Directorate charges each probation area for the maintenance of each computer terminal under the STEPS contract; and how much is paid to STERIA by the National Probation Directorate for the maintenance of each computer terminal as part of the STEPS Contract. [84301]

Hilary Benn: The National Probation Directorate currently levies a £485 per desktop recharge on probation areas for the 2002/03 financial year. The recharge figure covers the provision of maintenance, support service charges including the provision of the helpdesk during normal office hours, and support of the case management system.

Payments made to the company under the STEPS contract are covered by commercial confidentiality clauses that are normal in such contracts.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to prepare a national strategy to promote awareness of and confidence in the work of the National Probation Service; what its terms of reference are; and when it will be published. [83231]

Hilary Benn: The promotion of community sentences to the public and the wider work of the National Probation Service are part of the national strategy to increase confidence in the criminal justice system. As part of the Government's 2002 Spending Review the Home Office shares a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target with the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Attorney-General's Office to improve the level of public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Since, April 2001 the National Probation Service has been developing its communications in particular with sentencers in order to build up confidence in and awareness of, probation work, including new developments in community sentencers that help reduce reoffending. Activities include a video on the Probation Service 'What Works' programme, and plans for publications to disseminate information, and for probation participation at events organised for magistrates and judges.

This work is co-ordinated and funded by the National Probation Directorate, but much of the communication at local level occurs between local probation areas and local benches and Crown courts.

An action plan, bringing together the media strategy, internal communications and communications with sentencers, will be published in spring 2003. Future work will be informed by recently commissioned public perception research, due for publication in December, which the National Probation Service intends to repeat annually.

Police Arrest Procedures

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the procedures police officers have to undertake once they have arrested a suspect. [82968]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office in partnership with the Cabinet Office has conducted a fundamental review of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which examined the basic requirements of The Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act and the codes that underlie police procedures.

Based on the findings and recommendations of this report, the following changes are proposed in the Criminal Justice Bill:

We will give police officers the option to offer an arrested person street bail. At an officer's discretion, s/he would be able to release an arrested person on immediate bail at the scene of the crime on the condition that they must attend a specified police station at a specified time in the future. This allows them to prioritise their work load to attend to more serious crime and to put the necessary arrangements in place before they interview the person (eg where an appropriate adult will need to be in attendance with a juvenile).

The time-consuming requirement to list a detained person's property will be amended so that the custody officer would secure all possessions in a sealable property bag and only make a few supporting comments about the contents if necessary. This and any subsequent access would be done in the presence of the detained person. This has the potential to save resources without compromising protections.

We propose to extend the circumstances in which a review of detention could be done by telephone. It would no longer be obligatory for the reviewing officer to conduct them in person and would ultimately enable officers to overcome the time restrictions that hinder the process.

In addition, section 38 of the Police Reform Act 2002, which is due to be implemented on 2 December, will enable chief officers of police to designate suitably skilled and trained support staff to exercise certain police powers as detention officers, investigating officers and escort officers. Enabling civilians to exercise certain police powers will help to free-up police officers for patrol and increase police visibility. This is consistent with a number of recommendations arising from the Policing Bureaucracy Taskforce which was commissioned to give a Police Service view of what

could be done to tackle the administrative burdens and inefficient working practices which keep police officers off the streets.

Police Investigations

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many investigations in the last year resulted in the police taking no further action; and if he will make a statement. [83682]

Mr. Denham: During 2001–02, 1,291,396 recorded offences were detected by the police of which 199,567[1] (15 per cent.) were detected with no further action by the police. This means that 4 per cent. of all recorded crime is detected in this way. More detailed information on method of detection is published in table 8.02 of "Crime in England and Wales 2001–02". A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

The figures for crimes detected with no further action by the police above exclude those undetected crimes that are not investigated beyond initial reporting.

The current methods of detection are:

Charge/summons

Caution

Taken into consideration; and

Other (no further action)

The "Other" category are those in which the case is not proceeded with –ie there is no legal sanction against the offender.

[1] This figure excludes detections for Durham, which are not broken down by method of detection, and thus represent something of an under-estimate.

Police Numbers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are attached to each Basic Command Unit in England and Wales. [83674]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of officers in each Basic Command Unit (BCU) is provided annually (31 March) by each police force to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. The tables setting out the position for 31 March 2002 have been placed in the Library.

Policing by each BCU would additionally be supported by officers deployed to other operational roles, such as traffic officers, police support units and dog and mounted sections.

Police Technology

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has commissioned into the development of less lethal technologies for use by the police. [83681]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office's Police Scientific Development Branch have published two reports, in April 2001 and November 2001, detailing their research into less lethal technologies for the police.

Previous Convictions

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the changes his proposals for revealing previous convictions to a jury will make to the law on similar fact evidence. [82084]

Hilary Benn: The Government proposes to place the admissibility of evidence of previous misconduct on a statutory basis in a Criminal Justice Bill, which was introduced in Parliament on 21 November. Our proposals will ensure that all evidence of bad character, including previous convictions, is admissible where it is relevant to a matter at issue in a trial. This will represent a fundamental change to the current law on previous misconduct, including the similar fact rule. There will be a discretion to exclude evidence of bad character if its prejudicial effect exceeds its probative value. However, the proposed scheme will create a clearly inclusionary approach under which relevant bad character evidence will not be excluded unless the court is satisfied that there is good reason to do so.

Our proposals will also offer new protection to witnesses, to guard against unnecessarily wide ranging and humiliating attacks on their character. The current rules offer no such protection.

Prison Deaths

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inquests into deaths in *(a)* police and *(b)* prison custody resulted in a verdict of neglect in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [83683]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office publishes annual statistics of deaths in police custody or otherwise following contact with the police. There have been no inquest verdicts of neglect but a number where neglect has been a contributory factor, which are shown in the table.

Year	*Total number of deaths in police custody*	*Number of inquest verdicts where neglect was a contributory factor*	*Inquest verdicts*	*Inquest verdicts awaited*
1992	48	0	—	0
1993	31	0	—	0
1994	39	0	—	0
1995–96	50	2	1. Accidental death contributed to by neglect 2. Natural causes contributed to by neglect	0
1996–97	57	2	1. Drug abuse contributed to by neglect 2. Accidental death—aggravated by neglect	0
1997–98	69	1	Accidental death contributed to by neglect	0
1998–99	67	2	1. Natural causes contributed to by self-neglect	1

Year	Total number of deaths in police custody	Number of inquest verdicts where neglect was a contributory factor	Inquest verdicts	Inquest verdicts awaited
			2. Non-dependent abuse of drugs aggravated by neglect	
1999–2000	70	1	Accident contributed to by neglect	1
2000–01	53	1	Death by misadventure with contributory neglect	8
2001–02	70	0		54

The Prison Service has only been collecting data on neglect riders to inquest verdicts since the beginning of 2001. In that time there have been four inquest verdicts with neglect riders. All four verdicts were returned in 2002, three of them referring to deaths in 2001. This does not include one case of natural causes aggravated by self-neglect.

Prison Hospital Beds

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons do not have *(a)* in-patient beds and *(b)* 24 hour nursing care. [83181]

Hilary Benn: Health services in the following prisons are based on primary care and have no in-patient beds or 24 hour nursing care:

Acklington,
Albany,
Ashwell,
Askham Grange,
Blantyre House,
Blundeston,
Brockhill,
Buckley Hall,
Camp Hill,
Channing's Wood,
Coldingley,
Cookham Wood,
Dover,
Downview,
Drake Hall,
Durham (Female),
East Sutton Park,
Erlestoke,
Everthorpe,
Featherstone,
Ford,
Guy's Marsh,
Haslar,
Haverigg,
Hewell Grange,
Highpoint South,
Hollesley Bay Colony,
Huntercombe,
Kingston,
Kirkham,
Kirklevington Grange,
Lancaster,
Latchmere House,
Leyhill,
Lindholme,
Littlehey,
Lowdham Grange,
Maidstone,
Moorland Open (Hatfield),
Morton Hall,
The Mount,
North Sea Camp,
Portland,
Ranby,
Reading,
Rochester,
Send,
Shepton Mallet,
Shrewsbury,
Spring Hill,
Stafford,
Standford Hill,
Stocken,
Sudbury,
Swinfen Hall,
Thorn Cross,
Usk/Prescoed,
The Verne,
Wayland,
Wealstun,
Weare,
Wellingborough,
Werrington,
Whatton,
Wymott.

Prison Nurses

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* prisoners there are in each prison in the UK; and what the ratio is of nurses to prisoners. [83179]

Hilary Benn: The information available for England and Wales is set out in the table. It relates only to nursing staff or other staff with nursing experience working in prison health care that are employed by the Prison Service. Information about the numbers of prisoners in each establishment in England and Wales is available in the Home Office quarterly publication "Prison Population Brief", a copy of which is on the

Home Office website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/prisons1 .html. Matters concerning Scotland are for the devolved administration to answer. While the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Nurses and health care officers in prison establishments as at 31 October 2002

Area Est. Group	*Principal officer*	*Senior officer*	*Prison officer*	*Nursing grades*
East Midlands (North)				
Lincoln	1	4	6	6
North Sea Camp				1
Nottingham	2		4	13
Ranby		1	5	1
Sudbury		1		2
Whatton				1
East Midlands (North) Total	3	6	15	24
East Midlands (South) Ashwell				4
Gartree	1	2	6	6
Glen Parva	2		2	31
Leicester	1	1	3	12
Onley			2	10
Stocken		1		6
Wellingborough				5
East Midlands (South) Total	4	4	13	74
Eastern				
Bedford		1	1	11
Blundeston			2	12
Chelmsford	1	2	1	16
Grendon		5	3	6
Highpoint		1	1	7
Littlehey		1	2	5
Norwich	1	2	5	18
The Mount		1		6
Wayland		1	3	3
Eastern Total	2	14	18	74
High Security Prisons				
Belmarsh	1	3	5	37
Durham		1	6	24
Frankland		2	11	8
Full Sutton	1	4	4	4
Long Lartin			2	15
Wakefield	1	3	1	13
Whitemoor		2	6	9
Woodhill	1	3	13	12
High Security Prisons Total	4	18	48	122
HQ				
Area off—Kent, Surrey, Sussex				1
HQ				1
Standards Audit Unit	2			1
Training and Development	1			1
HQ Total	3	0	0	4
Juvenile Establishments				
Hollesley Bay		1	2	4
Huntercombe			3	2
Werrington	1	1	2	6
Wetherby		1	1	9
Juvenile Establishments Total	1	3	8	21
Kent, Surrey and Sussex				
Blantyre House			1	1
Canterbury	1	1	4	3
Coldingley		1	1	2
Dover	1		1	4
Elmley	1	2	7	9
Ford		1		2
Highdown	1	2		16
Lewes		2	3	7
Maidstone		1	1	3
Rochester	1	1	4	4
Standford Hill		1	2	

Nurses and health care officers in prison establishments as at 31 October 2002

Area Est. Group	*Principal officer*	*Senior officer*	*Prison officer*	*Nursing grades*
Swaleside	1	1	1	23
Kent, Surrey and Sussex Total	6	13	25	63
London				
Brixton	1	4	13	18
Feltham	2		2	23
Latchmere House			1	
Pentonville		2	5	36
Wandsworth	1	3	3	32
Wormwood Scrubs	2	2	11	30
London Total	6	11	35	139
North London				
Acklington			1	7
Castington		1		13
Deerbolt				12
Holme House	1	2	4	21
Kirklevington				2
North East Total	1	3	5	55
North West				
Buckley Hall				
Garth	2	1	9	13
Haverigg		1	1	3
Hindley	1	1	8	15
Kirkham			1	3
Lancaster				
Lancaster Farms				22
Liverpool	1	9	26	31
Manchester	4	1	1	25
Preston	1	3	13	8
Risley		1	1	13
Thorn Cross		1	2	
North West Total	9	18	62	123
South West				
Bristol		1	4	16
Channings Wood	1	1	2	2
Dartmoor	1	2	3	9
Dorchester		2		8
Erlestoke				3
Exeter	2	2	1	18
Gloucestershire	1	1	3	9
Guys Marsh		1	1	3
Leyhill	1		1	3
Portland		2	2	3
The Verne				3
Weare				2
South West Total	6	12	17	79
Thames Valley and Hampshire				
Aylesbury		1	1	9
Bullingdon		1	5	10
Haslar				3
Kingston		1	2	1
Parkhurst	1	2	11	15
Reading		1	3	6
Winchester		4	9	10
Thames Valley and Hampshire Total	1	10	31	54
Wales				
Cardiff	1	1	5	15
Swansea	1	2	4	12
Usk/Prescoed				4
Wales Total	2	3	9	31
West Midlands				
Birmingham	1	4	9	14
Brinsford				22
Featherstone			2	3
Shrewsbury				6
Stafford		1	5	2
Stoke Heath				14
Swifen Hall		1	1	1

Nurses and health care officers in prison establishments as at 31 October 2002

Area Est. Group	*Principal officer*	*Senior officer*	*Prison officer*	*Nursing grades*
West Midlands Total	1	6	17	62
Women's Prisons and YOIs				
Askham Grange				3
Brockhill				10
Bullwood Hall				11
Cookham Wood				5
Drake Hall				6
East Sutton Park				2
Eastwood Park			1	14
Foston Hall				10
Highpoint North		1	1	14
Holloway				38
Low Newton	1		1	12
Morton Hall				1
New Hall				20
Send				4
Styal				23
Women's Prisons and YOIs Total	1	1	3	173
Yorkshire and Humberside				
Everthorpe		1		2
Hull		1	8	18
Leeds		3	11	37
Lindholme		1	2	7
Moorland	1	3	9	7
Wealstun		1		4
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	1	10	30	75
Grand Total	51	132	336	1,173

Prison Sentences

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of cases heard in *(a)* magistrates and *(b)* Crown courts resulted in a sentence of imprisonment in each of the Criminal Justice System areas in the last year for which figures are available. [83669]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is shown in the table for England and Wales, 2000.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in December.

Magistrates Courts

Criminal justice system area	*Defendants proceeded against*[1]	*of which: Sentenced*[2]	*Given immediate custody*	*Percentage given immediate custody*[4]
Avon and Somerset	49,754	36,307	1,728	4.8
Bedfordshire	16,937	12,644	983	7.8
Cambridgeshire	12,171	9,720	582	6.0
Cheshire	32,419	25,887	1,348	5.2
Cleveland	23,857	17,972	1,013	5.6
Cumbria	16,482	13,282	539	4.1
Derbyshire	31,688	24,739	1,326	5.4
Devon and Cornwall	42,993	32,511	1,378	4.2
Dorset	19,366	14,563	877	6.0
Durham	18,906	14,243	899	6.3
Essex	54,044	42,305	2,000	4.7
Gloucestershire	19,003	13,992	497	3.6
Greater Manchester	142,015	108,632	4,860	4.5
Hampshire	57,713	44,937	1,988	4.4
Hertfordshire	27,576	20,431	758	3.7
Humberside	28,820	22,746	1,475	6.5
Kent	34,673	26,026	1,794	6.9
Lancashire	66,718	47,601	2,116	4.4
Leicestershire	35,195	26,592	1,408	5.3
Lincolnshire	22,757	17,990	550	3.1
Merseyside	53,400	38,661	2,548	6.6
Metropolitan police[5]	242,946	187,649	12,177	6.5
Norfolk	17,642	14,531	747	5.1
Northamptonshire	20,084	14,235	878	6.2
Northumbria	64,470	48,613	2,026	4.2

Magistrates Courts

Criminal justice system area	*of which: Defendants proceeded against*[1]	*Sentenced*[2]	*Given immediate custody*	*Percentage given immediate custody*[4]
North Yorkshire	19,097	14,433	876	6.1
Nottinghamshire	35,972	26,510	1,929	7.3
South Yorkshire	47,474	36,614	2,401	6.6
Staffordshire[6]				
Suffolk	18,964	13,931	655	4.7
Surrey	20,466	15,496	418	2.7
Sussex	39,519	28,944	1,472	5.1
Thames Valley	61,646	43,625	1,657	3.8
Warwickshire	18,525	14,905	406	2.7
West Mercia	32,316	24,394	1,157	4.7
West Midlands	114,743	75,711	4,543	6.0
West Yorkshire	105,906	71,113	3,810	5.4
Wiltshire	19,072	14,217	472	3.3
Dyfed Powys	17,878	13,009	433	3.3
Gwent	26,768	20,829	648	3.1
North Wales	21,009	16,657	867	5.2
South Wales	56,107	40,252	2,015	5.0
Total England and Wales	1,835,084	1,367,951	72,018	5.3

The Crown Court

Criminal Justice System area	*of which: Defendants tried*	*Sentenced*[3]	*Given immediate custody*	*Percentage given immediate custody*[4]
Avon and Somerset	1,858	1,392	707	50.8
Bedfordshire	652	472	330	69.9
Cambridgeshire	783	568	379	66.7
Cheshire	1,431	1,103	702	63.6
Cleveland	932	737	470	63.82
Cumbria	607	480	274	57.1
Derbyshire	1,346	1,029	592	57.5
Devon and Cornwall	1,399	1,030	549	53.3
Dorset	679	503	316	62.8
Durham	715	580	337	58.1
Essex	1,100	892	527	59.1
Gloucestershire	414	328	155	47.3
Greater Manchester	5,677	4,316	2,515	58.3
Hampshire	2,522	1,753	958	54.6
Hertfordshire	879	628	431	68.6
Humberside	1,081	926	586	64.42
Kent	2,316	1,684	1,049	62.3
Lancashire	2,509	2,018	1,240	61.4
Leicestershire	1,350	1,064	621	58.4
Lincolnshire	634	510	272	53.3
Merseyside	2,711	1,953	1,255	64.3
Metropolitan police[5]	12,987	8,391	5,327	63.5
Norfolk	848	639	362	56.7
Northamptonshire	613	525	384	73.1
Northumbria	2,137	1,765	927	52.5
North Yorkshire	932	734	423	57.6
Nottinghamshire	2,103	1,649	966	58.6
South Yorkshire	2,448	2,017	1,189	58.9
Staffordshire [6]	1,170	942	611	64.9
Suffolk	664	497	309	62.2
Surrey	600	437	274	62.7
Sussex	1,651	1,280	862	67.3
Thames Valley	1,425	1,066	710	66.6
Warwickshire	308	273	199	72.9
West Mercia	1,138	905	602	66.5
West Midlands	5,621	4,259	2,525	59.3
West Yorkshire	4,643	3,560	2,065	58.0
Wiltshire	297	251	173	68.9

	The Crown Court			
	of which:			
Criminal Justice System area	Defendants tried	Sentenced[3]	Given immediate custody	Percentage given immediate custody[4]
Dyfed Powys	451	316	159	50.3
Gwent	905	720	415	57.6
North Wales	586	436	299	68.6
South Wales	2,307	1,770	1,113	62.9
Total England and Wales	75,429	56,398	34,169	60.6

[1] Includes only prosecutions against defendants completed in magistrates' courts including those committed for sentence to the Crown Court.
[2] Includes those sentenced in the magistrates' court and committed for sentence to the Crown Court.
[3] Excludes offenders committed for sentence.
[4] Expressed as a percentage of those sentenced.
[5] Includes City of London.
[6] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates' courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Estimates based on this sample are included in the England and Wales figures only.

Prisoners (Drug Taking)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what punishments are given to prisoners who, by urine test, are discovered to have taken *(a)* heroin and *(b)* cannabis. [80531]

Hilary Benn: Punishments vary according to the discipline record of the prisoner concerned and local factors, such as the extent of any drug problems within the prison. A urine test showing a hard drug, such as heroin, will often attract a punishment of additional days. A lesser punishment, including loss of privileges or loss of earnings, would be more likely for a test showing cannabis.

Prisons (Mother and Baby Units)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women's prisons provide mother and baby units, and what the capacity is of those units. [83673]

Hilary Benn: There are four prison mother and baby units covering England and Wales. They are at Holloway in London, New Hall near Wakefield, Styal in Cheshire, and Askham Grange, an open prison in York. These provide a total of 68 places.

Two new units are also under construction. One is at Eastwood Park in Gloucestershire and the other at Askham Grange. These will provide an extra 22 places.

Two new build prisons at Ashford and Peterborough will also have accommodation for mothers and babies.

Projects (Lincolnshire)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding his Department has allocated to projects in *(a)* North East Lincolnshire and *(b)* North Lincolnshire since 1997, broken down by departmental initiatives. [82917]

Mr. Denham: The table outlines projects that have been funded in both North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire.

	Project	Amount per year (£)	Total (£)
North East Lincolnshire	Partnership Development Fund 2000–03	64,000/64,000/58,500	186,500
	Small Retailers in Deprived Areas 2001–03	12,135/24,309	36,444
	Freeman Street CCTV 2001–02	177,000	177,000
	North East Lincolnshire CCTV Control Room 2001–02	175,750	175,750
	Safer Communities Initiative 2002–03	79,110	79,110
	Communities Against Drugs 2001–03	188,500/188,500	377,000
	Reducing Burglary Initiative (Grimsby) 2000–01	544,752	544,752
Total			1,576,556
North Lincolnshire	Partnership Development Fund 2000–03	44,000/44,000/40,200	128,200
	Small Retailers in Deprived Areas 2001–03	10,000/20,000	30,000
	Ashby Town Centre CCTV 1999–2000	64,500	64,500
	Albert Mason CCTV Scheme 2001–02	189,244	189,244
	Safer Communities Initiative 2002–03	51,253	51,253
	Communities Against Drugs 2001–03	132,100/132,100	264,200
	Targeted Policing Initiative R2—Multi Agency Problem Solving Project 2001–03	80,000/268,000	348,000
Total			1,075,397
Overall spend			2,651,953

In addition to this, mainstream funding of £391.6 million has been allocated to Lincolnshire for policing since 1997. Police resources are allocated between all 43 forces in England and Wales according to a formula that allocates funding to provide a standard level of service. It is then a matter for the Police Authority to set a budget and the Chief Constable to determine how resources should be used, taking local views into account wherever possible.

Reoffenders

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women reoffended after release from prison in 2001–02. [83672]

Hilary Benn: Self-reported reoffending rates are not currently measured. However reconviction rates for persons released from prison are published annually as National Statistics. Two year reconviction rates for persons released from prison in 2001–02 will not be available until 2004–05.

Resettlement Pathfinder Projects

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the interim results are from the evaluation, under the Crime Reduction Programme, of the resettlement pathfinder projects which run from January 2000 until April; and what plans he has for further investment in support for work with discharged prisoners. [82962]

Hilary Benn: An initial application for advice on the work piloted by resettlement pathfinders has already been submitted to the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel (formerly the Joint Accreditation Panel). The response from the panel was encouraging but indicated that further developmental work was required specifically in relation to young adult offenders, women and minority ethnic offenders. To allow for this further work to proceed the three current resettlement pathfinders (Parc, Hull and Lewes) have been extended and are scheduled to run to at least the autumn of 2003.

The core programme (For-A-Change) has now been piloted with a young adult offender group and plans are being developed to establish a new pathfinder project to be delivered to short-term female prisoners. The programme material is to be reviewed to ensure that it addresses the specific needs of minority ethnic offenders and those with low levels of literacy.

To ensure that this work adequately reflects recent national reports on resettlement published by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) and jointly by the probation and prisons inspectorates, a joint prison/probation service project board has been established. This board will focus on the needs of short-term prisoners (those serving less than 12 months).

The Criminal Justice Bill, published last week, includes proposed legislation for the introduction of 'custody plus'. The experience gained through the delivery of the current resettlement pathfinders will be used to inform planning undertaken by the National Probation Service and the prison services for the introduction of this new sentence.

The report of the resettlement pathfinders evaluation, which will give interim findings, is currently being prepared for publication.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* sex offender orders, *(b)* disqualification orders and *(c)* restraining orders are in place, and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [82673]

Hilary Benn: There have been 173 sex offender orders made in England and Wales between 1 December 1998 and 31 March 2002.

Information on disqualification orders and restraining orders, introduced in 2001 are not yet available.

Paper 155 in the Police Research Series, published in the summer of 2002: "The Police Perspective on Sex Offender Orders: A preliminary review of policy and practice" showed that the police found sex offender orders to be a useful tool and that orders were perceived to be a practical mechanism for a multi-agency approach to the management of high-risk sex offenders.

The Police Reform Act 2002 contained a number of changes to improve the effectiveness and flexibility of sex offender orders. This included the introduction of interim sex offender orders. Interim orders will enable arrangements to be put in place to protect the public before a decision on a full order has been taken by the Court. The changes will be implemented on 2 December and we have issued new guidance to the police and courts on using sex offender orders. Additionally, on 19 November we published our proposals for further legislation in this area in the Command Paper, "Protecting the Public." In relation to sex offenders, these proposals include:

Registered offenders will be required to confirm annually and in person at their local police station that the information held about them is still up to date.

A new order to make those convicted of sex offences overseas register their details when they come to the United Kingdom.

Reducing the period within which a sex offender must notify the police of change of name or address from 14 days to three.

Offenders will be required to provide their National Insurance details when registering. This will make it easier to identify and find those offenders who try to evade the registration requirements.

Women Prisoners

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* main categories of offence for women prisoners and *(b)* re-offending rates for drug offences among women prisoners were in each of the last five years. [82864]

Hilary Benn: Information requested on main offence categories of women is shown in the table.

Women first received into prisons in England and Wales in 2001, by offence type and type of first reception

Offence group	Total	Untried	Convicted unsentenced	Sentenced	Non-criminal
Violence against the person	4,318	561	191	557	9
Sexual offences	29	10	4	15	—
Burglary	527	357	75	95	—
Robbery	395	231	43	120	1
Theft and handling	4,587	1,350	1,715	1,522	—
Fraud and forgery	678	162	117	399	—
Drugs offences	1,452	763	234	455	—
Other offences	2,981	671	530	980	—
Offences not recorded	997	241	255	501	—
Total	12,164	4,346	3,164	4,644	10

Re-offending rates are not normally measured as they rely on the self-reporting of offending by offenders. Such an approach can lead to questions over the reliability of data based on individuals' recollection and willingness to impart their offending behaviour to an official source.

However two-year reconviction rates for females released from prison after serving a sentence for a standard list drug offence are available. The rates are shown in the table.

Two year reconviction rates for females discharged from prison after serving sentence for a standard list drugs offence.

Year of discharge	Number of females discharged after serving a sentence for a standard list drugs offence	Percentage reconvicted within two years for any standard list offence
1994	244	18
1995	298	19
1996	428	26
1997	554	26
1998	700	25

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women are in prison; and of these, how many *(a)* are on remand, *(b)* are from black and ethnic minority groups and *(c)* have no previous convictions. [82876]

Hilary Benn: At 31 October 2002, there were 4,427 females in prison. Of these, 984 were on remand and 1,316 were from ethnic minority groups.

Information on the sentenced prison population held on 30 June 2000 has been analysed by the number of standard list offences for which a prisoner had received a conviction. On that date, 32 per cent. of females held in prison in England and Wales were known to have no previous convictions prior to the sentence which resulted in imprisonment. In addition, criminal histories for a further 11 per cent. of females could not be located on the Home Office Offenders Index.

Young Offenders

36. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Lord Chancellor about his plans for the bailing of persistent young offenders. [82338]

Hilary Benn: Home Office Ministers frequently discuss criminal justice matters with the Lord Chancellor and other Government colleagues. We decided this year to implement extended secure remand powers in respect of 12–16 year olds who repeatedly commit imprisonable offences while on bail or remand, together with bail tagging for juveniles. We have also funded an expansion of the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme. Together these changes give the courts much more choice where persistent young offenders are facing trial.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many incidents of self-harm there were in young offender institutions in each year since 1997; [82748]

(2) how many young offenders took their own lives while in custody in each year since 1997. [82747]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is in the tables. Table 1 covers the 79 self-inflicted juvenile and young offender deaths between 1997 and 20 November 2002. Table 2 covers the number of recorded incidents of self-harm by juveniles and young offenders between 1998 and 30 June 2002, data on self-harm in this format not having been available before 1998.

Table 1. Showing the number of self-inflicted deaths of juveniles and young offenders in custody between 01.01.1997 and 20.11.2002

	Juveniles (15–17 years)	Young Offenders (18–20 years)	Total under 21 years (juveniles and young offenders)
1997	0	9	9
1998	3	11	14
1999	2	13	15
2000	3	13	16
2001	3	10	13
2002	2	10	12
Total	13	66	79

The Prison Service employs the term "self-inflicted death" which includes all those deaths where it appears the person may have acted specifically to take his/her own life.

Table 2. Recorded incidents of self-harm among juveniles and young offenders in custody, 1 January1998 to 30 June 2002

	Juveniles (15–17 years)	*Young offenders (18–20 years)*	*Total under-21 years (juveniles and young Offenders)*
1998	252	746	998
1999	205	825	1,030
2000	288	1,069	1,357
2001	402	1,343	1,745
2002	260	739	999
Total	1,407	4,722	6,129

The Prison Service, with the support of the Youth Justice Board, is currently developing a suicide and self-harm prevention strategy. This is being taken forward progressively through a three year programme, which commenced in April 2001. Efforts are being targeted where the risks are highest within a broad preventative approach. The prisoners most at risk—in local prisons, on remand, in the early weeks and months of custody—will be better identified and cared for by better trained and supported staff. We aim to encourage a supportive culture in prisons based on good staff-prisoner relationships, a constructive regime and a physically safe environment. Six pilot prisons will act as the test bed for the full range of new safer custody policies and standards, and will be independently evaluated to determine which elements should subsequently be rolled out to the wider prison estate.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of young people are young offenders *(a)* in Staffordshire and *(b)* on average in England. [82975]

Hilary Benn: 4.2 per cent. of all young people (aged 10–17 inclusive) in Staffordshire were convicted or dealt with by police reprimand or warning in 2001. The proportion for England as a whole was 3.2 per cent.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been evaluated by his Department on the most appropriate method of deterrent to prevent young offenders from re-offending. [83976]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office and the Youth Justice Board (YJB) are currently evaluating the overall impact of the justice youth reforms and their component programmes.

Statistics published in June this year for offenders dealt with in July 2000, showed a 14.6 per cent. reduction in reconviction rates compared with 1997. Independent evaluation reports have been published: on Youth Offending Teams, the introduction of the Referral Order, reconvictions after Final Warnings, and Parenting programmes. The YJB expects shortly to publish further evaluation reports on cognitive behaviour, mentoring, drugs and alcohol, education, training and employment, prevention, and interventions in support of final warnings.

HEALTH

Spectacle Vouchers

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the value of vouchers for the purchase of spectacles for people on low incomes; and if he will make a statement. [84854]

Mr. Lammy: Optical voucher values are reviewed every year and we will be making an announcement about the 2003–04 rates shortly.

Recruitment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to encourage private recruitment agencies to sign up to the Government's guidelines on banning the recruitment of nurses from developing countries. [84892]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has written to those commercial agencies it is aware of, asking them to provide references from national health service and other customers confirming compliance with the code of practice. The code of practice states that developing countries should not be targeted for recruitment.

The list of agencies who are working in line with the principles of the code of practice appears on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/international-recruitment and NHS organisations are strongly advised to refer to the list when establishing new contracts.

The Department will write again to those agencies who have not replied and to any other agencies brought to its attention.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the South African health department regarding the recruitment of nurses to the UK. [84893]

Mr. Hutton: Departmental officials visited South Africa last year to share the United Kingdom's strategy and position on international recruitment and co-operation. The South African Ministry of health has asked for the Department's assistance with workforce evelopment and the establishment of a chief nursing officer post. Officials are due to visit South Africa in February 2003, to meet with senior officials of the Department of Health South Africa.

A&E Waiting Times

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the single longest wait recorded in an accident and emergency department has been this year. [83292]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not available.

Accidental Deaths

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accidental deaths of people on low incomes have occurred in each year since 1997. [83170]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply. The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Air Ambulances

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on sponsorship arrangements for air ambulances. [84027]

Mr. Lammy: In England, there are 12 air ambulance services provided by 12 independent air ambulance charities. Fund raising for air ambulances is organised by independent local charities. In most cases the national health services also supports the services by providing fully trained paramedics to crew the aircraft when they respond to emergencies. In addition, in 2001–02 the Government allocated £1.3 million to five of the 12 charities. Consideration is being given to further Government funding in 2002–03.

Cancelled Operations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in each of the last 10 years *(a)* as a total figure and *(b)* as a percentage of all patients treated. [83291]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the total number of operations cancelled are not collected. Figures are collected on the number of patients whose operations are cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons at the last minute. Data were not collected on cancelled operations before 1994–95.

These data, as a percentage of elective general and acute admissions and first finished consultant episodes, are provided in the table.

Year	*Quarter*	*Number of operations cancelled at the last minute*[1]	*Cancelled operations as percentage of general and acute elective first FCE admissions*
2002–03	Quarter 1	14,808	1.11
2001–02	Quarter 1	20,833	1.65
	Quarter 2	20,901	1.57
	Quarter 3	20,036	1.50
	Quarter 4	19,973	1.47
Whole year 2001–02		81,743	1.55
2000–01	Quarter 1	17,033	1.27
	Quarter 2	16,965	1.24
	Quarter 3	18,844	1.35
	Quarter 4	24,976	1.78
Whole year 2000–01		77,818	1.41
1999–2000	Quarter 1	12,313	0.93
	Quarter 2	12,017	0.90
	Quarter 3	15,769	1.18
	Quarter 4	20,143	1.46
Whole year 1999–2000		60,242	1.12
1998–99	Quarter 1	12,384	0.97
	Quarter 2	11,470	0.87
	Quarter 3	14,611	1.07
	Quarter 4	17,685	1.32
Whole year 1998–99		56,150	1.06
1997–98	Quarter 1	12,019	1.01
	Quarter 2	11,550	0.95
	Quarter 3	12,476	1.02
	Quarter 4	14,460	1.18
Whole year 1997–98		50,505	1.04
1996–97	Quarter 1	11,595	0.98
	Quarter 2	11,055	0.90
	Quarter 3	13,023	1.06
	Quarter 4	16,374	1.38
Whole year 1996–97		52,047	1.08
1995–96	Quarter 1	11,860	1.04
	Quarter 2	11,457	0.97
	Quarter 3	14,514	1.19
	Quarter 4	16,652	1.34
Whole year 1995–96		54,483	1.14
1994–95	Quarter 1	11,603	1.08
	Quarter 2	10,186	0.91
	Quarter 3	11,874	1.02
	Quarter 4	14,466	1.22
Whole year 1994–95		48,129	1.06

[1] Operations cancelled at the last minute are the number of patients whose operations are cancelled on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled *(a)* on the day of admission and *(b)* prior to admission for non-clinical reasons in each quarter since June 2001, broken down by NHS hospital trust. [84039]

Mr. Hutton: Data are collected on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation. These data are not broken down into whether an operation was cancelled on the day of admission or prior to admission. These data are available at trust level on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/data—requests.htm.

Community Health Councils

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if it is his policy that Community Health Council staff will not be made redundant until the Community Health Council has been formally abolished; [84068]

(2) what guidance he plans to give employing authorities on making redundancy payments to Community Health Council staff; [84067]

(3) if he will offer salary protection in cases where posts for the Clearing House staff are graded at salaries lower than those paid to Community Health Council staff; [84069]

(4) what the total cost is of making all remaining Community Health Council staff redundant. [84066]

Mr. Lammy: The Government takes the view that community health council (CHC) staff have valuable skills which are important to the smooth running of the national health service. We are working closely with the trade unions to ensure every action is being taken to support CHC staff to find suitable alternative employment. This includes the setting up of a clearing house system, training and careers interview facilities.

We are also currently working with the trade unions and other interested parties to develop a human resources (HR) framework which will provide support to CHC staff and managers. The HR framework will cover a variety of areas including employment options and the role of the clearing house system that will be

established to help CHC staff find employment in the NHS family and the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH).

The CPPIH has agreed to advertise all their vacancies through the clearing houses as well as in the national and local press. CHC staff applying for a post with the CPPIH who meet the specific job criteria would be guaranteed an interview.

The Government currently has no plans to make CHC staff redundant until all employment options have been fully considered. It is therefore not possible to give a redundancy cost at this time.

Redundancy terms for CHC staff, as strategic health authority (StHA) employees, are covered in Section 45 of the General Whitley Council Handbook or in accordance with the contract of employment for senior and general managers. A copy of the General Whitley Council Handbook is available in the Library.

Pay protection arrangements for those staff who find suitable alternative employment in a StHA are outlined in Section 48 of the General Whitley Council handbook.

Where CHC staff find suitable alternative employment in NHS trusts, trusts have the power to recognise previous service in the NHS.

Community Pharmacies

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community pharmacies there were in each health authority in each of the past five years. [84018]

Mr. Lammy: Information about the number of community pharmacies in each health authority in England in the past five years has been placed in the Library.

Decontamination Units

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS acute trusts had ordered mobile decontamination facilities and associated protective clothing between receipt of a letter dated 22 October from Dr. David Harper and 7 November. [84010]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health's chief scientist wrote to the national health service on 22 October to remind all NHS trust chief executives of current policy on this issue and to remind the small percentage of trusts who had yet to place an order.

A total of seven NHS acute trusts ordered mobile decontamination facilities and associated protective clothing between 22 October and 7 November.

Diabetes

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the national service framework for diabetes. [84282]

Mr. Lammy: We shall be publishing the delivery strategy for the diabetes national service framework in the next few weeks.

Doctors' Work Rotas

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of doctors working in shifts on the level of perioperative deaths in NHS hospitals. [83451]

Mr. Hutton: Each year the National Confidential Enquiry into Perioperative Deaths reports on deaths that occurred in the most recent 12 months for which figures are available. There has been no separate assessment of the impact of shift working on the level of perioperative deaths in the national health service. We are however, moving to a position where out of hours cover is provided by more experienced doctors, and this will be supported by our commitment in the NHS Plan to increase the number of consultants and doctors.

Drugs

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for health which drugs referred to NICE have been rejected and subsequently subjected to the appeal mechanism; and which of them were successfully approved. [83309]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* In total 56 appraisals have reached the stage where an appeal could be received; of these 19 received appeals and seven of these were upheld, six relating to drugs. The thrust of the recommendations changed in one of the appraisals as a result of an appeal, namely Rituximab for follicular non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

Dangerous Severe Personality Disorder

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of individuals with dangerous severe personality disorder in *(a)* prison and *(b)* the general population; and what assessment he has made of trends in the number of people with DSPD. [82426]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

We estimate that there are between 2,100 and 2,400 individuals who are dangerous as a result of a severe personality disorder (DSPD). The majority of these individuals will be in prison or a secure hospital. We estimate that at any one time 1,400 will be in prison and a further 400 will be detained on court orders under the legal category of psychopathic disorder in secure psychiatric hospitals. We also estimate that a further 300 to 600 men may be living in the community at any one time, of whom most will have been recently detained in prison or hospital.

There is no information currently available to make an assessment of likely trends in the number of people who are dangerous as a result of severe personality disorder in prison or the general population. However, the number of restricted patients detained in secure hospitals for a psychopathic disorder has remained around 400 for over 10 years.

East Midlands Ambulance Trust

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions the response time to category A calls to the East Midlands Ambulance Trust took *(a)* over 30 minutes and *(b)* over one hour, in

(i) the county of Rutland and (ii) the Melton borough council area, in each of the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [83012]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* Information about ambulance emergency response times to Category A calls is not available specifically for the county of Rutland or the Melton borough council. The latest information available about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times for the East Midlands Ambulance National Health Service Trust, and all other ambulance trusts, is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2001–02". A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library and available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0213.htm.

General Practitioners

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many general practitioners, in each London borough, are operating a closed-list policy; and if he will make a statement; [83657]

(2) what steps he is taking to encourage more general practitioners to set up practice in Inner and Greater London; and if he will make a statement. [83658]

Mr. Hutton: The information on closed lists is not held centrally.

We are committed to expanding the primary care work force both through national and local initiatives. The London work force development confederation has introduced a number of specific programmes to expand the GP work force in London by 225 general practitioners. These include:

The London Deanery's successful expansion of the number of training places in GP practices for GP Registrars. This year there are an additional 51 training places for GPs in London. Primary care trusts will be able to build on this success by setting up new and more flexible contracts for newly qualified GPs.

More flexible career opportunities, particularly those designed to retain GPs close to retirement age, are also being put into place by London PCTs including a flexible career scheme which will commence shortly, designed to attract GPs back into practice for part-time working.

A London wide international recruitment scheme which will commence in 2003 to build on the successful recruitment of 17 French GPs in South East London.

GPs (Age Distribution)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the age distribution is of general practitioners in *(a)* Kent and *(b)* England. [82739]

Mr. Hutton: The age distribution of general practitioners in England and Kent Medway Strategic Health Authority as at March 2002 is shown in the table.

All practitioners[1], NHS Plan GPs[2], unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[3] in Kent and Medway strategic health authority and England as at 31 March 2002 (by April 2002 boundaries)

Number (headcount)

	Total	*Under 30*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*50 to 54*	*55 to 59*	*60 to 64*	*65 to 69*	*70 and over*	*Unknown*
England												
All practitioners	32,011	1,305	3,557	5,497	6,272	5,376	4,633	3,379	1,419	506	66	1
Percentage		4.1	11.1	17.2	19.6	16.8	14.5	10.6	4.4	1.6	0.2	0.0
of which:												
Kent and Medway StHA												
All practitioners	946	26	77	149	180	176	154	117	56	11	0	0
Percentage		2.7	8.1	15.8	19.0	18.6	16.3	12.4	5.9	1.2	0.0	0.0

[1] All practitioners include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs, PMS salaried GPs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (para 52 SFA), PMS other and GP retainers.
[2] NHS plan GPs include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs, PMS salaried GPs, restricted principals, assistants, salaried doctors (para 52 SFA) and PMS others.
[3] UPEs include GMS unrestricted principles, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.
[4] Converted to match April 2002 boundaries (formerly East Kent HA and West Kent HA)
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Hospital Transport Scheme

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of the Hospital Transport Scheme was in each of the past five years. [84089]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not collected centrally.

Latex Allergy

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department will take to implement the conclusions of the second summit on latex allergy. [83943]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health has agreed to work closely with the Health and Safety Executive and other key stakeholders to produce new guidance on the use of latex products in the national health service. We expect that this guidance will be published in Health and Safety Week 2003 and will be circulated throughout the NHS.

Mental Health (Nottingham)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many specialist mental health beds for young people are provided by the Nottingham Healthcare NHS Trust. [84033]

Mr. Lammy: There are 12 specialist mental health beds for young people in Nottinghamshire.

NHS Funding

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding for the NHS per head of population was spent on primary care and secondary care in *(a)* North Staffordshire, *(b)* the West Midlands and *(c)* on average in England in 2001–02. [83547]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the expenditure per weighted head of population on primary, secondary and total healthcare in North Staffordshire Health Authority, West Midlands Region and England is shown in the table.

2001–02 expenditure on primary and secondary healthcare per weighted head of population

£ per head

	Primary	*Secondary*	*Total*
North Staffordshire HA	199.86	691.34	891.20
West Midlands region	212.88	616.79	829.67
All England	207.75	603.49	811.24

Notes:

1. In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure per head. These include:
the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission healthcare on behalf of other health bodies;
and asset revaluations in NHS trusts being funded through health authorities.
For these reasons expenditure per head cannot be compared reliably between health authorities.
2. Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.
3. Expenditure is taken from audited health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year. The expenditure is the expenditure on primary, secondary and total healthcare by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust summarisation forms and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board. An element of pharmaceutical services expenditure is accounted for by the Prescription Pricing Authority and not by health authorities.
4. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting in 2001–02 where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. This has been removed to provide comparability in the answer as far as possible.

Sources:

1. Health authority audited summarisation forms 2001–02
2. Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2001–02
3. Weighted population estimates 2001–02
4. Regional comparisons are all based on those existing in 2001–02

NHS Plus

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many clients NHS Plus has served since November 2001; and what has been its total income. [84092]

Mr. Lammy: NHS Plus providers are a network of 115 occupational health departments in the national health service in England selling services to non-NHS employers. Each occupational health department is autonomous and their finances are managed by their individual trust. Detailed information on the number of clients and income is not collected centrally.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made on the implications of the deficits of the *(a)* South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust and *(b)* Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust. [83517]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* Departmental officials in the Directorate of Health and Social Care (DHSC) Midlands and East of England and West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority (StHA) are working closely with both Worcestershire Acute Hospitals National Health Service Trust and South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT) to minimise the deficit forecast for the end of the financial year 2002–03. The PCT is conducting a review of services to consider more efficient ways of provision in the acute, community and primary care sectors. As part of the normal monitoring process undertaken by the DHSC and StHA, the organisations are producing longer-term financial strategies within their service development plans for 2003–04 to 2005–06, as required by all health economies nationally.

NHS Trusts (Compacts)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of NHS trusts have signed up to local compacts; [84096]

(2) what proportion of primary care trusts have signed up to local compacts. [84094]

Mr. Lammy: The Department is determined to see all national health service organisations in England signed up to a geographically relevant local compact by 31 March 2004. Information from the NHS in the list shows the following NHS trusts and primary care trusts have signed up to local compacts, as at 29 November 2002.

NHS trusts and primary care trusts

Ashton, Leigh and Wigan PCT
Bebington and West Wirral PCT
Birkenhead and Wallasey PCT
Brighton and Hove PCT
Camden PCT
Central Liverpool PCT
Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospital NHST
Central Suffolk PCT
Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHST
Coventry PCT
Croydon PCT
East Staffordshire PCT
Ellesmere Port and Neston PCT
Enfield PCT
Halton PCT
Kensington and Chelsea PCT
North Cheshire Hospitals NHST

North Liverpool PCT
North Sheffield PCT
North Warwickshire PCT
Northampton PCT
Northamptonshire Heartlands PCT
Oldham PCT
Rugby PCT
Sheffield South West PCT
Sheffield West PCT
South Downs Health NHST
South East Dorset PCT
South East Sheffield PCT
South Liverpool PCT
South Sefton PCT
South Warwickshire General Hospitals NHST
South Warwickshire PCT
South West Dorset PCT
Southport and Formby PCT
Southport and Ormskirk Hospitals NHST
St. Helens PCT
Stockport PCT
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHST
Wandsworth PCT
West Lancashire PCT
West Norfolk PCT
Wirral Hospital NHST
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Health Services NHST

Nurses (Recruitment)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with which developing countries the NHS has an agreement to recruit nurses *(a)* directly and *(b)* through commercial agencies. [84890]

Mr. Hutton: The Government have agreements to recruit nurses from the Philippines, India and Indonesia. University hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire national health service trust have an agreement to run a pilot to recruit nurses from China.

In addition, NHS employers are able to establish exchange programmes for nurses from developing countries, in line with the guidance on nursing recruitment.

The NHS does not work with commercial agencies to recruit directly from developing countries.

Nurses (Redbridge)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he intends to improve the recruitment and retention of nurses in Redbridge. [80537]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service set targets to increase the workforce in the NHS. Figures released earlier this year show that between September 1999 and September 2001, an extra 20,740 nurses joined the health service.

New targets were set by the Government, in the 2002 budget, to recruit 35,000 nurses and this will become part of the continuing drive to recruit more health professionals for the NHS.

Both Barking, Havering and Redbridge NHS Trust and Redbridge Primary Care Trust are actively pursuing policies to recruit additional nursing staff. There has been an increase of eight extra nurses in primary care and community settings.

Barking, Havering and Redbridge NHS Trust has had an active international programme in place since 2001 and currently 85 nurses from the Philippines are now working in the trust, with plans to welcome a further cohort next month. 75 per cent. of the recently qualified registered nurses across a range of services have successfully been recruited locally, with an expected 40 newly qualified registered nurses commencing employment within the trust in January 2003.

Oxford Centre for Diabetes, Endocrinology and Metabolism

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work of the Oxford Centre for Diabetes, Endocrinology and Metabolism. [84017]

Mr. Lammy: The Oxford Centre for Diabetes, Endocrinology and Metabolism, which was launched by the then Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, in January 1999, makes an important contribution to research in diabetes and other endocrine diseases.

Patient Advocacy

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that the Patient Advocacy and Liaison Service provides carers with information about the discharge of patients and the support services available to their carers; and if he will make a statement. [84234]

Mr. Lammy: Patient advice and liaison services are available to provide a range of information to patients, carers and their families, including information on discharge arrangements and support services. Such information is also available from other units in trusts and through general practitioners.

Pharmacy Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pharmacies participated in the Essential Small Pharmacies Scheme in each of the past five years, broken down according to size of turnover. [84019]

Mr. Lammy: The available information is shown in the table. Information about the size of turnover of the pharmacies participating in the essential small pharmacy scheme (ESPS) is not held centrally.

Community pharmacies receiving payment under Essential Small Pharmacies Scheme at 31 March England, 1997 to 2001

Year end	*Number of community pharmacies*
31 March 1997	256
31 March 1998	255
31 March 1999	255
31 March 2000	262
31 March 2001	243

Private Health Schemes

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if private health scheme customers can benefit from the use of NHS facilities and medical care; and if he will make a statement. [83458]

Mr. Hutton: The first priority of national health service bodies is to treat NHS patients. However, as a way of raising additional income, NHS bodies are permitted to provide accommodation and services privately to patients who undertake to pay for them, or on whose behalf such undertakings are given, provided this does not interfere with their NHS duties. These patients may include customers of private health schemes.

Residential Drug Treatment Centres

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential drug treatment centres there are in Nottinghamshire. [82930]

Mr. Lammy: There is currently one residential rehabilitation centre located in Nottinghamshire. It is a private unit: The Priory Clinic Nottingham, Ransom Road, Nottingham, NG3 5GS.

Sight Tests

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of people over 60 have had sight tests in each year since 1999. [84029]

Mr. Lammy: The table shows the number of national health service sight tests paid for in England for the years ending 31 March 2000 to 2002.

General Ophthalmic Services: number of NHS sight test paid for by Health authorities in England for patients aged 60 and over

Year	*Total number of sight tests (million)*
1999–2000	3.3
2000–01	3.8
2001–02	4.0

Information on the number of people having NHS sight tests is not collected centrally. The number of sight tests can not be equated with the number of people as some groups are advised to have more than one sight test in a year.

Suspended Doctors

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of doctors suspended for over six months are *(a)* women and *(b)* from ethnic minorities; and if he will make a statement. [82991]

Mr. Hutton: As of 30 September 2002, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 38 hospital and community medical and hospital dental staff suspended for more than six months. Of these, 10 were women. We do not collect information by ethnic group.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to widen the remit of NHS Plus to include vocational rehabilitation. [84045]

Mr. Lammy: NHS Plus providers are a network of 115 occupational health departments in the national health service in England. They provide a wide range of occupational health services, which includes advice on rehabilitation. Occupational health services are a component of vocational rehabilitation and it therefore already falls within the remit of the NHS Plus unit to sell each service to those providing vocational rehabilitation.

Where possible, NHS Plus will offer support to the Government's latest vocational rehabilitation initiatives, the "Health, Work and Recovery" programme, led by the Department for Work and Pensions and "Pathways to Work: Helping People into Employment", the new Green Paper presented to Parliament on 18 November by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Empty Homes

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many empty homes each Government Department has disposed of in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [83818]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Business Improvement Districts

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what arrangements are to be put in place under proposals for business improvement districts for a minimum threshold of businesses voting in the ballot and what safeguards will be put in place for low-turnover businesses to pay the levy. [84415]

Mr. Leslie: The rules governing the BID ballot are set out in the Local Government Bill. A successful ballot will have to meet two tests. Firstly, a simple majority of those voting in the BID ballot must vote in favour. Secondly, those voting in favour must represent a majority by rateable value of the hereditaments (rateable properties) of those voting. This "dual-key" mechanism means that a scheme cannot be forced through by large firms against the wishes of small firms, or vice versa. We do not intend to introduce a third test, namely that for a vote to succeed a set percentage of those entitled to vote must vote in favour. We believe that the "dual-key" provides sufficient protection for small businesses, including those with a low turnover.

Civil Contingencies

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) whether his Department's bid to the Capital Modernisation Fund for an additional £217 million to fund extra equipment and training for firefighters for a CBRN emergency has been successful; [82586]

(2) how many CBRN decontamination facilities have been established since 11 September; and where they are located; [82587]

(3) how much additional funding has been granted to each fire authority since 11 September 2001 for CBRN training, protection equipment and additional search and rescue equipment. [82585]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the right hon. Member to the answers given to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) on 2 December 2002, *Official Report*.

Coalfields Regeneration Trust

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the work of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, with particular reference to Stoke on Trent North. [83438]

Mr. McNulty: The Coalfields Regeneration Trust is an independent UK wide grant making body launched in 1999 as part of the Government's response to the Coalfield Task Force Report published in 1998. Working with partners, it delivers the social and economic regeneration of the coalfields in England, Scotland and Wales.

No separate figures are available for the funding of projects by the Trust in the Stoke on Trent North area. However, during its first round of funding (1999–2002) the Coalfields Regeneration Trust made 11 grants with a value of £670,000 to the wider Stoke on Trent area. Since the inception of the second round of funding from April 2002 a further five grants have been made with a value totalling £458,300.

A wide range of community projects have been supported by these grants including the provision of new community facilities, the refurbishment of former miners welfare facilities and the provision of work based training opportunities to disaffected young people.

Council Tax

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if his Department will fully fund the new discretion to be given to local authorities to reduce council tax on hardship grounds. [84490]

Mr. Leslie: No. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) announced on 19 November 2002, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has decided that authorities exercising the proposed new powers to create their own council tax discounts and exemptions will have to meet the costs of these new discounts or exemptions.

Decent Homes

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many households owned by councils have met the Government's decent homes target in each local authority; [83410]

(2) how many homes have reached the decent homes target; [83407]

(3) how many households in the registered social landlord sector have met the Government's decent homes target. [83409]

Mr. McNulty: Initial estimates from the 2001 English House Condition Survey are that, at April 2001, 1.6 million local authority and 1 million registered social landlord owned homes met the decent home standard.

Local authorities' estimates of the number of homes they own that met the standard at April 2002 are mapped out in the following table. The data from the two sources are not directly comparable, as not all local authorities have supplied data and less stock is owned by local authorities in 2002 than 2001.

Homes which met the decent home standard at April 2002[1]

Stock owning local authority	*Number*
Adur	2,900
Alnwick	1,400
Amber Valley	1,700
Arun	3,600
Ashfield	4,000
Ashford	5,600
Aylesbury Vale	5,400
Babergh	2,300
Barking and Dagenham	10,800
Barnet	7,000
Barnsley	14,600
Barrow-in-Furness	2,300
Basildon	11,400
Bassetlaw	6,200
Berwick-upon-Tweed	1,100
Birmingham	15,000
Blaby	2,100
Blackpool	1,300
Blyth Valley	2,100
Bolsover	1,900
Bolton	10,200
Bournemouth	4,700
Bracknell Forest	6,100
Bradford	#
Braintree	1,900
Brent	4,300
Brentwood	2,000
Bridgnorth	2,500
Brighton and Hove	3,600
Bristol	14,400
Bromsgrove	3,200
Broxbourne	3,400
Broxtowe	3,500
Bury	5,200
Cambridge	5,800
Camden	7,500
Cannock Chase	1,700
Canterbury	3,400
Caradon	1,400
Carlisle	#
Carrick	900
Castle Morpeth	800
Castle Point	1,600
Charnwood	5,600
Chelmsford	#
Cheltenham	1,400
Cherwell	2,000
Chesterfield	4,400
Chester-le-Street	5,100
Chorley	3,000
City of London	#
Colchester	3,200
Copeland	1,600
Corby	2,900
Craven	900
Crawley	8,500
Crewe and Nantwich	#
Croydon	8,700
Dacorum	10,000
Darlington	5,800

Homes which met the decent home standard at April 2002[1]

Stock owning local authority	*Number*
Dartford	2,200
Daventry	3,400
Derby	7,700
Derwentshire	4,800
Doncaster	17,300
Dover	3,000
Dudley	17,500
Durham	5,700
Ealing	10,400
Easington	3,900
East Devon	4,400
East Riding of Yorkshire	6,900
Eastbourne	1,200
Ellesmere Port and Neston	4,100
Enfield	8,900
Epping Forest	5,400
Erewash	#
Exeter	1,000
Fareham	1,900
Fenland	2,100
Forest Heath	2,700
Forest of Dean	#
Gateshead	15,300
Gedling	2,300
Gloucester	2,900
Gosport	2,500
Gravesham	4,400
Great Yarmouth	4,400
Greenwich	8,300
Guildford	5,000
Hackney	1,400
Halton	5,400
Hammersmith and Fulham	9,400
Harborough	1,400
Haringey	13,100
Harlow	8,300
Harrogate	2,400
Harrow	4,200
Hartlepool	3,700
Havering	11,700
Herefordshire	#
High Peak	1,800
Hillingdon	7,300
Hinckley and Bosworth	3,600
Hounslow	4,200
Hyndburn	3,600
Ipswich	5,400
Isles of Scilly	0
Islington	11,900
Kensington and Chelsea	3,000
Kettering	3,700
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	2,200
Kingston upon Hull	6,900
Kingston upon Thames	2,400
Kirklees	8,100
Knowsley	#
Lambeth	26,800
Lancaster	4,200
Leeds	33,900
Leicester	6,300
Lewes	2,600
Lewisham	10,300
Lincoln	6,500
Liverpool	8,300
Luton	5,400
Macclesfield	4,200
Maidstone	2,900
Manchester	24,900
Mansfield	1,600
Melton	#
Merton	4,100
Mid Bedfordshire	#
Mid Devon	2,400

Homes which met the decent home standard at April 2002[1]

Stock owning local authority	*Number*
Mid Suffolk	1,800
Middlesbrough	6,000
Milton Keynes	10,000
Mole Valley	3,100
New Forest	2,900
Newark and Sherwood	4,300
Newcastle upon Tyne	7,200
Newham	11,500
North Cornwall	1,700
North East Derbyshire	4,800
North East Lincolnshire	6,200
North Hertfordshire	6,100
North Kesteven	2,000
North Lincolnshire	4,100
North Norfolk	2,900
North Shropshire	1,700
North Somerset	4,300
North Tyneside	9,400
North Warwickshire	800
North West Leicestershire	4,600
Northampton	5,000
Norwich	7,200
Nottingham City	18,000
Nuneaton and Bedworth	3,700
Oadby and Wigston	1,200
Oldham	15,500
Oswestry	1,900
Oxford	3,400
Pendle	2,500
Peterborough	5,900
Plymouth	12,200
Poole	3,200
Portsmouth	7,700
Preston	1,800
Purbeck	1,100
Reading	5,000
Redbridge	3,300
Redditch	6,800
Reigate and Banstead	#
Ribble Valley	1,100
Richmondshire	1,400
Rochdale	5,600
Rochford	1,500
Rossendale	3,300
Rotherham	14,900
Rugby	3,900
Runnymede	2,300
Rushcliffe	#
Rutland	1,000
Salford	5,700
Salisbury	4,900
Sandwell	8,900
Scarborough	2,800
Sedgefield	6,300
Sedgemoor	2,800
Sefton	9,500
Selby	2,500
Sheffield	17,100
Shepway	2,300
Slough	3,500
Solihull	11,900
South Bedfordshire	4,900
South Cambridgeshire	#
South Derbyshire	1,800
South Gloucestershire	5,700
South Holland	2,300
South Kesteven	5,800
South Lakeland	2,800
South Norfolk	2,500
South Northamptonshire	#
South Tyneside	14,400
Southampton	5,700
Southend-on-Sea	4,300

Homes which met the decent home standard at April 2002[1]

Stock owning local authority	*Number*
Southwark	47,200
St. Albans	5,000
St. Edmundsbury	#
St. Helens	#
Stafford	2,300
Stevenage	1,300
Stockport	5,900
Stockton-on-Tees	3,200
Stoke-on-Trent	12,900
Stroud	3,600
Sutton	4,700
Swindon	7,800
Tamworth	2,700
Tandridge	2,400
Taunton Deane	5,800
Teesdale	500
Teignbridge	2,600
Tendring	1,500
Thanet	3,300
The Medway Towns	2,700
Three Rivers	2,000
Thurrock	9,300
Torridge	1,200
Tower Hamlets	5,200
Trafford	3,400
Uttlesford	2,700
Vale Royal	#
Wakefield	32,500
Walsall	4,400
Waltham Forest	4,600
Wandsworth	15,900
Wansbeck	0
Warrington	6,300
Warwick	3,100
Watford	3,600
Waveney	4,400
Waverley	4,200
Wealden	2,000
Wear Valley	3,300
Wellingborough	3,800
Welwyn Hatfield	9,100
West Lancashire	#
Westminster	2,400
Wigan	15,300
Winchester	5,300
Wirral	9,500
Woking	2,800
Wokingham	2,400
Wolverhampton	11,400
Worcester	2,900
Wycombe	4,800
York	5,500

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100. Authorities marked with a # did not supply the information in their HRA Business Plan Statistical Appendix.

Deprivation

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the position of *(a)* Tamworth and *(b)* Sutton Coldfield constituencies is in the national table of deprivation. [84174]

Mrs. Roche: The table shows how all wards in the Tamworth and Sutton Coldfield constituencies are ranked according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the six other domains included in the Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID 2000). Under the ID 2000, the most deprived ward is ranked 1, while the least deprived is ranked 8,414.

Constituency/ward	*LA name*	*Rank of index of multiple deprivation*	*Rank of income domain*	*Rank of employment domain*
Tamworth				
Bourne Vale	Lichfield	4,965	6,550	6,411
Fazeley	Lichfield	2,786	2,786	3,104
Little Aston	Lichfield	8,117	8,371	7,655
Mease Valley	Lichfield	4,915	5,159	7,266
Shenstone	Lichfield	6,203	5,532	6,603
Stonnall	Lichfield	7,537	7,209	6,826
Tame	Lichfield	7,341	8,084	6,806
Amington	Tamworth	2,569	2,187	3,520
Belgrave	Tamworth	2,028	1,707	3,080
Bolehall	Tamworth	2,425	3,568	3,071
Castle	Tamworth	3,635	3,729	3,573
Glascote	Tamworth	1,003	593	1,697
Mercian	Tamworth	3,883	3,959	3,848
Spital	Tamworth	3,382	3,049	2,878
Stonydelph	Tamworth	2,255	2,076	4,096
Trinity	Tamworth	5,315	5,892	6,297
Wilnecote	Tamworth	3,962	4,183	5,274
Sutton Coldfield				
Sutton Four Oaks	Birmingham	7,033	5,950	5,430
Sutton New Hall	Birmingham	4,991	3,972	4,148
Sutton Vesey	Birmingham	6,626	5,535	5,028

Constituency/ward	*LA name*	*Rank of health domain*	*Rank of education domain*	*Rank of housing domain*	*Rank of access domain*
Tamworth					
Bourne Vale	Lichfield	6,438	4,062	2,390	858
Fazeley	Lichfield	2,377	2,292	3,640	3,582
Little Aston	Lichfield	7,673	8,017	7,769	1,826
Mease Valley	Lichfield	5,443	4,899	4,772	489
Shenstone	Lichfield	6,118	5,694	7,828	1,303
Stonnall	Lichfield	5,620	6,249	8,357	3,000
Tame	Lichfield	6,406	5,142	8,341	1,938
Amington	Tamworth	3,104	1,629	1,602	6,530
Belgrave	Tamworth	2,797	1,083	1,280	6,938
Bolehall	Tamworth	2,475	456	3,075	7,766
Castle	Tamworth	2,645	1,745	6,669	6,726
Glascote	Tamworth	1,748	772	787	7,384
Mercian	Tamworth	2,990	3,455	4,324	3,967
Spital	Tamworth	2,267	3,765	5,660	4,991
Stonydelph	Tamworth	3,889	327	4,676	4,045
Trinity	Tamworth	5,006	1,638	5,194	5,141
Wilnecote	Tamworth	4,308	1,547	3,472	4,295

Constituency/ward	LA name	Rank of health domain	Rank of education domain	Rank of housing domain	Rank of access domain
Sutton Coldfield					
Sutton Four Oaks	Birmingham	5,406	7,891	8,117	3,570
Sutton New Hall	Birmingham	3,992	6,598	4,870	4,791
Sutton Vesey	Birmingham	5,178	6,885	7,113	4,550

Empty Homes

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Government Departments and agencies have *(a)* adopted and *(b)* not adopted the revised guidance on securing the better use of empty homes published by the DETR in 1999; and if he will make a statement. [83814]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All relevant departments and agencies were consulted in drawing up the guidance and should follow the good practice procedures it sets out. We announced in our response to the Transport, Local Government and Regions Select Committee report on Empty Homes that we intend to issue strengthened guidance to take account of latest best practice. The guidance will be published in the new year.

Empty Properties

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many empty properties there were in England and Wales in each year since January 1997 in each local authority area. [83413]

Mr. McNulty: Information relating to the number of empty properties in each local authority in England for each year from 1 April 1997 to 1 April 2001 (latest data available) has been placed in the House Library. For information on properties in Wales I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Fire Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what groups in the Fire Service are disadvantaged by current shift arrangements. [83257]

Mr. Raynsford: Research[1] commissioned by the Government found that the difficulty of balancing home life with Fire Service hours and shift requirements is a potential barrier to the recruitment of women and single parents, and within communities with strong family ties.

[1] Home Office Fire Research and Development Group Research Reports 4/1999, 2/2000, 3/2000 and 4/2000, copies of which can be found in the House Library.

Fire Service (Modernisation)

Mr. Page: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the components that make up the modernisation programme for the Fire Service; and what anticipated pay uplift percentages would be awarded to each achieved component of the modernisation programme. [84488]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government have established the Independent Review of the Fire Service, under Sir George Bain, to examine modernisation and pay in the Fire Service. In its Position Paper, issued on 11 November 2002, the Independent Review recommended that above-inflation pay increases should only be paid if accompanied by modernisation. Modernisation includes:

full-time firefighters working in the same crew as retained (part-time) firefighters;

ending the ban on overtime;

allowing management to change, where necessary, the rigid shift system of two days on, two nights on, then four days off in order to provide a better service;

giving firefighters some medical training as paramedics, and allowing them to carry resuscitation equipment such as defibrillators;

the Fire Service sharing control rooms between brigades and with other emergency services, to provide a more efficient response; and

taking action to improve the management of sickness in the Fire Service to reduce the high numbers who retire early through sickness and ill-health.

The full Position Paper is available at: www.irfs.org.uk/docs/positionpaper/index.htm and a copy has been placed in the House Libraries.

It is for the local government employers and the FBU to negotiate the level of pay in the Fire Service. The Government have made it clear that anything over and above the four per cent. offered to firefighters must be paid for by modernisation.

Fire Services (CBRN)

David Davis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether his Department's bid to the Capital Modernisation Fund for money for extra equipment and training for firefighters for a CBRN emergency has been successful. [82390]

Mr. Leslie: £43 million is being provided from the Capital Modernisation Fund for mass decontamination facilities, including personal protective equipment for firefighters and associated set-up costs, such as initial training for the Fire Service in England and Wales.

David Davis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much additional funding has been granted to each fire authority since 11 September 2001 for *(a)* CBRN training, *(b)* protection equipment and *(c)* additional search and rescue equipment [82391]

Mr. Leslie: The additional funding for CBRN related equipment and activities will not be distributed to individual fire authorities but administered centrally by the Government. The project will be overseen by the New Dimension Group, comprising all the main fire service stakeholders. Fire authorities have been

involved in the establishment of regional planning teams, the specification and order of equipment and the specification of training. CBRN training and personal protective equipment represent £7.63 million and £6.3 million respectively of the funds from the Capital Modernisation Fund. A considerable amount of work is being undertaken in partnership with the stakeholders to assess operational and resource requirements for search and rescue facilities.

Firefighters' Dispute

Andrew Selous: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on who will pay for a settlement of the firefighters' pay dispute above four per cent. [84214]

Mr. Raynsford: Any pay award, not affordable within existing public expenditure, must be paid for by modernisation.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what advice Army officers have given to his Department regarding crossing Fire Brigades Union picket lines to use fire fighting equipment. [83197]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has neither sought nor received any advice from Army officers regarding crossing Fire Brigades Union picket lines. The military have already been given access to all the fire engines they have asked for, with an initial tranche of 27 red engines made available on the 15 November. It is expected that up to 100 will be made available from local authority reserves during the next few days.

Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the grants funded by his Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if he will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82195]

Mr. Leslie: Grant programmes funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for which the public or organisations may apply are listed below, together with the total expenditure outturn for 2001–02.

	£000
New deal for communities	85,288
Community chest	6,918
Special grants programme	1,731
Tenant participation grant	3,845
Rough sleepers	41,833

In addition funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister supports some grants payable by local authorities and some grants payable by the Housing Corporation (the latter mostly to registered social landlords).

The number of awards made under each programme is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Many of these grant schemes are administered by intermediaries, such as local partnerships, or voluntary bodies, who are responsible for specific grant allocations.

The administration of grant programmes is carried out by a number of different units within the Office and Government Offices to which a range of staff make a contribution. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of these costs centrally. A small proportion of the totals given above may relate to the administration costs of bodies such as partnerships managing programmes.

Housing Market Initiative

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria were set governing the allocation of pilot projects to given areas under the Housing Market Renewal Fund initiative. [83875]

Mr. McNulty: The areas invited to establish low demand pathfinder projects were identified in two ways. First, we analysed data from the statistical returns compiled by local authorities as part of the Housing Investment Programme and, where available, local housing market studies undertaken by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (Birmingham University). Second, we looked at the scale of the low demand problem across housing markets, rather than individual local authorities. We sought to identify the most acute problems of low demand in terms of scale and intensity of the problem.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Council households have been transferred under stock transfer in each local authority area, in each year since 1997. [83406]

Mr. McNulty: The table lists those local authorities that have undertaken large-scale voluntary transfers since 1997 and the number of Council households in each transfer.

List of all large scale voluntary transfers which have taken place since 1997

Date of transfer	*Authority*	*Number of households*	*Annual total*
28 February 1997	Cotswold DC	4,282	
7 March 1997	South Staffs C	5,273	
19 March 1997	Lichfield DC	4,921	
7 July 1997	South Oxfordshire DC	5,018	
22 September 1997	Eden C	1,510	21,004
5 January 1998	LB Lambeth[1] Moorlands	515	
9 February 1998	LB Bexley	4,118	

List of all large scale voluntary transfers which have taken place since 1997

Date of transfer	*Authority*	*Number of households*	*Annual total*
9 February 1998	LB Bexley	4,097	
2 March 1998	Congleton BC	4,061	
9 March 1998	Oldham BC[1] Limehurst	642	
19 March 1998	Liverpool CC[1] Windermere	493	
23 March 1998	LB Merton[1] Pollards Hill	1,018	
23 March 1998	LB Tower Hamlets[1] Poplar II	1,852	
23 March 1998	Kerrier DC	3,732	
30 March 1998	LB Hackney[1] Kingsmead	951	
30 March 1998	LB Brent[1] Fortunegate/Church End	1,481	
30 March 1998	Basildon DC[1] Vange	708	
30 March 1998	West Somerset DC	1,869	
31 March 1998	Stoke-on-Trent CC[1] Bentilee	917	
27 April 1998	Tewkesbury BC	3,066	
1 May 1998	Rother DC	3,058	
20 July 1998	LB Lambeth[1] Lansdowne Green	681	
7 December 1998	LB Tower Hamlets[1] Poplar II	2,431	
25 January 1999	Wirral[1] Leasowe	1,082	35,690
1 February 1999	Tameside[1] Westashton	901	
22 February 1999	West Devon BC	1,446	
1 March 1999	South Somerset DC	8,883	
1 March 1999	East Lindsey DC	5,102	
5 March 1999	Liverpool CC[1] Pinehurst	646	
8 March 1999	Manchester CC	1,030	
15 March 1999	LB Hackney[1] Morningside	1,084	
22 March 1999	South Hams District Council	3,096	
17 March 1999	LB Hammersmith and Fulham[1] Old Oak	668	
22 March 1999	LB Hackney[1] Upper Clapton	1,000	
25 March 1999	Telford and Wrekin C	13,081	
29 March 1999	LB Enfield	1,194	
29 March 1999	Worthing BC	2,525	
29 March 1999	Bath and North East Somerset C	9,887	
29 March 1999	Manchester CC[1] East Wythenshawe	6,667	
29 March 1999	LB Greenwich1 Charlton Triangle	1,280	
29 March 1999	LB Hackney[1] Haggerston	661	
31 March 1999	Allerdale BC	3,704	
31 March 1999	Allerdale BC[1] Saiterbeck	727	
14 June 1999	Preston BC[1] Avenham	1,121	
5 July 1999	LB Lambeth[1] Central Stockwell	2,358	
21 June 1999	Birmingham CC[1] Central Areas	2,813	
26 September1999	LB Islington[1] Barnsbury	647	
26 September 1999	LB Islington[1] 10 Estates	739	
4 October 1999	Liverpool CC[1] Speke Garston	4,382	
18 October 1999	West Lindsey DC	3,929	
25 October 1999	LB Lambeth[1] St. Martins	1,033	
29 November 1999	Boston BC	4,871	
20 December 1999	Tynedale DC	3,564	89,039
31 January 2000	Newcastle-under Lyme BC	9,887	
7 February 2000	Restormel BC	3,577	
14 February 2000	Manchester CC (Colshaw Farm)	600	
21 February 2000	North Devon DC	3,293	
6 March 2000	LB Hackney[1] Stamford Hill	1,095	
6 March 2000	LB Hackney[1] Pembury Estate	1,241	
8 March 2000	Burnley BC	5,330	
20 March 2000	Manchester CC Sale Estate	1,655	
20 March 2000	Weymouth and Portland C	3,105	
20 March 2000	Huntingdon DC	6,650	
27 March 2000	Elmbridge BC	4,894	
27 March 2000	Test Valley BC	5,495	
27 March 2000	Wyre Forest DC	6,056	
27 March 2000	Manchester CC Whitefield Estate	1,033	
27 March 2000	LB Tower Hamlets[1] THCH	1,551	
27 March 2000	Tameside MBC	8,532 7,934	
17 July 2000	LB Richmond	7,139	
22 September 2000	Coventry CC	20,125	
2 October 2000	Fylde BC	1,905	
27 November 2000	Chester CC	7,096	
11 December 2000	Horsham DC	4,650	112,843
12 February 2001	LB Tower Hamlets	196	
19 February 2001	East Northamptonshire DC	3,495	
19 February 2001	Torbay C	2,947	
23 February 2001	Staffordshire Moorlands DC	3,132	

List of all large scale voluntary transfers which have taken place since 1997

Date of transfer	*Authority*	*Number of households*	*Annual total*
6 March 2001	Calderdale MBC	12,759	
13 March 2001	Chichester DC	5,321	
19 March 2001	Mendip DC	4,326	
26 March 2001	West Wiltshire DC	3,284	
26 March 2001	West Oxfordshire DC	3,643	
26 March 2001	East Staffordshire BC	5,637	
26 March 2001	Manchester CC Handforth Estate	659	
26 March 2001	Sunderland CC	36,356	
28 March 2001	Blackburn with Darwen BC	9,886	
1 October 2001	Shrewsbury and Atcham BC	5,500	
5 November 2001	Mid-Bedfordshire DC	3,084	100,225
4 March 2002	Derbyshire Dales	3,287	
11 March 2002	Chelmsford BC	6,902	
18 March 2002	East Hertfordshire	2,687	
	DC	3,237	
25 March 2002	Erewash BC	5,847	
25 March 2002	Reigate and Banstead BC	4,846	
24 June 2002	St. Edmundsbury	5,947	
1 July 2002	Vale Royal BC	6,813	
1 July 2002	St. Helens MBC	14,632	
15 July 2002	Redcar and Cleveland BC	11,625	
15 July 2002	Knowsley MBC	17,090	
30 September 2002	LB Waltham Forest	2,574	
14 October 2002	LB Hackney CC Sheltered Stock	954	
14 October 2002	LB Harrow	518	86,959
Total number of dwellings that have been transferred since 1997			445,760

[1] Indicated the transfer was an Estates Renewal Challenge Fund scheme

Note:

We have interpreted Mr. Pickles' question to mean Large Scale Voluntary Transfers. These are transfers by a single local authority of 500 or more households to a single landlord within any five-year period.

Local Authority Performance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the means by which scores for *(a)* OFSTED, *(b)* SSI and *(c)* other inspections are aggregated in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process; and what criteria must be met for a local authority to achieve each CPA grade. [83590]

Mr. Raynsford: The Audit Commission are responsible for the methodology used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of local authorities. Full details are available in the Audit Commission's publication, "Final Framework for CPA for Single Tier and County Councils", and on their website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk with a summary in Annex A, which has been placed in the Library.

In practice, OFSTED, SSI and other inspection scores are translated into a 1 to 4 scale, multiplied by the appropriate weighting, and added together to produce an overall performance score. Councils are allocated to a CPA category on the basis of their overall performance score and their corporate assessment score, together with the application of various rules that, for example, mean that a council must achieve a level of performance in key services to be 'excellent' or 'good'.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the dates of *(a)* CPA inspections of each local authority and *(b)* other inspections which contribute to the CPA process. [83591]

Mr. Raynsford: The dates on which Corporate Assessments were carried out for English county, metropolitan and unitary councils and London boroughs, are tabled below. Other inspection work contributing to the overall performance score for each authority is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Annex A—Comprehensive Performance Assessment List of Phases for Single Tier and County Councils

The corporate assessments for the 10 pathfinder councils took place in April 2002:

Bolton MBC
LB of Camden
LB of Havering
Hertfordshire CC
Kent CC
Leeds MBC
Borough of Telford and Wrekin
Wigan MBC
Wiltshire CC
RB of Windsor and Maidenhead

May 2002	*June 2002*	*July/August 2002*	*September 2002*
Barnsley MBC	Coventry CC	Bracknell Forest BC	Bath and North East Somerset
Bedfordshire CC	Devon CC	Buckinghamshire CC	Birmingham City
Bournemouth BC	East Sussex CC	Bury MBC	Blackburn with Darwen BC
Brighton and Hove City	Essex CC	Cambridgeshire CC	Blackpool BC

May 2002	*June 2002*	*July/August 2002*	*September 2002*
Cheshire CC	Halton BC	City of York	Bristol City
Derbyshire CC	Isles of Scilly	Corporation of London	City of Bradford
Dorset CC	Knowsley MBC	Cumbria CC	Calderdale MBC
East Riding of Yorkshire	LB of Bexley	Derby City	Cornwall CC
Gateshead MBC	LB of Bromley	Dudley MBC	Darlington BC
Hampshire CC	LB of Greenwich	Durham CC	Doncaster MBC
Kirklees MBC	LB of Hammersmith and Fulham	Isle of Wight	Hartlepool BC
LB of Barking and Dagenham	LB of Haringey	Kingston upon Hull	Herefordshire CC
LB of Kensington and Chelsea	LB of Islington	LB of Brent	Lancashire CC
LB of Lewisham	LB of Richmond upon Thames	LB of Baling	LB of Barnet
LB of Newham	LB of Southwark	LB of Harrow	LB of Croydon
LB of Sutton	Leicester City	LB of Lambeth	LB of Enfield
Norfolk CC	Leicestershire CC	LB of Redbridge	LB of Hackney
Northamptonshire CC	Luton BC	LB of Tower Hamlets	LB of Hillingdon
Nottinghamshire CC	Newcastle-upon-Tyne City	Lincolnshire CC	LB of Hounslow
Oxfordshire CC	North Yorkshire CC	Liverpool City	LB of Merton
Peterborough City	Rotheram MBC	North Lincolnshire	LB of Waltham Forest
Poole BC	Sandwell MBC	North Somerset	LB of Wandsworth
Sefton MBC	Slough BC	North Tyneside MBC	Manchester City
Staffordshire CC	St.Helens MBC	Oldham MBC	Milton Keynes
West Sussex CC	Surrey BC	Portsmouth City	North East Lincolnshire
Wirral MBC	Tameside MBC	RB of Kingston upon Thames	Northumberland CC
Wokingham	Trafford MBC	Reading BC	Nottingham City
Worcestershire CC	Wakefield City	Redcar and Cleveland BC	Plymouth City
		Rochdale MBC	Salford City
		Rutland CC	Sheffield City
		Somerset CC	Shropshire CC
		South Gloucestershire	Solihull MBC
		Stockport MBC	South Tyneside MBC
		Stockton-on-Tees BC	Southampton City
		Stoke-on-Trent City	Southend-on-Sea BC
		Swindon BC	Suffolk CC
		Warrington BC	Sunderland City
		West Berkshire	Thurrock BC
		Wolverhampton City	Torbay
			Walsall MBC
			Warwickshire CC
			Westminster City

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* qualifications are required and *(b)* criteria are adopted for selection of members of CPA inspection teams. [83592]

Mr. Raynsford: The composition and recruitment of CPA inspection teams is a matter for the Audit Commission. However, I understand that the teams that conducted the corporate assessment element of CPA were made up of: a team leadereither a senior Audit Commission inspector or auditor; an Audit Commission inspector; an appointed auditor; a peer councillor; and a peer officer.

Peer Councillors and officers were appointed with the help of the Local Government Association and the Improvement and Development Agency. Team members were all senior staff with the relevant skills and experience.

Local Government Bill

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans that each order laid before the House under Clause 97 of the Local Government Bill relating to charging and trading will *(a)* contain a provision for the Secretary of State to revoke such an order and *(b)* specify the circumstances for such a revocation. [84424]

Mr. Leslie: Clause 97 confers powers enabling my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister by order, to amend, repeal, revoke or disapply the application of any order, to amend, repeal, revoke or disapply the application of any enactment that restricts a best value authority's ability to charge for the provision of a discretionary service or carrying out trading in its functions. By virtue of provisions contained in the "Interpretation Act 1978," it is unnecessary for the order itself to make express provision as to its revocation. Having made an order under clause 97 for the purpose of revoking an enactment which restricts charging or trading, we would not expect to make a further order revoking that initial order.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister under clause 99 of the Local Government Bill relating to the Audit Commission assessment of English Local Authorities Performance, whether the Audit Commission will be free to set its own criteria; and what appeal mechanism there will be against a particular assessment. [84425]

Mr. Raynsford: The clause requires the Audit Commission to provide a report on local authorities' performance and to categorise individual authorities. The Commission will be responsible for all decisions on such a report and the categorisations.

The Commission have set out their disputes procedure in the publication "Quality Assurance Procedures and Dispute Resolution for Single Tier and County Councils". Full details are available on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what safeguards there will be to stop trade distortion and unfair competition in the proposed new powers to allow local authorities to trade; and how full cost recovery will be included in the pricing of services or goods traded. [84426]

Mr. Leslie: The power to trade conferred by the provisions is only exercisable through a company within the meaning of Part V of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The Competition Act 1998 and the Companies Act 1985 will apply in the normal way to these operations. The new trading powers will therefore be subject to the same regulation as other commercial bodies. This will help ensure a level playing field with private sector competitors.

Clause 97 provides for my right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister to make an Order enabling best value authorities to trade in any of their ordinary functions. Trading is expected to take place on a commercial basis, that is, charges fixed at more than cost recovery. We expect to issue guidance on the ways in which local authorities may use the powers, aspects of competition law that authorities will need to take into account and how to avoid distortion of markets.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what reason underlies his policy on the abolition of the statutory safeguards relating to local authorities powers to borrow in relation to charging and trading. [84427]

Mr. Leslie: The Local Government Bill makes provision to allow local authorities to borrow for capital expenditure without Government consent, where they can service the debt from their revenues. This freedom would be subject to safeguards for national and local taxpayers. Any borrowing by an authority relating to services where it is exercising its powers to charge or to trade would therefore be subject to these rules.

Local Government (Anti-fraud Practices)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 119W, what action he is taking to encourage local authorities who do not have an anti-fraud and corruption strategy to implement one. [84766]

Mr. Leslie: A high proportion of fraud perpetrated against local authorities is benefit fraud. One of the Government's current best value performance indicators for local authorities requires authorities to state whether they have a strategy for combating such fraud. The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, which is part of the Department for Work and Pensions, reports on benefit administration across both central government agencies and local authorities with particular emphasis on standards of counter fraud and security performance. Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission have a responsibility to review and report on the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption in the authority. New Codes of Conduct, which have applied to all local authorities since May 2002, include provisions relating to the proper use of an authority's resources.

Local Government Finance

Gregory Barker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will meet an all party delegation from East Sussex County Council to discuss proposals for the reform of local government funding. [83914]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will shortly be consulting on the Government's proposals for the funding of local authorities revenue expenditure in 2003–04. It would probably be impossible to arrange a meeting with every individual authority which would ideally like one. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has therefore suggested to authorities that it would be helpful if they could make any representations as part of broader delegations, for example on the basis of special interest groups. If particular authorities judge that their case cannot be made effectively in this way, requests for individual meetings will be considered.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost was of each local government reorganisation since 1972. [83903]

Mr. Raynsford: Following the 1972 reorganisation, a number of unitary authorities were established in England during the 1990's. The information requested on these reorganisations is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Nevertheless supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) were given to authorities affected by reorganisation to enable them to borrow money to meet the one off indirect costs of reorganisation. The SCAs to all reorganised authorities in England totalled £492.3 million.

New Homes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* new home (i) starts and (ii) completions and *(b)* demolitions there were in each quarter from 1996 to the most recent available date in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. [84224]

Mr. McNulty: The number of new dwellings started and completed in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne is shown in the following table. Available information on demolitions is that the local authority reported 612 dwellings demolished in the financial year 2001–02.

Newcastle upon Tyne

	New dwellings	
Year/quarter	*Starts*	*Completions*
1996		
1	65	81
2	68	75
3	35	81
4	103	90
1997		
1	40	29
2	125	52

Newcastle upon Tyne

	New dwellings	
Year/quarter	*Starts*	*Completions*
3	55	20
4	77	53
1998		
1	105	80
2	57	95
3	74	135
4	83	36
1999		
1	32	56
2	76	96
3	88	60
4	116	122
2000		
1	209	93
2	149	103
3	111	87
4	181	189
2001		
1	124	69
2	122	129
3	143	87
4	138	109
2002		
1	231	139
2	87	68

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the local PSA targets for each local authority that has entered into a local PSA agreement for *(a)* 2001–2 and *(b)* 2002–03. [84909]

Mr. Raynsford: The targets are contained in the agreements, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The targets are also summarised for each authority on the Local PSA web site. The address of this web site is: http://www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/lpsa/index.htm.

Regional Government

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what funding or authorisation for spending will be provided for yes and no campaigns in regions which decide to hold a referendum on regional assemblies. [83441]

Mr. Raynsford: This is a matter for the Electoral Commission under the provisions of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (sections 108–110 and schedule 12). The Government will not fund any "yes" or "no" campaigns.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which national bodies accountable to Government operate on a *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partial regional basis; and in each case to which regional government office they report. [83816]

Mr. Leslie: As set out in annex C of the White Paper Your Region, Your Choice (Cm 5511; annexes updated in August 2002), apart from the Government Offices, there can be up to four main types of government presence in a region:

- central government agencies with local or regional offices (such as the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency);
- national non-departmental public bodies ('quangos') with local or regional offices (such as English Nature or the Prescription Pricing Authority);
- regional non-departmental public bodies (such as the Regional Developmental Agencies);
- local organisations located in a region (such as port authorities).

An indicative list of the public bodies active in a particular region (the North East in this case) is included in the White Paper annex.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people are employed by the *(a)* Regional Development Agency and *(b)* Regional Assembly in Somerset. [83390]

Mr. Leslie: In the year to 31 March 2002, the South West England Development Agency employed an average of 197 people, serving the whole of the region. There are approximately 12 staff, based in Taunton, working nearly exclusively in support of the agenda of the South West Regional Assembly. The SWRA secretariat also supports the work of two other regional organisations: the South West Local Government Association and the South West Provincial Employers. Staff work flexibly across all three parts.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent evaluations have been undertaken of the effectiveness of the Regional Co-ordination Unit and Government Office network; and if he will make a statement. [84149]

Mrs. Roche: The Government Offices contribute to the delivery of the programmes of a number of different Government Departments and these are set out in the Corporate Plan for the Regional Co-ordination Unit and Government Office network. Performance against the Corporate Plan is monitored quarterly and the outcomes reported to sponsor Departments.

A copy of the Corporate Plan for the network will be placed in the Library of the House.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Flook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he next plans to undertake a street count of those living rough in *(a)* Bristol and *(b)* Somerset. [83343]

Mrs. Roche: Local authorities are responsible for homelessness in their areas and as such also take responsibility for the co-ordination and timing of street counts. It is the policy of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that in areas where more than 10 people are sleeping rough, a count should take place at least every twelve months. This would apply to any local authority areas in Bristol or Somerset.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many submissions have been received in the consultation period on the reform of the SSA. [82951]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government received around 55,000 letters from the public relating to the Formula Grant Review, the great majority of these are the result of various campaigns that have been organised. One such campaign was organised by the F40 Group of local authorities, of which Staffordshire is a constituent authority, on education funding and produced approximately 53,000 responses in total.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister do not record the details of the senders of campaign letters as a matter of course. For this reason, and since very many from the F40 campaign are multiple copies of the same letter by the same people to different Ministers, it is not possible to provide a more precise answer, except at disproportionate cost.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently taking decisions on the new system to replace SSAs, carefully considering the full range of evidence, pressures and points that have been put to us. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will announce its proposals for the new system to Parliament at the time of the next provisional local government finance settlement, which it expects will be around the beginning of December 2002.

Supporting People Strategy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many letters he has received from *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* service providers and *(c)* service users regarding the implementation of the Supporting People strategy. [84765]

Mr. McNulty: The implementation of the Supporting People programme has been designed as a participatory process involving representatives from local authorities and service providers as well as prospective service users from an early stage. Forums for communication, including email and telephone helplines, an online discussion area, regular stakcholder meetings and organised conference events are built into the programme development model. As a result the implementation team receives and responds to huge volume of correspondence by letter, email, telephone and other media covering a wide-range of implementation issues. This approach to implementation has proved effective in bringing key-stakeholders into the programme development process but due to the volume of correspondence dealt with and the diverse issues that it covers it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the overall figures in the format requested.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and if he will make a statement on how it has changed since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [83497]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister makes a significant contribution to the UK's pursuit of sustainable development through our aim of thriving, inclusive and sustainable communities in all regions. In addition to this, work is under way to assess what mechanisms could be employed to ensure that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister continues to improve its contribution to sustainable development. This work will take on board the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit.

Timber

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for what reason the Office of Government Commerce's Green Public Private Partnerships guide makes no reference to the Government requirement that all timber should be procured from legal and sustainable sources; and if he will require the guide to be amended to reflect Government policy. [82855]

Mr. Leslie: The function of the Green Public Private Partnerships guide is to raise awareness of sustainability issues in a PPP context, and to direct project managers towards appropriate sources of advice and practical help.

Annex A of the guide provides advice on materials, drawing specific attention to the Government's timber policy. Detailed advice on the application of the policy is set out in the key guidance documents that project managers are referred to at paragraph 2.3 of the guide.

Valuation Tribunal

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the costs will be of setting up the new Valuation Tribunal Service; what the running cost will be each year; and how many employees it will have. [84422]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is establishing the Valuation Tribunal Service (VTS) to provide central direction to Valuation Tribunals (VTs), to help spread best practice, strengthen corporate identity and capacity and improve customer service. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is still working on the details but currently estimates that the set-up costs will be no more than a few hundred thousand pounds, and a similar annual amount for additional running costs. This expenditure will be met from the existing baseline for Valuation Tribunals through savings already achieved through rationalisation of staff and offices plus further savings which will result from the dissolution of the non statutory Valuation Tribunal Management Board and its fora.

VTs currently employ around 165 staff and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans for that to change except for the recruitment of a small number of HQ staff. Future staffing requirements will be a matter for the VTS to determine. It will want to take into account its workload and the impact of the Non Domestic Rates revaluation in 2005, the Council Tax revaluation in 2007 and other matters relating to the efficient management of the service.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 3 December 2002

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Indian Ocean Territories

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total volume of fish, by type, landed from the British Indian Ocean territories was in each of the last five years. [84052]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The total volume of fish in tonnes in each type of commercial fishery caught in the British Indian Ocean territory in the last five years is as follows:

Season	*British Indian ocean territory*	*Tonnes*
1997–98	Longline	2,327
	Purse seine	2,173
	Inshore	79.5
1998–99	Longline	2,427
	Purse seine	6,275
	Inshore	122.2
1999–2000	Longline	1,939
	Purse seine	3,415
	Inshore	309.1
2000–01	Longline	1,828
	Purse seine	1,064
	Inshore	224.8
2001–02	Longline	1,034
	Purse seine	5,795

No figures are as yet available for the inshore fishery for 2002. It is not possible to list fish catches by individual species.

EU Commission (Infraction Proceedings)

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what infraction proceedings against Her Majesty's Government are being taken by the EU Commission; and when they commenced. [84994]

Mr. MacShane: At any given time, the European Commission will have a number of infractions proceedings against any member state. They will be at different stages of the proceedings.

As of 31 December 2001, the last date for which the Commission has comprehensive public figures, the Commission had 220 infractions cases under examination against the United Kingdom. These cases were opened following a complaint or at the own Commission's initiative. Those cases will have commenced over a variety of years, some even dating back to 1978.

We are working with the Commission to resolve the outstanding cases.

India

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will name the successor to HM High Commissioner to India. [84836]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: New High Commissioners to India are publicly announced once approval from the Indian Government is received.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Foreign Minister of India; and if he will make a statement. [84903]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 626W.

Iraq

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from Medact about the effects of a military conflict on civilians in Iraq. [84864]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: None. No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq. Unlike Saddam Hussein, we have always tried to minimise the adverse effects of our actions on the Iraqi people, and we will continue to do so.

Nigeria

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the British Government has made to the Government of Nigeria on the stoning to death of those convicted of adultery. [84433]

Mr. Rammell: We remain extremely concerned about these sentences. During her visit to Nigeria in September the Minister responsible for Africa, my noble Friend the Baroness Amos, raised with President Obasanjo HMG's concerns about the harsh sentences imposed under the Sharia penal codes, including that of stoning for adultery. She emphasised the strength of feeling against them in the UK and reiterated HMG's opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances.

The British High Commission in Abuja, together with EU partners, follows all such cases closely and keeps in close contact with local human rights organisations. The High Commission regularly raises our concerns about the sentences with the appropriate authorities.

The Federal Government has made clear its opposition to the extreme Sharia penalties. It has declared them discriminatory and unconstitutional. Exercise of the Sharia penal code is, however, entirely under the control of the relevant States. The Federal justice system only comes into play if the defendant appeals to the Federal Appeal Courts.

Referendums Protocol

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he defines an intervention in Irish public and political affairs in

connection with the referendum on the Nice Treaty, with reference to the requirements of Her Majesty's Ambassador and embassy staff. [84662]

Mr. MacShane: The duty imposed upon diplomats by Article 41(1) of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations is not to interfere in the internal affairs of the receiving state. This duty is not further defined in international or UK domestic law.

Shakeela Siddique

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations were made by the High Commission in Islamabad to the Pakistani Government after 17 July concerning the rape victim Shakeela Siddique and her treatment at the hands of the authorities. [84407]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We take all human rights violations seriously and regularly raise our concerns with the Pakistani authorities. We are working with our EU partners on a comprehensive demarche to the new Pakistani administration on the human rights situation in Pakistan. Experience suggests that concerted action is the most effective way of putting pressure on the Pakistani authorities. We have meanwhile been working with our partners to collate the facts on this and other cases with a view to their inclusion in the demarche. As a result, no formal representations about Ms Siddique have yet been made.

Sustainable Development

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and if he will make a statement on how it has changed since the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg. [83500]

Mr. Rammell: The FCO has a long-standing commitment in promoting international sustainable development based on the outcome of the earth summit held in Rio in 1992. The FCO has been very actively involved in the WSSD process and is now working intensively with our international partners to ensure that the impressive range of commitments agreed at the summit are effectively implemented. WSSD outcomes and first views on follow-up will be reflected in the annual report on UK progress on sustainable development for 2002.

The FCO is focused on achieving high levels off sustainability in its own operations. It has had a programme in place for some time that is designed to respond to the sustainable development challenges confirmed at WSSD. The FCO is therefore committed to meeting the targets being set out in the "Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate". This framework is designed to ensure Government operations contribute positively to the UK's sustainable development headline indicators. These targets are being applied to the whole of the FCO's UK estate, although timescales may vary depending upon the location and nature of the site. We have a specific SDA target of achieving efficiencies from the existing energy target of reducing carbon emissions by an ongoing 1 per cent. per annum.

Our overseas posts are required to apply the framework targets as far as possible in their individual circumstances.

The FCO raises awareness of operational sustainable development issues using both informal methods eg Intranet discussion group, and formal training.

Turkmenistan

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the Russian Government, *(b)* the Turkish Government and *(c)* the United States Government, regarding restrictive regulations on registration of religious groups and religious persecution in Turkmenistan; [84553]

(2) what reports his Department have received regarding harassment and persecution of religious groups in Turkmenistan; and if he will make a statement; [84550]

(3) what steps he has taken to ensure that goods shipped from the UK under UK and EU export control regulations to Turkmenistan *(a)* have not been and *(b)* will not be used for internal repression or torture; [84580]

(4) what representations his Department has made to the Government of Turkmenistan regarding *(a)* restrictive regulations on the registration of religious groups in the country and *(b)* harassment of religious groups and repression of religious activity; [84551]

(5) what UK delegations to Turkmenistan are planned; and if he will make a statement; [84552]

(6) if he will raise the issue of restrictions on religious groups and their harassment and persecution in Turkmenistan at the tenth OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Portugal; and if he will make a statement. [84549]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* We are concerned at Turkmen Government actions aimed at restricting the activities of religious groups. We regularly monitor reports from Turkmenistan and meet representatives of religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Solidarity Worldwide, to discuss the situation in the country.

Senior UK officials have discussed the repression of human rights in central Asia with representatives from other countries (including Russia and Turkey). Together with EU and US colleagues, we use every opportunity to raise cases of religious persecution with the Turkmen Government, and we believe our representations helped to secure the release of the Baptist, Atakov. Most recently, our Ambassador wrote to the Turkmen Foreign Minister on 1 November requesting the release of religious and other prisoners.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Welfare of Animals (Circuses)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent

representations she has made to owners of circuses on the welfare of animals. [82732]

Mr. Morley: The welfare of animals in circuses is an issue that is currently being reviewed in the light of the recent consultation on the proposed Animal Welfare Bill. A number of suggestions have been made concerning the better regulation of performing animals and as part of the series of stakeholder meetings on the Bill, my officials have met representatives of the performing animals industry and organisations concerned with the welfare of performing animals. In the light of these discussions I shall give further thought to what changes need to be made the existing legislation on circus animals.

Quite separately, the Association of Circus Proprietors has drawn up a code of practice to help circus operators and those responsible for animal welfare enforcement

Agricultural Wages Board

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs why the Chairman of the Agricultural Wages Board has resigned. [84236]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Chairman of the Agricultural Wages Board, Professor John Andrews, has indicated his wish not to serve a further term for personal reasons. The Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales have reluctantly accepted Professor Andrew's decision and thanked him for his valuable work during the last three years.

Professor Andrews has agreed to continue in post until a successor has been appointed. The post has been advertised and it is hoped that an appointment can be made before Easter.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the relevant qualifications are of the two new independent board members of the Agricultural Wages Board. [84237]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Independent members of the Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales are not required to hold any specific qualifications. However when new members are appointed we do try to ensure that collectively, the independent members have experience of as many areas of expertise relevant to the Board's work as possible. These include EU and UK employment legislation, EU and UK social policy, arbitration and conciliation, human resource management, tribunal work, accountancy and economic issues.

Gillian Morris is a Professor of Law at Brunel University and since 2000 has been Deputy Chairman of the Central Arbitration Committee. Derek Evans served with ACAS from 1974, becoming acting chief executive in May 2000 until his retirement last year.

Beef Industry

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on the decision by the European Commission not to fine France for imposing an illegal ban on British beef and beef products. [81829]

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what efforts she has made to recover the costs to the British beef industry of the refusal of the French Government to lift its British beef import ban. [81944]

Mr. Morley: The UK Government are gratified that France has at last complied with EU law and lifted its ban on British beef. Working through EU institutions was the best way to resolve this difficult issue although I regret the decision by the European Commission not to pursue the case seeking financial penalties against France. Compensation for losses must be sought by those directly affected. The UK Government intervened to support the NFU's current case to rule the ban illegal in the French courts and will support those who wish subsequently to pursue any claims.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning the decision of the European Commission not to fine the French Government for the illegal imposition of a ban on the sale of British beef in France; what measures she proposes to take to seek compensation from the French Government for the losses incurred by British farmers for the period of the illegal ban; and what other redress she proposes to make to British farmers for the damage suffered by their business for the period of the illegal ban. [82915]

Mr. Morley: The Government has received a number of representations on this matter.

The UK Government is gratified that France has at last complied with EU law and lifted its ban on British beef. Working through EU institutions was the best way to resolve this difficult issue although the UK Government regrets the decision by the European Commission not to pursue the case seeking penalties against France. The UK has supported the Commission throughout and believes that pressing this case would have sent a firm message to member states that no one country can avoid its obligations and responsibilities.

Compensation for losses must be sought by those directly affected. The UK Government intervened in the European Court of Justice to support the NFU's current case to rule the ban illegal in the French Courts and will support those who wish subsequently to pursue any claims.

Biomass

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has set in relation to the creation of energy by the use of biomass. [84197]

Mr. Meacher: Targets in respect of the Government's support for biomass are generally linked to the potential to contribute to climate change savings and the implications for the rural economy. In the energy crops scheme, part of the England Rural Development Programme, we have funding of £29 million which could see around 20,000 hectares of crops planted. Each hectare of biomass crops yielding the equivalent of 8 tonnes per annum will save 2 tonnes of carbon per annum. Purpose grown energy crops and other biomass will provide feedstocks for the projects developed under

the bio-energy capital grants scheme from which we expect electricity generation of up to 120MW in addition to the development of combined heat and power and heat only projects.

Bovine TB

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what vaccines exist for inoculating cattle against TB; what use is made of such vaccines; what advice she gives to farmers about the use of these vaccines; and if she will make a statement. [84858]

Mr. Morley *[holdilng answer 2 December 20002]:* Developing a bovine TB vaccine is a long-term aim. The Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISO) has cautioned that such a vaccine is a potential policy option only in the longer term and has set up, this year, a Vaccine Scoping Study. A report is expected to be submitted to Ministers early in 2003 on the feasibility of pursuing a vaccination strategy.

A test which is able to distinguish vaccinated from infected cattle would be a great asset in the development of a vaccination strategy. Development of such a test is part of our wide-ranging research programme. Once a test has been developed we would need to approach the European Union to seek its acceptance of the new test as showing cattle to be free from the disease. This would require a change to European law.

Any new vaccine would need to meet the EU criteria of safety, quality and efficacy for the authorisation of veterinary medicinal products.

The BCG vaccine is being used a starting point for much of the current research. We are looking at how BCG protects animals and what environmental factors affect this. Some of the possible new vaccines under development are mutated or altered forms of BCG.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Andrew Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect Government financial support was given to the combined heat and power industry in each year since 1990. [82798]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* Estimated direct financial support to the CHP industry, in the form of spend on research, demonstration and development, since 1990 is:

	£ million
1990–91	0.3
1991–92	0.3
1992–93	0.3
1993–94	0.4
1994–95	0.5
1995–96	0.5
1996–97	0.7
1997–98	1.0
1998–99	1.3
1999–2000	1.9
2000–01	2.5
2001–02	2.8

The 2001–02 figure includes around £0.4 million in development grants from the new Community Energy programme, most of which benefits CHP. In the current financial year, £3.3 million of capital grants from the programme have been approved to date.

In addition, the Carbon Trust receives around £50 million per annum in total from which it provides direct support for CHP through its ActionEnergy Scheme and for research, development and demonstration of CHP through the Low Carbon Innovation Programme.

Several indirect measures of support for the CHP industry were also introduced in 2001–02. Of those that can be enumerated, climate change levy exemption on fuel inputs to Good Quality CHP and Good Quality CHP electricity outputs were valued at up to £90 million, while eligibility for Enhanced Capital Allowances is worth in the region of £10 million per annum to the industry. In addition, CHP is one of the measures that operators who are participants in Climate Change Agreements are encouraged to use to meet their targets and therefore qualify for the 80 per cent. reduction in Climate Change Levy.

Dairy Herds (Somerset)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average size of the dairy herd in Somerset was in each of the last five years. [82608]

Mr. Morley: The tables show the number of holdings, number of cows in the dairy herd and average number of these dairy cattle on holdings in the county of Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset Unitary Authorities.

County of Somerset

Year	Holdings	Dairy cows	Average herd size
1997	1,371	118,572	86.5
1998	1,326	113,221	85.4
1999	1,289	115,126	89.3
2000	1,229	109,498	89.1
2001	1,190	111,379	93.6

Bath and North East Somerset Unitary Authority

Year	Holdings	Dairy cows	Average herd size
1997	108	8,680	80.4
1998	108	8,920	82.6
1999	109	9,098	83.5
2000	102	8,546	83.8
2001	104	9,453	90.9

North Somerset Unitary Authority

Year	Holdings	Dairy cows	Average herd size
1997	135	10,337	76.6
1998	132	9,799	74.2
1999	133	10,165	76.4
2000	113	9,408	83.3
2001	107	9,296	86.9

Notes:
1. These figures show the old county of Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset Unitary Authority and North Somerset Unitary Authority. These now comprise the area covered by Somerset.

2. Years 2000 and 2001 refer to main and minor holdings. 1997–99 refer to main holdings only.
3. A dairy cow is defined as a cow or heifer in the dairy herd that has calved.
Source:
June Agricultural and Horticultural Census

Elephant Ivory

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the EU decision to abstain in respect of the vote at the CITES meeting in Santiago, relating to whether to allow elephant ivory stockpile sales by Namibia, Botswana and South Africa, reflected the position the UK Government advocated in its discussions with EU partners prior to the vote. [83382]

Mr Morley *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* At the meeting of the Environment Council on 17 October member states agreed that the Community was unwilling to agree to a resumption in commercial ivory trade unless it was satisfied, following consultation with all range states, that there would be no resulting increase in illegal killing of elephants and no unfavourable impact on the conservation of elephant populations. The Community would continue to support the cooperation of range states to this effect.

In Santiago the UK supported the EU view that the initial set of proposals put forward by the range states did not meet these criteria for a resumption in commercial ivory trade. Following a meeting between representatives of range states and the EU, a revised set of proposals was prepared which sought only a one-off sale, subject to strict conditions which must be fulfilled before the sale could go ahead.

On these, the EU agreed to abstain because it was clear that there was no prospect of achieving an agreed view, even on qualified majority voting, to support or oppose the revised proposal. The UK does not believe that the necessary conditions are currently in place, even for a one-off sale. However, if the strict requirements of the agreement (which include a minimum 18-month delay, strict control of the market, stringent monitoring requirements and a condition that the proceeds of any sale are used solely for the benefit of elephant conservation) are met in full and verified, we believe that this agreement strikes the right balance between meeting the legitimate expectations of the southern African states that they should be able to engage in sustainable utilisation of their natural resources, whilst establishing strict controls to secure the conservation of wider elephant populations, as envisaged in the Environment Council decision.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Andrew Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how much Government financial support has been made available for energy efficiency measures in each year since 1990; [82804]

(2) how much Government financial support has been made available to *(a)* the Energy Savings Trust, *(b)* the Carbon Trust and *(c)* other organisations concerned with energy efficiency measures in each year since 1990. [82805]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* Since 1996 the Government have provided funding to the Energy Saving Trust (Defra funding currently about £24 million) to encourage the sustainable use of energy in the domestic and small business sectors. The Energy Saving Trust also receives funding from the Scottish Executive, Department for Transport and Department of Trade and Industry.

Government funding for the Carbon Trust by my Department and the Devolved Administrations since April 2001 is a little under £50 million a year funded from Climate Change Levy receipts and the Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme.

The funding made available by my Department and its predecessors to support and promote efficiency measures in each year since 1990 (including the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust) is of the scale set out:

	£ million
1990–91	18.4
1991–92	39.3
1992–93	49.4
1993–94	60.3
1994–95	102.7
1995–96	128.5
1996–97	116.0
1997–98	110.5
1998–99	109.0
1999–2000	112.0
2000–01	119
2001–02	approximately [1]253

[1] Subject to final audit

These figures include the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme, support for the Energy Saving Trust (from 1996), Fuel Poverty and for the Carbon Trust (from 1 April 2001). Energy Saving Trust funding for Scotland was devolved from 1 July 1999. Between 1991–99, the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme covered the whole of Great Britain. Funding was devolved to Scotland in July 1999 and to Wales in April 2000. The new Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (now marketed as the Warm Front Team) was launched in England in June 2000.

EU Agriculture Regulations

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many EU regulations have been introduced in each year since 1997 relating to agriculture. [82686]

Mr. Morley: A table showing council regulations agreed in the years 1997–02 relating to agriculture is available in the Library of the House. A number of regulations agreed during this time have since expired—these are not included. The list has been trawled from a variety of sources and it is possible that a small number of regulations may have fallen through the net. Regulations have a direct effect in the laws of member states and do not usually require Governments to take action to implement them, the table does not show commission regulations. Details of all regulations adopted can be found on the Eur-Lex database available on the European Union's website.

Insurance (Flooding)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the insurance industry about continuing flood cover. [84186]

Mr. Morley: There have been many discussions with the insurance industry, involving myself, my officials and officials from Treasury, culminating in the Association of British Insurers' announcement in September that they would continue provision of flood insurance for the vast majority of homes situated on the floodplain. Discussions continue as we have agreed to review the situation on a regular basis.

Farming

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* land-owning farmers and *(b)* tenant farmers have left the industry in each of the last 10 years. [82894]

Mr. Morley: The information for farmers is not available. Figures from the agricultural census on the number of holdings by tenure in England 1991–2000 indicate the following.

	Holdings wholly owned/ 50 per cent. or more owned	*Holdings wholly rented/ 50 per cent. or more rented*
1991	112,383	38,583
1992	113,698	38,020
1993	115,956	37,466
1994	117,086	36,340
1995	111,877	34,235
1996	112,164	33,474
1997	111,594	33,183
1998	112,369	32,724
1999	115,148	32,072
2000	114,841	31,506

Notes:

1. Data refers to main holdings only.

2. It is not possible to show the number of farmers, only the number of holdings.

Some farmers may have more than one holding.

3. The figures show only the number of holdings on the census day in June each

year. They therefore do not reflect gains or losses during the year.

Source:

June Agricultural and Horticultural Census

Horticulture (Employment Statistics)

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people were employed in horticulture in *(a)* 1972, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1990, *(d)* 1995, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001, broken down by *(i)* contractual and (ii) full time workers. [84238]

Mr Morley *[holdling answer 2 December 2002]*: Figures on the Labour force on Horticulture Holdings in England is provided as follows It is not possible to provide figures for 1980 and figures on contractual workers.

	1990	*1995*	*2000*	*2001*
Farmers, partners, Directors full-time (including spouses in 2000 and 2001)	8,920	7,474	7,557	7,532
Farmers, partners, directors part-time (including spouses in 2000 and 2001)	3,483	3,198	8,005	8,605
Spouses of farmers partners and directors full and part-time	4,287	3,427	[1]	[1]
Salaried managers:				
Part-time	N/a	N/a	1,876	2,190
Full-time	N/a	N/a	231	338
Total	1,338	1,265	2,107	2,528
Full-time workers	1,5012	12,601	12,404	126,96
Part-time workers	9,259	7,706	6,991	6,440
Casual labour	16,761	14,888	12,938	13,358
Total labour	59,060	50,559	50,002	51,156

[1] Including above.

Notes:

(a) A horticultural holding is one where horticulture is the predominant activity.

(b) Spouses are included only if they are working on the holding.

(c) Figures for 1990 and 1995 represent main holdings only.

(d) In 1998 fundamental changes were introduced to the labour questions on the June Agricultural and Horticultural Census in England. It appears that this change in questions may have led to the recording of additional labour not previously included in the returns.

(e) As a result of a register improvement exercise the figures from June 2000 and June 2001 are not directly comparable.

Source:

June Agricultural and Horticultural Census.

Live Sheep Exports

Mr. Gwyn Prosser To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on *(a)* 13 November and *(b)* 14 November; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(i)* during inspection for health certification purposes and (ii) at Dover docks; to where those sheep were taken; and what the address was of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [82072]

(2) how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on 16 November; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(a)* during inspection for health certification purposes and *(b)* at Dover docks, and to where those sheep were taken; and what the address was of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [82768]

(3) how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on 19 November; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(a)* during inspection for health certification purposes and *(b)* at Dover docks, and to where those sheep were taken; and what the address was of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [82996]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is as follows.

November 2002	Total animals	Where consignments were certified	Animals rejected at certification	Animals rejected at Dover docks	Destination
13	2,809	England, Scotland and Wales	37	0	France
14	2,330	Wales	33	0	France and Germany
16	3,265	England and Wales	60	0	France
16	405	Wales	6	0	Germany
19	2,889	England, Scotland and Wales	10	0	France

The sheep for the consignments listed were certified within 48 hours prior to export. These consignments went to approved slaughterhouses apart from the sailings on 13 November and 19 November which were fattening animals transported to holdings. The animals which were rejected at certification remained in Great Britain.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the operational effectiveness of the 20 day rule. [84164]

Mr. Morley: Ministers and officials are in regular contact with their counterparts in the devolved Administrations about a number of animal health matters, including the 20 day standstill.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many representations she has received on the effects of the 20 day standstill rule in relation to the movement of animals; and if she will make a statement. [84188]

Mr. Morley: Industry organisations, veterinary associations, individual farmers and others have made numerous and varied representations about the effects of the 20 day standstill.

Modification (Public Consultation)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the process which will apply in respect of the public consultation exercise on modification. [84727]

Mr. Meacher: The Government is sponsoring a public dialogue on genetic modification (GM) technology and this will focus on issues and concerns raised by the public. This consists of three strands:

A public debate organised independently of the Government, overseen by an independent steering board chaired by Professor Malcolm Grant, chair of the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC).

A review of the science surrounding GM issues, led by Professor David King (the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser) working with Professor Howard Dalton (the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). An expert Science Review Panel, chaired by Professor King, will review and summarise the state of scientific knowledge, concerns and areas of uncertainty over GM science issues

The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit is carrying out a study into the overall costs and benefits of GM crops, including their effect on conventional and organic farming interests.

The Strategy Unit study, along with the science review, will feed into thepublic debate. The overall process is now underway and will continue until June next year.

Pesticide Residues

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many food samples tested for pesticide, veterinary and other residues in each of the last 10 years were assessed to contain *(a)* residue above the maximum residue level for the *(i)* UK and (ii) EU, *(b)* a residue not approved for use on UK crops and *(c)* a residue in organic samples. [84159]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 December 2002]*: The results of analysis for pesticide residues are presented in Table 1. All the samples were assessed for Maximum Residue Level[1] (MRL) exceedances (where MRLs had been set) and UK non-approved uses for the UK samples only. Organic samples are not specifically targeted in the surveys. They are tested as part of the monitoring programme as they are available for consumers to buy. Table 1 therefore includes the number of samples tested for pesticide residues which were found to contain MRL exceedances (which may be either UK, EU or Codex Alimentarius Commission MRLs). It also includes the number of non-approved uses found in UK produce only, and the number of organic samples that were found to contain residues.

The detailed results of the Pesticide Residues Committee's (PRC's) monitoring (and its predecessor the Working Party on Pesticide Residues (WPPR) (including the commodities tested) have been published and can be viewed on the relevant websites:

www.pesticides.gov.uk/committees/PRC/prc.htm (PRC results)

www.pesticides.gov.uk/committees/WPPR/wppr.htm (WPPR results)

These electronic results go back as far as 1996. Hard copies going back to 1992 are available in the House Library.

Table 1 Samples tested for pesticide residues from 1993–2002 which were found to contain an MRL exceedance, non-approved UK use or organic samples containing residence

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001 [1]
Number of samples tested	3,177	3,371	3,742	3,230	3,449	2,648	2,187	2,374	2,304	4,003
Number of samples containing MRL exceedances	28	46	23	32	27	15	29	38	25	29
	(0.88%)	(1.36%)	(0.61%)	(0.99%)	(0.78%)	(0.57%)	(1.33%)	(1.60%)	(1.09%)	(0.72%)
Number of UK samples containing non-approved pesticides	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	12	5	8	9
Number of organic samples containing residues	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	7

[1] The PRC plan to test 4,000 samples during 2002, however, the full results are not available
[2] Data are not available

The results of analysis for veterinary medicine residues are presented in Table 2. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) of DEFRA runs two surveillance schemes that look for residues of authorised veterinary medicines and banned substances in UK produced and imported foods. Samples of organic produce are included in the surveillance, but the results have not been kept separately. The Maximum Residue Limits[1] (MRLs) for residues of veterinary medicines are set on an EU-wide basis. Substances not authorised for use will not have an MRL. For such compounds and also for approved substances without an MRL for a particular tissue, an 'Action Level' is applied; this is normally that any confirmed residue is reported.

All of the results, highlighting any exceedances of MRLs and Action Levels, are published quarterly in the VMD's newsletter. They have been published annually in the VMD's annual report and accounts up to 1994, in a dedicated VMD report on surveillance for veterinary residues between 1995 and 2000, and in the veterinary residues committee's annual report on surveillance for veterinary residues in 2001. Copies of the annual reports are available in the House Library or the VMD's website www.vmd.gov.uk.

A variety of factors which influence the pattern of results—such as compounds sought or analytical capability—have changed in both programmes over time. Data for different years may, therefore, not be directly comparable. The detailed published reports for the programmes covering these years should be consulted for further information.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has responsibility for pesticide residues and veterinary medicines residues. Other food residues are a matter for the Food Standards Agency.

Table 2: Number of samples tested under the VMD's statutory and non-statutory surveillance programmes that were above approved limits for each of the last 10 years

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Total samples (1000s)	48	49	47	50	42	44	40	41	39	40
Veterinary authorised [1]	207	60	180	101	129	78	73	59	80	75
Non-authorised [2]	15	0	69	57	66	34	50	15	32	34
Other[3]	57	108	101	69	101	376	16	44	18	46

[1] This includes where MRLs were exceeded or a residue of an authorised substance has been found where no MRL was set (in this case an 'Action Level' is applied—this is normally that any confirmed residue is reported as an exceedance).
[2] Non-authorised substances may not have an MRL. Some of the reported cases will be of hormones, where the action level may be exceeded by the natural fluctuations of the hormone within the animal.
[3] Certain substances, such as PCBs, pesticides, dyes and heavy metals are included in the VMD surveillance programmes, as they are a requirement under Council Directive 96/23EC.
Note:
The definition of MRLs for pesticide residues and veterinary residues is not the same; they have different meanings.

For pesticide residues, MRLs are maximum residue levels. These are intended primarily as a check that pesticides are being used correctly and to assist international trade in treated produce. Maximum residue levels for pesticide residues are not safety limits, and exposure to pesticide residues in excess of a maximum residue level does not necessarily imply a risk to health.

For veterinary residues, MRLs are maximum residue limits. For veterinary medicines, they are statutory limits—if any tissue from an animal presented for slaughter is found to contain a residue above the maximum residue limit, an offence may have been committed. In Europe, the Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products (CVMP), part of the European Medicines Evaluation Agency, sets MRLs. Because of the way veterinary MRLs are set, exposure to a residue over the MRL is in itself not necessarily a cause for concern. The VMD take toxicological advice from the Food Standards Agency where residues over the relevant MRL or actions levels are detected.

Pet Passport Scheme

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will reassess the risks of the reintroduction of rabies via the pet passport scheme. [84242]

Mr. Morley: We carried out such an assessment before deciding to extend the pet travel scheme to the USA and Canada. The risk of importing rabies into the UK, from qualifying countries under the pet travel scheme, remains low.

Timber Procurement

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the countries from which timber was obtained for the refurbishment of Nobel House; and what steps she has taken to ensure that the timber used was derived from legal and sustainable sources. [84732]

Alun Michael: The most recent refurbishment work in Nobel House was to the Ministerial Suite completed in 1997. At that time no records were kept of the source of timber and as the contractor has gone into bankruptcy I am advised that it is not possible to pursue the matter through company records.

Refurbishment in the adjoining building, 9 Millbank, was completed in September 2002. Limed oak was obtained from a renewable, legal source in Germany for that project.

Waste-Based Fishing Quotas

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she has received representations about the possibility of waste-based fishing quotas. [83898]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* No but I am pleased to note that the Commission has recently produced an action plan to address the practice of discarding of unwanted fish. One of the many points for discussion is the possibility of reducing discards due to exhausted quotas by establishing by-catch quotas or setting multi-species TACs. We have not yet taken a view on this but look forward to detailed consideration and discussion of this and other novel ideas in the action plan.

TRANSPORT

Airport Security

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the report on airport security by Sir John Wheeler; and if he will make a statement. [82875]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend announced on 30 October, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins), *Official Report*, columns 861–62W, that the Government had considered carefully the findings and recommendations in Sir John Wheeler's report, and was happy to accept in principle all of them. The Department for Transport and the Home Office are now working closely together on implementation, involving as appropriate, the police and other control agencies, and the airport industry.

10-year Plan

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to reply to Mr. Peter Tucker of Burton Sea's letter of 1July regarding liquid petroleum gas. [83354]

Mr. Jamieson: I apologise that the hon. Member's constituent has not received a reply to his letter. My Department has received a further copy of the letter, to which officials are replying. I will ensure a copy is sent to the hon. Member for information

Air Routes

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on the establishment of public service obligations on air routes serving peripheral or development regions where no subsidy is involved. [84868]

Mr. Jamieson: We are prepared to consider the establishment of Public Service Obligations where the criteria laid down in Regulation 2408/92 are met.

Air Transport Consultation Process

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who will *(a)* analyse and *(b)* collate the responses to the air transport consultation; and whether they or their employees have previously been employees of airlines or airport operators. [84560]

Mr. Jamieson: The analysis of the consultation responses will be carried out by a team comprising civil servants and retained consultants with expertise in a range of relevant areas including aviation, surface access, safety and environmental issues. It will be for officials to prepare and submit advice to Ministers.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the current timetable for the air transport consultation process for the south east will be affected by the high court ruling on 26 November regarding the omission of Gatwick airport from the air transport consultation document; and if he will make a statement. [85020]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement given to Parliament on 28 November by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Airports Consultation

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what he estimates to be the total costs to public funds of contesting the action brought by Essex county council, Kent county council and Medway cistrict council in respect of the Airports Consultation. [85220]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's own costs and Counsel's fees have not yet been calculated.

The amount of each claimant's costs will have to be assessed by the Court in due course if it cannot be agreed.

Birmingham International Airport

Mrs. Spelman: Mrs. Caroline Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will *(a)* rescind his previous intention to issue a white paper on potential expansion of Birmingham International Airport and *(b)* substitute a green paper. [83549]

Mr. Jamieson: It remains our intention to issue a white paper setting out our policies on both aviation and airports.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will allow *(a)* the period of consultation to be extended and a second round of consultation to be organized and *(b)* additional time for (i) preparation and publication of detailed Birmingham International Airport proposal and the documentary evidence to support such a proposal and its concomitant business care and (ii) public scrutiny and response. [83550]

Mr. Jamieson: As the Secretary of State has announced in his written Statement of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 35–36WS and his Oral Statement to the House on 28 November, we have decided to extend the consultation. It will now close four months after the publication of a further consultation document for South East England.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what account he will take of representations about the proposed expansion of Birmingham international airport which are not in the form of responses to the official questionnaire; and whether he will receive representations after 30 November; [83945]

(2) whether he will examine the proposal for expansion of Birmingham international airport put forward by the airport management. [83946]

Mr. Jamieson: All written responses to the consultation will be considered. Details of how to respond are set out in the consultation document.

British Midland

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on operations between British Midland from Heathrow to the USA. [84059]

Mr. Jamieson: The Bermuda II agreement allows the UK to designate only two airlines to operate from Heathrow to the US, and British Airways and Virgin Atlantic are the designated UK airlines. We have put proposals to the US for the full liberalisation of the UK-US aviation market, but these have not been accepted. More recently, we put proposals to the US Government for a partial liberalisation of the market, which would have allowed bmi British Midland to operate a limited number of Heathrow-US services, but the US felt unable to accept them either. We are currently considering whether a further proposal should be made.

Containers

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received on the development of container handling capacity in the UK; [84116]

(2) what appraisal his Department has made of the likely demand in container handling facilities in UK ports over the next 25 years; [84115]

(3) what appraisal his Department has made of the need for hub port development in the UK; [84114]

(4) what recent representations he has received on the development of hub ports in the UK. [84113]

Mr. Jamieson: A paper, "Recent Developments at UK Container Ports" was published by the Department in July 2001. Copies of this paper were placed in the Library in response to a question from the Hon. Member for Reading West on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 296–97W. This paper was based on extensive consultation with port and shipping interests. Representations received in relation to the development of hub ports have related predominantly to specific schemes and have been made as part of the formal planning process in which the schemes are at various stages. A few have related to other possible projects on which no formal proposals have been submitted.

Croxley Rail Link

Claire Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of discussions on the Croxley rail link project. [83822]

Mr. Jamieson: The scheme is currently being considered in our preparations for this year's local transport settlement; an announcement on which will be made shortly.

Cycle Facilities (Railway Stations)

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of railway stations in England with cycle-friendly facilities; how many have *(a)* gulleys for taking bikes up stairs and *(b)* cycle parks; and what measures he has taken to encourage cycle-friendly facilities at railway stations. [83797]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not held centrally. The Strategic Rail Authority encourages all train operators to provide appropriate facilities at stations for the safe and secure storage of cycles.

Detrunked Roads Programme

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what method the detrunked roads programme will be incorporated into the local government finance system; and when he expects the integration programme to be *(a)* started and *(b)* completed. [84512]

Mr. Jamieson: Transfers of revenue to local authorities in respect of detrunked roads are provided by special grant under section 88B of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The timing and method of the integration of the Special Grant into Formula Spending Shares (previously Standard Spending Assessments) is currently under consideration.

Government Sponsorship

Ms Shipley: Ms Debra Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his sponsorship of *(a)* the New Government Building, Leeds and *(b)* the Highway Agency's Stonehenge improvement entails. [83351]

Mr. Jamieson: The new Government Building, Leeds and the Highways Agency's Stonehenge improvement are two Departmental projects selected by the former DTLR for inclusion in the Better Public Building Initiative.

The Highways Agency is the largest and the leading partner in a project to co-locate five departments in a single new office at Leeds. The design of the new office is being developed with input from the Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment (CABE).

The project is a Private Finance Initiative scheme and is at a stage where five outline proposals have been submitted by developers. It aims to provide a combination of a pleasant working environment for staff with high quality exterior design which enhances the local environment and meets government targets on sustainability.

The Highways Agency's A303 Stonehenge Improvement is a central component of the Stonehenge Project, which will help to restore the setting of the scheduled monument within the Stonehenge World Heritage Site. The Project brings together a number of government and non-government agencies and other organisations in partnership. Detailed development work is currently being undertaken by the Agency.

The principal feature of the improvement will be a tunnel past the Stones. High quality design will be essential for all parts of the scheme that have an impact on the World Heritage Site. CABE is already involved in assessing the detail of the proposals.

Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the grants funded by his Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if he will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82198]

Mr. Jamieson: Total funding and number of awards for grants funded by my Department, for which individual members of the public and organisations may have applied in the last financial year, are set out in the table. The administration of grant programmes is carried out by a number of different units within the Department to which a range of staff make a contribution. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of those costs centrally.

Grants	*Total funding in 2001–02 (£000)*	*Awards in 2001–02*
Bus Service Operator's Grant	304.300	1,800
Rail Freight Grant	32.800	23
Track Access Grant	24.200	21
Powershift	3.998	4,491
CleanUp	3.455	2,424
CleanUp Haulage	1.255	341
Road Safety Grants	0.334	9
Mobility Grants	0.620	12
Water Freight Grant	16.981	13

HGV Licences

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the valid heavy goods vehicle operator licences in effect in *(a)* Wychavon, *(b)* Cotswold, and *(c)* Stratford-upon-Avon district council areas. [84911]

Mr. Jamieson: The Traffic Area Network electronic database of HGV and PSV operator licences can be accessed through their website on www.tan.gov.uk. Data can be extracted by post-code area, but not by local authority district, and by operator name. There are more than 100 operators in the areas.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make it his policy to require the Transport Commissioners to notify local councils of applications for heavy goods vehicle operator licenses within their council area; [84914]

(2) if he will list those bodies and individuals the Traffic Commissioners are obliged to consult before issuing operators licences; and what plans he has to add bodies and individuals to this list; [84920]

(3) why the responsibility to advertise an application for a heavy goods vehicle operator licence rests with the applicant. [84915]

Mr. Jamieson: An applicant for a heavy goods vehicle operating licence must advertise the details of the application in a local newspaper circulating in the locality of a proposed operating centre and send a copy of the advertisement to the Traffic Commissioner. A Traffic Commissioner must satisfy himself that this meets the requirements. If not, he must refuse the application. Independent verification by the Traffic Commissioner provides a better safeguard for local residents than if he were responsible for advertising applications.

The Traffic Commissioner has the responsibility for publishing applications received, other than minor variations, and for notifying those bodies with a statutory right to object to the grant of a licence. The bodies a Traffic Commissioner is obliged to consult are: prescribed trade unions; a chief officer of police; a local authority; a planning authority. There are no plans to add to this list. Local residents affected may make representations.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the need for the Traffic Commissioners to take account of environmental issues when granting operator licences for the use of heavy goods vehicles; [84921]

(2) what account the Transport Commissioners are required to take of local road safety congestion and the amenity of local committees when granting a heavy goods vehicle operator licence; [84912]

(3) what steps the Traffic Commissioners take to ensure an applicant for a heavy goods vehicle operator licence is a bona fide business and otherwise suitably qualified individual; [84917]

(4) if he will make it his policy to require the Transport Commissioners to satisfy themselves that an appropriate planning permission exists on a site for which an application for a heavy goods vehicle operator licence has been made before granting any such licence; [84913]

(5) for what reason the independent Traffic Commissioners are limited in what they may consider when deciding an operator's licence application; [84916]

(6) what account the Traffic Commissioners take of practicability of *(a)* gaining access to and *(b)* manoeuvring vehicles on a site before granting an operator licence for heavy goods vehicles; [84919]

(7) what steps the Traffic Commissioners take to ensure that a site on which a heavy goods vehicle operator licence is applied for has the appropriate planning permission. [84918]

Mr. Jamieson: The Goods Vehicle (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995 determines the matters which a Traffic Commissioner takes into account in granting an application for a goods vehicle operating licence. These relate to the suitability of:

(a) a site for use as an operating centre for heavy goods vehicles, including parking; safety of access to a public road; and impact on the local environment; and

(b) an operator in terms of good repute; financial standing; and professional competence.

Traffic Commissioners are responsible for deciding whether the criteria have been met. It follows that Traffic Commissioners do not have the power to take into account other matters such as the absence of planning permission for an operating centre or its impact on road congestion. These are the responsibility of the local planning authority and the local highway authority respectively.

Highways Agency

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers a Traffic Manager will have; what plans he has to change the role of the Highways Agency; and what discussions he has had with the insurance industry on the implications of removing vehicles soon after an accident. [84244]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) have recently completed a comprehensive review of police and Agency roles for network operation. The review investigated how greater co-operation could improve the effective operation of the network and the way in which incidents and the effects of incidents could be jointly managed.

Implementation will be carefully managed and carried out in partnership with the police. There will be detailed consultation with internal and external stakeholders.

Illegal Parking

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will introduce adoptive powers to make it an offence to allow vehicles to be parked on verges and footpaths; [85170]

(2) if he will bring into force section 19a of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to make it an offence for motor vehicles, other than heavy commercial vehicles, to park on verges and footways or the land between carriageways on any urban road. [85171]

Mr. Jamieson: Section 19A of the Road Traffic Act 1988 was repealed by the Road Traffic Act 1991.

We are not in favour of a national ban on pavement parking for the reasons given in our response to recommendation [e viii] of the Walking in Towns and Cities report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee (Cm 5277). Parking on pavements and verges is a problem that should be tackled at local level using traffic regulation orders.

Jet Skis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had from *(a)* individuals, *(b)* manufacturers and *(c)* user groups about the need to regulate the use of jet-skis and make them subject to registration and insurance; and if he will make a statement. [83261]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department receives communications from time to time from individuals seeking advice. We continue to take the view that education and training are preferable to compulsory registration. My Department also liaises with manufacturers and user groups on a regular basis to produce safety guidelines and advice to encourage training and better awareness of the users' responsibilities.

Additionally my Department supports a national system, fully sponsored by manufacturers, users, and local authorities, covering voluntary training, insurance and registration.

Light Dues

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on how money received as light dues may be spent. [83570]

Mr. Jamieson: The provisions of section 211(2) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 define how monies paid into the General Lighthouse Fund (GLF) are spent. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has responsibility for the management of the fund and sanctions all expenditure by the General Lighthouse Authorities.

Modes of Travel

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passenger miles were travelled in journeys by *(a)* train, *(b)* car, *(c)* bus, *(d)* aeroplane and *(e)* ship in the last year for which information is available. [85089]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is as follows:

Passenger kilometres by mode: Great Britain 2001

Mode of transport	*billion*
Rail	47
Car, vans and taxis	624
Bus and coach	46
Air	8
Water	0.5
All modes	[1]734

[1] Includes 9 billion passenger kilometres by pedal cycle or motor cycle.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent in support of *(a)* road, *(b)* rail, *(c)* air and *(d)* sea transport in the last year for which information is available. [85090]

Mr. Jamieson: For 2001–02, the last year for which full information is available, total public expenditure was: £1,639 million on national roads; £2,080 million on railways; £92 million on aviation; and £9 million on maritime programmes.

In addition, local authorities are responsible for local roads and highways. In 1999–2000, the last year for which information on actual spending is available, gross revenue spending by English local authorities on highways was £1,994 million, with capital spending on roads of £930 million.

Motorway Congestion

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he plans to take to reduce congestion on motorways; and what research he has conducted into the change in the speed of motorway traffic since 1998. [84243]

Mr. Jamieson: "Transport 2010: The Ten Year Plan" sets out our vision for a fairer and more effective transport system, while the Highways Agency's "Strategic Roads 2010" sets out the framework for delivering the strategic road network elements of the plan, which includes reducing congestion across the strategic motorway and trunk road network. This needs to be considered in the context of measures to improve other forms of transport, which will also contribute to delivery of the congestion target.

Pilot studies to actively manage the traffic and make better use of the existing road space will be undertaken, and where necessary, programmes of works such as the Targeted Programme of Improvements and the recently announced 92 priority junction schemes will be delivered. Both will provide increased capacity and improve conditions on the network.

To help deliver the reduction in congestion, the Highways Agency is also developing its role as a traffic manager to help motorists deal with congestion on motorways and other strategic routes, and has appointed a director whose prime purpose is to take this role forward. A number of initiatives are being pursued. These include the Traffic Control Centre project that will provide advice to motorists about travel conditions on the trunk road network, allowing them to plan their journeys more effectively to avoid congestion. In conjunction with the Police and other emergency services, the Agency is improving the way it deals with accidents and incidents on the network so that they are dealt with more effectively, reducing the time roads are disrupted to minimise congestion.

The Department for Transport has monitored trunk road and motorway speeds in 1995, 1998 and 2001. Surveys show that while, in general, overall speeds have fallen since 1995, average speeds on motorways were 2.5 mph faster in 2001 in the morning peak period when compared to the equivalent speeds in the 1998 survey. In the evening peak, they were 3.3 mph faster.

Motorways

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the cost per mile of using a noise absorbing surface on motorways. [83904]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Mathews to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Ginny Clarke to Mr. Prentice, dated 5 December 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the cost per mile of using a noise—absorbing surface on motoways. I am replying in the absence of Tim Mathews the Chief Executive who is currently away on Highways Agency business.

The cost varies considerably depending on site specific issues such as:

the overall size of the contract,

wheather the existing surface is to be planed out and to what depth, or overlaid,

the thickness of the material to be laid and the number of layers,

whether the work is to be carried out during the day or at night, re-opening the carriageway during the day,

the complexity and duration of the traffic management necessary and,

whether it is necessary to resurface the hard shoulders or carry out adjustments to other road items.

The cost per mile for surfacing laid on both carriageways of a dual three—lane motorway would be expected to range between £200,000 and £450,000. These costs are for the quieter surfacings currently being used on the trunk road network in line with Government policy. They do not include the cost of porous asphalt for which no recent prices are available. Based on past experience however, this would be considerably more expensive; we estimate perhaps £600,000 to £700,000 per mile.

If it would be helpful, John Williams in our pavement engineering team, would be pleased to discuss the quieter surfacings in current use on the trunk road network with you. His telephone number is 01234 796116.

Multi-Modal Studies

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the costs so far have been of the Multi-Modal Studies; and what the total estimated cost is. [85160]

Mr. Jamieson: Expenditure to 31 October 2002 on the Multi-Modal Studies has been approximately £27 million (excluding VAT). The estimated cost of the studies to completion of the programme is £32 million (excluding VAT).

New Trains (Glasgow-Euston)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when new trains will be introduced on the Glasgow-Preston-London Euston route. [84057]

Mr. Jamieson: A phased introduction of new Pendolino trains will begin early in 2003, initially between London and Manchester. Introduction of trains north of Crewe is dependent upon fleet delivery and ongoing route clearance and upgrade works.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84798]

Mr. Jamieson: The total expenditure on official travel for the predecessor Department, Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in 2001–02 was £6,623,138.81. This total includes the travel, accommodation and subsistence costs. Expenditure on official travel for its agencies is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Since 1999, the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published, on an annual basis, the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1374–75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House. All travel by officials in my Department is undertaken in accordance with the principles set out in chapter 8 of the Civil Service Management Code (available on the net at: http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/civilservice/managementcode/csmc.rtf

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84933]

Mr. Jamieson: The budget for travel and subsistence is included in the high level allocation to Divisional Managers for administration costs. Divisional Managers decide on the allocation to each area of costs.

Oil Tankers

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what help the UK Government have made available to *(a)* the Spanish and *(b)* the Portuguese authorities to help tackle the environmental repercussions of the Prestige oil disaster. [84740]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) received a request on 13 November from the Spanish embassy via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for offers of assistance for an at-sea clean-up operation, following an oil spill from M/V Prestige.

An offer of immediate salvage and counter pollution advice and equipment was passed to the Spanish embassy. This request was repeated on 14 November by the European Commission's Civil Protection and Environmental Accidents Unit, which was assessing availability of equipment for collective help to Spain.

On 14 November the MCA offered Spain a range of equipment and expertise, outlining the elements of the UK's own oil spill response capability that could be utilised in this incident. This offer was enhanced on the 19th with information about an oil spill recovery vessel—the Sefton Supporter owned by Gulf Offshore that operates in the Irish Sea.

On 21 November the MCA received a further request from the European Commission's Civil Protection Co-operation Mechanism, on behalf of Spain and Portugal, for information on the availability, costs/hire charges and mobilisation time of specialised equipment for the recovery of heavy oil. On 24 November MCA's offer of assistance was accepted and, after discussion with the Spanish Authorities, three Artic lorries with specialist equipment and one flat bed lorry equipped with a 10ft crane was sent by ferry, due to arrive in La Coruna 28 November. The MCA are also sending five trained personnel to operate and help deploy this equipment.

Additionally an aerial surveillance capability was requested by Spain on 27 November and this is being deployed by 3 December.

The Spanish Authorities also contacted Gulf Offshore directly requesting the services of the Sefton Supporter, which arrived in La Coruna on 27 November. Defra's Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science has also contacted the scientists working on impact assessment and offered any technical assistance they may find helpful.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if she will press the European Commission to bring forward the date on which the use of EU waters by single hull oil tankers will be forbidden. [84741]

Mr. Jamieson: The recent amendment to the MARPOL Convention agreed in the International Maritime Organization, and implemented within the EU by regulation No. 417/2002, has just come into effect. Single hull tankers having no additional protection, such as the Prestige, must be phased out in order of age between 2003 and 2007. Single hull tankers fitted with partial protection must be phased out in order of age between 2003 and 2015. Each category of single hull tanker will have to satisfy an additional requirement for a rigorous condition assessment survey to be able to operate after 2005 and 2010 respectively. The use of waters of EU member states is regulated in accordance with compliance with the United Conventions on the Law of the Sea.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will press the EU to set a maximum size for oil tankers allowed in EU waters. [84742]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no evidence that reducing the size of oil tankers would lead to an overall improvement in safety. The implication of using smaller tankers is that more voyages would be needed to carry the same volume of oil and related cargoes.

Public Service Obligation

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with *(a)* EU transport ministers, *(b)* Commission officials and *(c)* the Council of Ministers, on the common application of public service obligations across Europe. [84866]

Mr. Jamieson: We have already advocated to the Commission and other member states in Council working groups on the Commission's proposals for amending Regulation 95/93 that we believe that there is a case for amending Regulation 2408/92 on public service obligations.

Rail Network

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of new rail passenger line, exluding refurbishment of existing lines, have been opened in each year since 1972; and how many miles have been closed in each of the corresponding years. [81586]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* This information is not held in the form requested. The route kms open for traffic each year are as follows:

(km)

Year	*Route open for traffic*
1972–73	18,417
1973–74	18,227
1974–75	18,168
1975–76	18,118
1976–77	18,007
1977–78	17,973
1978–79	17,901
1979–80	17,735
1980–81	17,645
1981–82	17,431
1982–83	17,229
1983–84	16,964
1984–85	16,816
1985–86	16,752
1986–87	16,670
1987–88	16,633
1988–89	16,599
1989–90	16,587
1990–91	16,584
1991–92	16,558
1992–93	16,528
1993–94	16,536
1994–95	16,542
1995–96	16,666
1996–97	16,666
1997–98	16,656
1998–99	16,659
1999–2000	16,649
2000–01	16,652
2001–02	16,652

Road Accidents (A12)

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* injury and *(b)* non-injury road accidents have been reported since 1990 on the A12 road in Essex between Witham and Marks Tey. [84656]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to reply to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Alan Hurst, dated 3 December 2002:

David Jamieson has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many injury and non-injury road accidents have been reported since 1990 on the A12 between Witham and Marks Tey.

There have been 291 injury accidents since 1994 between Lynfields Interchange at the southern end of the Witham Bypass and the A12/A120 Marks Tey Interchange. Of these, 10 were fatal, 57 were serious and 224 were slight injuries. Statistics for non-injury accidents are not available as there is no requirement to report this type of accident.

I regret that records for injury accidents prior to 1994 are not readily accessible and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Road Accidents (Insurer Liability)

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Government will oppose proposed measures by the EU to make motorists' insurers liable, without regard to fault, in all cases of accidents involving motorists and cyclists. [83396]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 6W. We will decide our position when the proposal becomes clearer.

Road Fund Licences

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost of individuals failing to pay road fund licences in the UK in the last year for which figures are available. [84588]

Mr. Jamieson: The national roadside survey of vehicle excise duty evasion which took place in June 1999 showed the level of evasion as 3.9 per cent. of revenue due which equated to £191 million in 2001–2002. This was offset by £110 million recovered through enforcement activities.

Road Traffic Fatalities

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road traffic fatalities there were in Lancashire in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available. [84974]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures for fatalities in Lancashire in the years 1996, 1997 and 2001 are as shown:

Year	*Fatalities*
1996	87
1997	79
2001	76

Roadworks

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications for roadworks were received by each English local authority from utility companies in each year from 1995–96 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [83148]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* This information is not held centrally. However streetworks are a serious growing problem and I believe that the current legislation needs to be improved. My Department is currently considering the options.

Secretary of State Representative

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken in pursuit of the recommendations to appoint a Secretary of State Representative, made in Lord Donaldson's Report of March 1999 on Command and Control, a Review of Salvage and Intervention. [84241]

Mr. Jamieson: The appointment was made on 4 October 1999.

Speed Cameras

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fixed site speed cameras are in operation. [84594]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally.

Speed Limits

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines he has issued to local authorities regarding suitable speed limits on roads adjoining school premises. [84583]

Mr. Jamieson: Guidance to local authorities on the setting of local speed limits exists in the form of Circular Roads 1/93. Additionally, legislation and guidance exists that allows local authorities to introduce 20 mph zones and 20 mph speed limits. Traffic calmed 20 mph zones have been particularly successful in urban areas, including around schools as they ensure compliance with the speed limit thereby substantially reducing the risk of accidents.

Strategic Rail Authority

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much *(a)* the staffing and *(b)* the overall budget of the SRA has changed in each year since its inception. [84271]

Mr. Jamieson: For staffing, I refer the hon. Member to the reply to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 500W.

The budget for 2001–02 at the start of the year was £1,280,619,000. During the financial year, the budget increased to £1,871,992,000. The budget for 2002–03 at the start of the year was £2,166,535,000. That total was recently increased to £2,351,535,000. These increases reflect increases in the scope of SRA expenditure.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and if he will make a statement on how it has changed since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [83503]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is committed to the objectives set out in the Government's overall strategy for sustainable development, "A Better Quality of Life" (Cm 4345), published in May 1999.

Our policies, including those set out in the Integrated Transport White Paper (Cm 3950) of July 1998; the associated policy statements, such as the Sustainable Distribution Strategy of March 1999; the 10 Year Plan for Transport published in July 2000, which sets out an investment programme to 2010; and the on-going Powering Future Vehicles initiative; will help to deliver not only the UK's sustainable transport priorities, but also the transport outcomes of the World Summit for Sustainable Development.

WSSD outcomes and first views on follow-up will be reflected in the Government's annual report on UK progress on sustainable development for 2002.

Traffic Accidents (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many traffic accidents resulted in a fatality in Lancashire in each of the last five years. [85342]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures for road fatalities in Lancashire for 2001 and the five preceding years are shown in the table.

The first column shows the number of accidents in which fatalities occurred, and the second column gives the total number of people killed as a result of those accidents.

	Number of fatal accidents	*Number of fatal casualties*
1996	81	87
1997	75	79
1998	81	84
1999	70	79
2000	60	65
2001	74	76

Transport 10-year Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what expenditure is allocated under the Strategic Rail Authority's 10-year plan for *(a)* multi-modal studies and *(b)* projects relating to access to airports; and if he will make a statement. [83666]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan does not break down proposed expenditure on this basis. Proposals for funding of all rail schemes are assessed and taken forward according to their affordability and value for money.

Trinitas Services Ltd.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether the proposal on the level of interest rate to be charged on the loan to Trinitas Services Ltd. after the third year of the loan being drawn down was referred to the Treasury for instructions on the terms to be applied to the loan; and, how this transaction is governed by Government fiscal policy; [83577]

(2) whether the decision to provide an interest-free loan from the General Lighthouse Fund to Trinitas Services Ltd. was put to the *(a)* Lights Finance Committee and *(b)* Lights Advisory Committee for approval. [83523]

Mr. Jamieson: As the General Lighthouse Fund provided the loan to Trinitas Services Ltd., the Treasury was not consulted on the terms of the loan. No public funding was included.

The loan was submitted to the Lights Advisory Committee for approval but not to the Lights Finance Committee.

Unregistered Vehicles

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what power *(a)* the Mayor of London, *(b)* the Greater London Authority and *(c)* other local authorities have to pick up and crush unregistered vehicles; what restrictions there are upon them taking that action; and if he will make a statement. [84065]

Mr. Jamieson: We are not aware of a particular problem (e.g. of abandonment) in respect of the very small number of unregistered vehicles in the UK. However, we are aware of the considerable problem of unlicensed vehicles.

Local authorities have various powers to deal with abandoned vehicles. Among these will be a number that are also unlicensed and in determining whether a vehicle is abandoned, the absence of a tax disc may be a significant, but not the only factor. Section 4 of the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 Act provides that a local authority may destroy a vehicle immediately which is in their custody and on which no current vehicle excise licence (tax disc) was displayed at the time of its removal.

Although local authorities have however, no general power to deal with unlicensed vehicles as such, powers now exist for the Driver Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) to devolve its powers of enforcement in dealing with unlicensed vehicles to local authorities wishing to use them. To date six local authorities have been given devolved powers to clamp and impound unlicensed vehicles on behalf of the Secretary of State. These are the London Boroughs of Croydon, Lewisham, Newham and Wandsworth, together with Hastings and Southend-on-Sea borough councils.

These councils seek authorisation from DVLA to clamp any unlicensed vehicles. If the vehicle is not claimed after 24 hours it is removed to a secure vehicle compound. The vehicles are kept in the compound for a minimum of 7 days to allow DVLA to write to the registered keeper informing them of the whereabouts of the vehicle and what steps they will need to take to reclaim the vehicle. If the vehicle still remains unclaimed, DVLA will give authorisation for the vehicle to be disposed of, this is usually by crushing.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains *(a)* arrive at and *(b)* depart from Preston station each day. [85325]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is contained in the National Rail Timetable.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Pre-legislative Scrutiny

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Council pursuant to his reply, 19 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 44W, on pre-legislative scrutiny, when decisions will be made on the form of scrutiny to which a number of bills will be subject. [83808]

Mr. Robin Cook: A decision will be made on the form of scrutiny to which a draft bill will be subject once the timetable for its publication is firmly established.

TREASURY

Manufacturing Exports

Mr. Hoyle: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the amount of exports from the manufacturing sector in the North West in the last three years. [84081]

John Healey: The estimates for manufacturing exports from companies in the North West are shown as follows, for 1999–2001 and 2002 year to date, together with corresponding estimates for the UK as a whole.

Manufacturing exports from the North West have averaged 1.69 billion per year over the period 1999–2001. This compares to £21.9 billion per year average for UK manufacturing exports (North West being 7.7 per cent. of the UK figure).

For 2002 year to date, the North West figure of £1.23 billion is 7.4 per cent. of the UK figure of £16.6 billion (January to September)

Year	*Exports from North West*	*Exports from UK*
1999	1.67	20.3
2000	1.71	22.6
2001	1.69	22.8
2002[1]	1.23	16.6

[1] Year to date

Ordnance Exports

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arms, munitions, and military equipment were exported for sale from Great Britain to the Government of Israel in 2001–02; and what the total value of such exports was. [83888]

John Healey: Information in the format requested would enable individual businesses to be identified and cannot be disclosed. Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (third party commercial confidences) applies. However, information on the value of strategic exports to Israel for 2001 can be found in Appendix C of the Strategic Export Controls Annual Report, which is available in the Library.

"The Threat to Enterprise Britain"

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes to take in response to the report of the Quoted Companies Alliance, The Threat to Enterprise Britain. [85202]

Ruth Kelly: The Government recognise the economic contribution of smaller quoted companies (SQCs) and continueto monitor developments in all capital markets, including those serving the SQC sector. For example, the Government are implementing the

recommendations of the Myners review of institutional investment, to reduce impediments to rational, well-informed and undistorted investment decisions.

Barristers' Fees (VAT Liability)

Mr. Dismore: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the scheme which allows VAT liability on barristers' fees only to become due to be paid by the barrister after those fees are paid and received by the barrister and not at the time of provision of the services of the barrister or delivery of the fee note to the barrister's customer. [84582]

John Healey: VAT law governing the time at which VAT is to be accounted for (the "tax point") provides a number of special tax point regimes that are tailored to meet the needs of specific categories of supply. There are no current plans to review this aspect of the law as it applies to the VAT liability on barristers' fees.

Carbon Trust

Sue Doughty: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total annual budget of the Carbon Trust Low Innovations programme is in *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04 and *(c)* 2004–05. [83541]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The Carbon Trust was launched in April 2001 to support UK business and the public sector in reducing their Carbon emissions while maintaining competitiveness. The Carbon Trust is a private non-profit company that receives funding of around £ 50 million per annum from Defra and the Devolved Administrations. About two-thirds of its current funding comes from recycled receipts from the Climate Change Levy. As a private company the management of its programmes, including its Low Carbon Innovation Programme, and decisions on the allocation of funding, are a matter for the Carbon Trust Board.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government will recycle a rising percentage of receipts from the Climate Change Levy directly into the Carbon Trust rather than through National Insurance Payments. [83542]

John Healey: Government have recycled revenue from the Climate Change Levy back to business through the 0.3 per cent. National Insurance contributions cut, Enhanced Capital Allowances for investments in energy-saving technologies, and funding for renewables and energy efficiency, principally through the Carbon Trust. The Government set out their spending plans in relation to energy efficiency in Spending Review 2002.

CITES

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many customs officials have *(a)* had training in respect of and *(b)* been allocated to the detection of illegal imports of (i) bushmeat and (ii) species and material listed under CITES. [80869]

John Healey *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* As part of their normal frontier enforcement activity, customs detection staff undertake work to detect imports which are illegal under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). They are supported by a specialist team. Customs detection staff also support the lead agencies (local and port health authorities and Defra) in detecting illegal bushmeat imports not covered by CITES restrictions.

Training in CITES-related issues is part of the standard training of the approximately 3,800 customs detection staff and others whose work involves CITES issues.

With customs currently not having the lead role in bushmeat detection no specific training is currently provided to customs officials on this.

A recent Cabinet Office study has recommended a future transfer of responsibility to customs for detection of smuggled imports of animals, fish, plants and their products, and foodstuffs (including meat). Work on arrangements to effect this transfer has begun.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what evaluation he has carried out into the operation of the climate change levy, with specific reference to *(a)* manufacturing, *(b)* the service sector and *(c)* small and medium sized enterprises; [84810]

(2) if he will make an assessment of the financial cost to the British manufacturing industry of the climate change levy. [84813]

John Healey: All industries face the same general challenges and opportunities from the climate change levy.

All revenue from the levy is recycled back to business through reductions to employer national insurance contributions (NICs) and support for energy efficiency. While the levy package is broadly revenue neutral to business as a whole, the effects on any specific sector will depend on a number of factors, including:

- the future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support;
- employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded NICs cuts;
- what use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy-exempt renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power; and
- use made of the 80 per cent. discount where this is available via voluntary agreements with energy-intensive sectors.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current status of discounts allowable under the climate change levy. [84811]

John Healey: Sectors of industry which are covered by the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations Part A are eligible for an 80 per cent. discount in the rate of levy, provided they enter into an agreement with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to meet energy efficiency targets. The Government have also given a five year 50 per cent. discount to protect the competitiveness of horticulture.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the CBI on the issue of the climate change levy. [84814]

John Healey: As part of the normal process of contact with business, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Treasury Ministers have met a variety of businesses and business organisations and have heard a range of representations. As the Chancellor said in his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 114–115W, inline with previous Administrations, it is not this Government's practice to provide details of the meetings they routinely have with a wide range of organisations.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice he is giving to manufacturers who wish to reduce the impact of the climate change levy by introducing combined heat and power. [84815]

John Healey: Currently, all supplies of taxable commodities for use in producing any outputs from good quality combined heat and power (GQCHP) are exempt from the levy. Also, all GQCHP electricity supplies sold direct to customers are free from the levy.

In Budget 2002, the Government announced that exemption would be extended to include all supplies of electricity from GQCHP. The exemption will be introduced after it has received state aid clearance from the European Commission.

Energy Saving Material (VAT)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on recent changes to his policy on VAT on energy saving material with special reference to the impact of the judgment in Case 416/85 in the Court of Justice of the European Communities. [84660]

John Healey: On 1 June 2002 the Government extended the scope of the 5 per cent. reduced rate on energy-saving materials to the grant-funded installation of factory-insulated hot water tanks, micro-combined heat and power units, and renewable energy heating systems, in the homes of less well-off people. Case 416/85 in the Court of Justice of the European Communities examined the scope of the UK's zero rates and has no bearing on this change.

European Court of Auditors

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action the Government have taken to mark the 25th Anniversary of the European Court of Auditors. [84819]

Ruth Kelly: The Government value the work of the European Court of Auditors highly and will today have an opportunity to offer congratulations at the ECOFIN Council, when the President of the Court presents its 25th Annual Report.

Lloyds

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations Her Majesty's Government has made to the European Commission in respect of the audit system in place at Lloyds of London between 1978 to 1988; [84993]

(2) what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the European Commission in respect of its supervision of Lloyds between 1978 and 1988; and if he will make a statement. [84995]

Ruth Kelly: The Commission sent a formal letter to the Government on 21 December 2001, raising questions about the implementation of obligations imposed on the UK by EC legislation in respect of the Lloyd's insurance market. The Government replied in full on 30 April 2002. The Commission are still considering this reply. The Government is firmly convinced that we have fulfilled our obligations under Community Law. Correspondence of this sort between the Commission and Member States is regarded as confidential. These arrangements in practice enable cases to be taken forward in the most expeditious manner.

Motor Vehicle Seizures

Barbara Follett: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 64W, when information relating to vehicle seizures by Customs and Excise in 2001–02 will be published. [85431]

John Healey: Information relating to vehicle seizures by Customs and Excise for 2001–02 will be published in Customs' Annual Report, which had been expected to be published at the end of November and will be laid before Parliament shortly.

National Insurance Contributions

Mark Tami: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates is the annual cost to the Exchequer of *(a)* under-payment of NICs by those regarded as self-employed and *(b)* the avoidance of self-employment tax status. [84581]

Dawn Primarolo: The amount lost to the exchequer as a result of a failure by individuals correctly to declare their business profits can only be estimated. Lord Grabiner in his report "The Informal Economy" concluded that it was impractical to arrive at a precise figure but assumed that 'billions of pounds' of income was a realistic figure.

No specific figures are available as to the amounts lost in respect of either tax or national insurance contributions. However, the Inland Revenue annual report for the year ended 31 March 2001 showed that compliance activity by the Inland Revenue had identified additional tax and National Insurance liability of just under £4.5 billion.

Self-assessment

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many self-assessment tax returns were *(a)* issued, *(b)* received, *(c)* waiting to be processed and *(d)* processed in each month since 1st July 2001; and if he will make a statement. [84162]

Dawn Primarolo: The statistical data requested is detailed in the table.

Date	SA ITRs issued	SA ITRs received	SA ITRs processed	SA ITRs waiting to be processed
Tax year 2000–01				
1 July 2001	8,940,513	1,323,115	864,497	458,618
29 July 2001	8,990,292	1,943,901	1,350,597	593,304
2 September 2001	8,989,043	2,798,153	1,966,795	831,358
30 September 2001	9,152,255	4,241,952	2,677,145	1,564,807
4 November 2001	8,842,560	4,682,767	3,421,658	1,261,109
2 December 2001	9,360,099	5,383,846	4,436,261	947,585
30 December 2001	9,299,623	5,745,572	4,839,285	906,287
3 February 2002	9,552,433	8,362,361	5,848,319	2,514,042
3 March 2002	9,610,787	8,732,139	6,892,084	1,840,055
31 March 2002	9,644,313	8,805,949	8,009,457	796,492
Tax year 2001–02				
5 May 2002	8,984,089	287,223	74,244	212,979
2 June 2002	9,081,002	751,541	323,265	428,276
7 July 2002	9,167,807	1,397,759	709,556	688,203
4 August 2002	9,232,637	2,020,483	1,135,313	885,170
1 September 2002	9,300,825	2,717,767	1,591,565	1,126,202
6 October 2002	9,394,724	4,475,890	2,438,405	2,037,485
3 November 2002	9,463,002	4,948,989	3,300,392	1,648,597
24 November 2002	9,511,670	5,280,197	4,008,768	1,271,429

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and how it has changed since the Earth Summit in Johannesburg. [83442]

John Healey: HM Treasury, Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue contribute to the delivery of the objectives in the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy through a variety of mechanisms, including regular reporting on sustainable development issues and the incorporation of sustainable development into key processes such as Spending Review 2002.

The outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Government's initial views on delivering them will be set out in the forthcoming Annual Report on Sustainable Development.

Trust Posts

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the Office for National Statistics decided to classify certain major trust posts as public bodies requiring their financial transactions to be included in the PSBR; and what reasons were given for the decision. [85123]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Chope, dated 3 December 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the classification of major trust ports. I am replying in his absence. (85123)

The decision was taken on 26 October 2000.

Classification decisions are made by applying international standards for National Accounts. These are the 1995 European System of Accounts (Eurostat) and the 1993 System of National Accounts (United Nations, IMF, OECD etc). The classification of corporations to either the private or the public sector is determined by control. The public sector has control over the major trust ports, usually through both appointment rights and powers contained in the Ports Act 1991.

Young People (Business Start-ups)

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what incentives he is introducing to encourage young people in deprived areas to start businesses. [85185]

John Healey: We have allocated 60million by 2005–06 to ensure that all pupils in England have five days of enterprise experience before they leave school. This gives effect to the recommendations of the Davies Review of Enterprise and the Economy in Education.

The Department for Education and Skills will be running pilots to test possible approaches in 2003–04 and 2004–05 at a cost of 5 million and £10 million respectively. This initiative will provide young people in all areas of England, including deprived areas, with experience of enterprise, and encourage them to consider starting their own businesses in the future. Young people wishing to start their own businesses in deprived areas will also benefit from our measures to support enterprise and tackle market failures in these areas more generally. These measures include designating 2,000 Enterprise Areas in the most deprived areas in the UK, where policies to support businesses are now being concentrated. Businesses in these areas already benefit from an exemption from stamp duty on property transfers between 60,000 and 150,000. We have announced that we will remove stamp duty on all commercial transactions in those areas, introduce a more flexible planning regime and a tax credit to encourage community investment, and offer greater support from the Small Business Service and the Inland Revenue.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Solicitor General what the policy is of her Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81849]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* In relation to the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, employees travel by public transport. Should the use of a private car be essential for work, rather than personal, reasons, the Department would bear the cost of the charge. It is not expected that any such occasion should arise.

The policy of the Treasury Solicitor's Department is to encourage its employees not to use private vehicles on official business and to encourage them to use public transport. The Department will, however, pay road tolls, including the central London road user charge, where use of a private vehicle is essential or where the journey remains cost effective in comparison to the use of public transport.

The Crown Prosecution Service has not yet published a policy in relation to the reimbursement of the central London road user charges.

The Serious Fraud Office does not intend to amend its terms and conditions to include reimbursement of central London road user charges incurred by its employees for travelling to work.

In respect of HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, it is Departmental travel policy that employees should not use cars to commute to and from work in London. Where the use of a car in London is essential for work, not personal, reasons, charges will be reimbursed.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Public Procurement Directive

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what scope EU contracting authorities will have under the proposed new EU public procurement directive to make choices between bids at the award stage, based on environmental criteria; and if she will make a statement. [83930]

Miss Melanie Johnson: At the award stage, the proposed new directive makes it clear that contracting authorities are able to use environmental criteria where these are justified by the subject of the contract and provide a benefit to the contracting authority. Such criteria can include whole life cost factors, such as energy usage, disposal costs, and recyclability, as well as those related to qualitative aspects of the product. However, it will often be more appropriate and sensible to take environmental issues into account earlier on in the procurement process, in defining the subject of the contract and the specification. There is much scope to do this, provided that such specifications do not discriminate against suppliers across the Community, and that buyers respect the rules in the directives on technical specifications. Contracting authorities can, for example, specify green production processes (eg timber from sustainable sources, recycled paper, green electricity etc) and can refer to relevant eco-label criteria. Contracting authorities can also define one or more variants to the standard specification to allow, for example, bids to be submitted which offer a higher environmental performance.

Broadband

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 228W, on priority areas, if she will place in the Library the broadband strategy that SEEDA is implementing; and what discussions SEEDA has had with BT to upgrade their exchange on the Isle of Sheppey so broadband can be delivered there. [85001]

Mr. Timms: I understand that the Chief Executive of SEEDA has written to my hon. Friend proposing they meet to discuss SEEDA's approach to the promotion of broadband availability in the region. The process for upgrading exchanges for the delivery of broadband involves the setting by BT of registration thresholds, which can be viewed on the BT website. Through its discussions with SEEDA, BT has confirmed that exchanges on Sheppey which are awaiting upgrade to broadband are subject to the same registration process as that which applies to all other exchanges in the region.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the publications produced by her Department that refer people to the Citizens Advice Bureau Service for advice and assistance; and whether Citizens Advice Scotland is made aware of such referrals prior to publication. [84155]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) Service in England and Wales, and in Scotland is a valuable source of independent advice and information on a wide range of issues that affect and concern the citizen. The very positive findings of the Quinquennial Review of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB) and Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) which I announced on 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 943W, and 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 829 respectively confirmed and emphasised this point. Given the CAB Service's knowledge and expertise and the fact that it has a national network of advice centres, Government frequently mentions CABx as a further source of advice and information in its publications as well as in other media such as websites, press notices and in its replies to correspondence from a number of interested parties.

DTI and other Departments have a good working relationship with both NACAB and CAS. Regular meetings are held at both ministerial and official level to inform each other of developments and any other issues that might impact on the Service in both England and Wales and Scotland.

Dungeness

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what emergency measures are in place to deal with a release of radioactive material from the nuclear facilities at Dungeness. [84745]

Mr. Wilson: There are well tried and tested emergency plans to deal with a release of radioactive material from Dungeness nuclear facilities. These plans are maintained under the license condition arrangements for all such sites and have been reviewed and tested at regular intervals over many years. The revised off-site emergency plan, prepared by Kent county council in consultation with the emergency services and power stations, has just been published in accordance with the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001. The plan covers procedures, facilities and equipment. The last off-site emergency exercise for Dungeness was the major national exercise for 2001–02, and took place on 27 March 2002. It involved relevant local and national agencies.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has to introduce targeting of programmes and aid to promote energy efficiency. [84812]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are currently caring out a review of future energy policy with a view to issuing a White Paper early in the new year. As a part of this review it is considering mechanisms for the promotion of energy efficiency.

Export Licence OIEL No.45

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* type, *(b)* quantity and *(c)* total value of components supplied to India under Export Licence OIEL No.45 of 6 September 2001; and if she will make a statement. [83531]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer the right hon. and learned Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 53W.

Leg-irons and Cuffs

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications have been *(a)* made and *(b)* granted for export licences for *(i)* leg-irons and (ii) over-sized cuffs in each year since 1997. [82940]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The export of leg-irons, over-sized handcuffs and individual cuffs are controlled under entry PL5001 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended, to ensure as far as possible, full compliance by the UK on the embargo on instruments of torture.

The number of Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications and Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) applications that have been made and granted, for the proposed export of over-sized handcuffs, is set out in the table below:

	Over-sized handcuffs			
	SIEL applications received	*SIELs issued*	*OIEL applications received*	*OIELs issued*
2 May 1997–31 December 1997	4	3	0	0
1998	10	10	0	0
1999	7	6	0	0
2000	9	5	1	0
2001	6	4	0	0
1 January 2002–15 November 2002	5	6	0	0

During the same period, no SIEL applications or OIEL applications were made or granted for the proposed export of leg-irons or over-sized individual cuffs.

This information should be considered in light of the answer tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns 870–871.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average payment made to ex-miners in compensation for respiratory disease was in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; and how many claims were settled in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001, in each constituency. [84314]

Mr. Wilson: The average payment made to ex-miners for respiratory disease as of 24 November 2002 is £6,421. It is not possible to give the average figure for 1999, 2000, and 2001 in the time available or to provide the number of claims settled in each year for each constituency. However, I would like to refer the hon. Member to the Department's coal health claims website which contains regularly updated breakdowns of statistics for coal health claims for each constituency and has a profile of payments made.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims by ex-miners for compensation for respiratory disease were settled using the fast-track procedure; and what the average payment was under the fast track procedure in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [84315]

Mr. Wilson: The figures are as follows.

	Number of expedited payments	*Average value of expedited payment (£)*
1999	806	5,739
2000	3,675	5,013
2001	6,574	4,564

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Ministers whose responsibilities have included the payment of miners compensation have been in post since 1997. [84316]

Mr. Wilson: Since 1997 there have been four energy Ministers whose responsibilities have included the payment of miners compensation: my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Mr. Battle), my right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mr. Liddell), my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain) and myself.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many medical examination centres are operational for examining ex-miners who have lodged applications for compensation for respiratory disease; and how many there were in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000. [84317]

Mr. Wilson: As of 28 November 2002 there are 29 operational medical testing centres for examining ex-miners who have lodged applications for compensation for respiratory disease. Eight of these are operating at double capacity and one is operating as a triple centre. In addition to these medical testing centres there are two mobile testing units.

There were no testing centres opened at the end of 1999, as the medical contract with Healthcall was just signed at the end of October 1999. As of the end of 2000 there were 27 fully operational medical testing centres, two of which were double centres.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met representatives of the mining unions to discuss issues relating to the payment of miners' compensation claims. [84319]

Mr. Wilson: Representatives of mining unions are on the various ministerial monitoring groups which advise the Department on the compensation schemes. I last met the National Monitoring Group on 12 November and have meetings every 3 to 4 months. I regularly meet with union representatives in the open meetings I have been holding in mining areas.

Nuclear Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial commitments she has made towards research into Generation IV nuclear energy systems; and if she will make a statement. [83877]

Mr. Wilson: The UK with eight other countries signed the Charter of the Generation IV International Forum (GIF) in July 2001. The initiative foresaw a need for advanced nuclear energy systems in the future to help meet growing international demands for carbon free energy; and that to meet public concerns, future systems must meet exceptionally high standards of safety, sustainability and proliferation resistance, while operating economically in liberalised markets. The aim is to develop a framework for collaborative R&D to facilitate the deployment of such advanced reactor systems from 2030 and beyond. The GIF meeting in Tokyo in September 2002 agreed a "Roadmap" for R&D development based on six systems selected as best satisfying these goals. Further information is available from the following website -http://energY.gov/HOPress/releases02/scppr/GIFupdate.pdf

UK participation in the Charter is without commitment to a specific nuclear proportion of UK electricity generation sources. The involvement of representatives from DTI, HSE and the industry ensures our nuclear technology and regulatory experience is shared internationally.

The framework for international research agreement under the Generation IV initiative has yet to be put in place and the extent of any UK financial commitment to research has yet to be decided.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the *(a)* UK's role within the Generation IV International Forum and *(b)* agreement reached on Generation IV nuclear energy systems in Japan in September. [83878]

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the level of BNFL-funded nuclear waste decommissioning and radioactive remediation liabilities. [84267]

Mr. Wilson: The recent DTI White Paper, Managing the Nuclear Legacy—a strategy for action, estimated that public sector civil nuclear liabilities stood at £47.9 billion undiscounted as at 31 March 2002; BNFL's share of those liabilities stood at £27.2 billion at that time.

Planning Applications

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what timescale has been put in place for regional government offices to deal with planning applications called in for *(a)* small developments, *(b)* major planning applications and *(c)* for applications dealing with tree preservation orders; [84078]

(2) what guidelines govern the time taken to make decisions on planning applications called in by the Government. [84077]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

Following proposals in the Planning Green Paper, a new Planning Central Casework Division has been established in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to deal with decisions on planning applications called in by my right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Central Casework Division has a shared target with the Planning Inspectorate to decide 80 per cent. of my right. hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister's cases (this includes both called in applications and recovered appeals), from close of Inquiry to decision, within 16 weeks by March 2004.

Applications dealing with tree preservation are not called in. The Government Offices for the Regions deal with appeals against local authority decisions under tree preservation orders. They have a target to decide 80 per cent. of such appeals within eight weeks of receiving the Inspecting Officer's report.

Power Cuts

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many homes in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire were without power after the storms in October; and for how long in each case. [85132]

Mr. Wilson: I have been advised by LE Group that the numbers of customers without electricity due to the storm in Chesham and Amersham on the following days were:

Day	*Numbers of customers*
27 October 2002	1,977
28 October 2002	150
29 October 2002	88
30 October 2002	55
31 October 2002	43
1 November 2002	0

With regard to your question *(b)*, LE Group and Scottish and Southern Energy (S&S) company area boundaries divide Buckinghamshire. The companies have informed me that the number of customers without electricity was as follows:

	Number of customers		
Day	*S&S*	*LE Group*	*Total*
27 October 2002	7,190	7,112	14,302
28 October 2002	1,387	3,597	4,984
29 October 2002	222	997	1,219
30 October 2002	0	761	761
31 October 2002	0	686	686
1 November 2002	0	50	50

No accurate figures are available for 2 November 2002 from LE Group: however, all LE Group customers were restored by midnight on 3 November 2002.

Regional Energy Policy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's regional energy strategy. [85111]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are currently carrying out a review of future energy policy with a view to issuing a White Paper in the new year. As a part of this review, it is considering the role of the regions.

Renewable Energy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people in the UK are employed in the renewable energy industry. [85104]

Mr. Wilson: At present, there are no authoritative figures on the number of people employed in the renewable energy sector. Renewables UK plans to undertake a collaborative study of the renewable supply chain covering all technologies for publication in the second half of 2003. One aim of this study is to detail how many people are employed across the whole renewable energy sector.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of licensed electricity suppliers fulfilled all of their obligations under the Renewables Obligation through the purchase of green certificates in 2001. [85319]

Mr. Wilson: The Renewables Obligation only came into effect on 1 April 2002, so electricity suppliers were not under any obligation in 2001. The Gas and Electricity Markets Authority are required by the Renewables Obligation Order to maintain a register holding specific information on the Renewables Obligation Certificates and to publish an annual report on the performance of the Obligation.

The first such report will cover the financial year 2002–03.

Renewable Energy Goods

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent initiatives there have been to encourage entrepreneurs to *(a)* develop and *(b)* export renewable energy goods and services. [84192]

Mr. Wilson: The Renewables Obligation, which the Government introduced on 1 April 2002, is being backed by over £250 million of direct support measures to bring forward newer renewable energy technologies. This provides a substantial incentive to renewable energy generation in the UK, and creates a favourable climate, too, for the expansion of renewable energy goods and services.

Accordingly, the Government set up in April a new unit, Renewables UK, to encourage the renewable energy sector to take advantage of the opportunities created by the Renewables Obligation, and to increase the UK industry content of renewable energy projects.

To foster innovative research and development activity, the Government have increased provision for the New and Renewable Energy Programme to £19 million per year. The programme includes an export promotion arm, for which Renewables UK is responsible, which provides specific, targeted support to UK companies in the renewables sector.

Renewables UK chairs an inter-governmental committee, the Sustainable Energy Exports Committee, which brings together all Departments and Government agencies supporting renewable energy exports activity to work together for the benefit of UK companies.

The Export Credit Guarantee Department makes available cover for up to £50 million of exports each year for projects in the renewable energy sector.

Renewable Energy Targets

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what renewable energy targets have been set for local authorities. [85113]

Mr. Wilson: The Government have not set renewable energy targets for local authorities. However, the regional resource assessments, which indicate the level of renewable generation necessary for the UK to achieve the 10 per cent. target by 2010, have now been completed. The assessments take into account each region's potential renewable resource and have been made available to inform local decision taking.

The findings from the regional resource assessments can be found in the Regional Renewable Energy Assessments report, which can be accessed at the following web address: http://www.dti.gov.uk/renewable/oxera—report.pdf

Solar Photovoltaics Industry

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in improving the UK's competitive position in the solar photovoltaics industry; and if she will make a statement. [84482]

Mr. Wilson: Renewables UK is planning to undertake a collaborative study of the renewable supply chain covering all technologies, including photovoltaics, during 2003. This will identify strengths and weaknesses of the industry, and identify opportunities for UK companies.

In the meantime, there is evidence that the UK PV industry is gearing up to meet the challenge of the £20 million first phase of the major PV demonstration programme. For example, after the first six months of the programme there are 28 installation companies provisionally accredited, and several companies are developing roofing and cladding products for the UK market, which could also be marketed overseas.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military commitments have been made to the Afghan Government to assist in developing a stable democracy in that country; and if he will make a statement. [84194]

Mr. Hoon: Since the installation of the Afghan Interim Authority on 22 December 2001, we have deployed a range of land, air and sea forces to

Afghanistan. We were the first Lead Nation of the International Security Assistance Force deployed in Kabul in support of the Bonn Agreement that will lead to democratic elections. We remain a major troop contributor to the ISAF with some 300 troops now in Kabul. ISAF continues to help Afghan authorities maintain stability within Kabul, an essential component to the success of the Transitional Authority.

Cadet Forces

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment his Department has made of the implications of funding the sea cadets on the same basis as the army cadets and air training corps; [83774]

(2) on what basis his Department funds *(a)* the sea cadets, *(b)* the army cadets and *(c)* the air training corps; and if he will fund the sea cadets on an equal basis to the army and air training corps. [83775]

Dr. Moonie: The Army Cadets and the Air Training Corps are voluntary youth organisations sponsored by the MOD and are funded appropriate to the way they are organised. The Sea Cadet Corps is an independent youth organisation which is neither owned nor managed by the Ministry of Defence. However, it is jointly sponsored by the MOD and Sea Cadet Association (SCA). The Ministry of Defence supports the Sea Cadets in the form of financial assistance, material and limited manpower resources.

The Ministry of Defence has made no formal assessment of the implications of funding the Sea Cadets on the same basis as the Army Cadets and the Air Training Corps, and has no plans to do so.

Chinook

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the HK2 Chinook helicopters were sold back to the USA Government; whether the helicopters have been purchased outright; what the initial cost was of the helicopters; at what price they were resold to the US Government; whether there are plans to replace them; and what impact the sale of the helicopters has had on British forces' operational ability. [84572]

Mr. Ingram: We have not sold any of our Mark 2 Chinook helicopters to the USA Government. However, we have received an approach from US Department of Defence officials to purchase their new MH47'G' model Chinook in return for our UK Mark 3 model. However, no formal proposal has yet been made, and no decision will be made until such a proposal is presented and has been given full consideration.

Contingencies Funding

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what contingencies extra money has been allocated to his Department, as referred to by the Chancellor in his statement on the pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [85122]

Mr. Ingram: The £1 billion special reserve allocation is being made available to cover costs of military and overseas operations to ensure that the United Kingdom can continue to play a leading role in the global war against terror. No assumptions have been made at this time as to the scope and nature of any operations that may be required.

Correspondence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will write to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South regarding his answer of 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 472W, concerning service personnel accommodation. [84075]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is still being collated. I will write to the hon. Member once it is available and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Decontamination Training

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* military units in active service, *(b)* reserve military units and *(c)* Territorial Army units have specialised CBW decontamination training. [83530]

Mr. Ingram: All United Kingdom service personnel are trained to decontaminate themselves, their personal equipment and in some cases the equipment they operate. In addition, on Royal Navy ships and at Royal Air Force bases, teams can be formed to undertake decontamination as required to sustain operations. The Joint Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Regiment maintains three decontamination troops whose primary role is to decontaminate the regiment's equipment but who could also provide a capability for other units. Two of these troops are drawn from the Royal Yeomanry, a Territorial Army unit.

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent he monitors the performance of the Defence Export Services Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [83863]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Export Services Organisation is an integral part of the Ministry of Defence. Support to United Kingdom defence exports is an Additional Target in the Public Service Agreement 2000 and MOD's performance is formally monitored via the performance reporting system. The Head of Defence Export Services and his staff report frequently to Defence Ministers, who are often involved personally in supporting UK defence exporters in their overseas markets.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which defence contracts the Defence Export Services Organisation has been successful in achieving for British companies in the Middle East in the past three years. [83864]

Dr. Moonie: In the Middle East, between 1999 and 2001, United Kingdom defence industry secured business worth over £5.5 billion. The results of a survey of UK industry, completed in 1999, showed that they assessed that the Defence Export Services Organisation played a major role in securing some 75 per cent. of their successes.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how often he meets the head of Defence Export Services to discuss the performance of DESO in assisting British companies. [83865]

Dr. Moonie: The Head of Defence Export Services meets Defence Ministers frequently to discuss the work of the Defence Export Services Organisation, including its support for British defence exports.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the most senior 50 employees of the Defence Export Services Organisation have a military background. [83866]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently 14 serving or retired military officers employed at Assistant Director level or above in the Defence Export Services Organisation.

Emergency Planning Centres (Somerset)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the emergency planning centres are in Somerset. [83392]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The Ministry of Defence has no emergency planning centres in Somerset.

Planning for emergencies at the local level is the responsibility of a range of organisations, including local authorities and the emergency services. This ensures the degree of operational flexibility necessary for local services to respond to such emergencies, taking account of specific local needs. These organisations act within a framework of well established guidelines produced by central Government and professional bodies such as the Association of Chief Police Officers, in order to ensure effective co-ordination and consistency of approach.

Eurofighter Typhoon

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the second tranche of orders for the Eurofighter Typhoon. [84082]

Dr. Moonie: The order for the second tranche of Typhoons, of which 89 will be for the Royal Air Force, is planned to be placed by the four participating nations during 2003.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what working definition of Gulf War Syndrome he used in order to assess whether such a condition existed. [85003]

Dr. Moonie: Each medical syndrome comprises a set of physical signs and/or symptoms that distinguishes it from other medical conditions. As a group, Gulf veterans have reported more ill-health than other comparable groups. The pattern of their ill- health is not unique but they have reported symptoms with greater frequency and of more severity than those in comparable groups. Some Gulf veterans have recognised medical conditions, but a large number of non-specific, multi-system, medically unexplained symptoms have also been reported. The consensus of the international scientific and medical community is that this diversity of symptoms means that ill-health among Gulf veterans cannot be characterised as a unique Gulf related illness or syndrome. The Ministry of Defence's approach must be guided by medical science and so does not recognise "Gulf War Syndrome" as a medical condition and has no working definition of such a syndrome.

Headline Goal

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with European colleagues regarding the use of Russian assets to achieve the Headline Goal. [84846]

Mr. Hoon: The Nice European Council agreed that Russia, Ukraine, other European states with which the Union maintains political dialogue and other interested states could be invited to participate in EU-led operations. However, the Headline Goal is a target for EU member states. However, the ECAP panel on outsized transport aircraft is considering, along with other options, whether developing existing arrangements for chartering Russian transport aircraft might be part of an interim solution to the shortfall of airlift assets until A400M is delivered. Implementing solutions identified by the panel will be a matter for member states.

HMS Nottingham

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement about the future of HMS Nottingham; [84372]

(2) what measures he is taking to redistribute to other warships duties formerly allocated to HMS Nottingham. [84374]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the written Ministerial Statement made today.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason HMS Sheffield has not been retained in service following the damage to HMS Nottingham. [84373]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the Ministerial Statement made today. This decision was taken as part of the process of ensuring that the best use of the capability available is made to meet operational commitments. HMS Sheffield, an anti submarine warfare frigate, is not required to meet these commitments.

Homeland Defence and Security

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with agencies and other Government Departments on homeland defence and security coordination and centralisation. [84843]

Mr. Ingram: Issues concerning homeland defence and security, including organisational matters, are addressed in a series of ministerial and official committees which meet regularly. The Government's position on coordination and centralisation was laid out most recently in its response to the Defence Select Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2001–02, 'Defence and Security in the UK'.

Iraq

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of *(a)* preparing tanks for desert conditions, *(b)* enhancing medical support to improve hygiene conditions in field hospitals, *(c)* speeding up the purchase of temporary disposable accommodation, *(d)* improving military ambulances, *(e)* extra training in service and *(f)* communications and call up of reservists, in the event of war with Iraq. [84133]

Mr. Hoon: I am withholding the information requested under Exemption 1 (defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about *(a)* preparations for and *(b)* the sustainability of a Royal Naval task force for possible operations against Iraq. [84361]

Mr. Hoon: Exercise Saif Sareea II, in Oman towards the end of last year, fully demonstrated our ability to deploy forces to the Middle East and sustain them there. As I have already assured the House, we shall continue to take the appropriate steps to ensure that our armed forces are ready to take whatever action might be asked of them should Iraq fail to comply with UN Resolution 1441. It would be inappropriate to comment on the detail of any specific preparations at this stage.

Medical Reservists

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Territorial Army are *(a)* medical officers, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* combat medical technicians. [83404]

Dr. Moonie: The following table shows the numbers of Doctors, Nurses and Combat Medical Technicians (CMTs) in Army Medical Services TA units (Field Ambulances, Medical Squadrons, Specialist Units, Ambulance Regiments and Field Hospitals), as at 29 November 2002:

	Number
Doctors	405
Nurses	1,213
Combat Medical Technicians	1,463

In addition, other units throughout the TA are established for medical officers and CMTs. Information on which of these posts are filled is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Military Deployments

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military forces are allocated to *(a)* NATO duties and exercises, *(b)* the EU Rapid Reaction force and *(c)* SEATO. [84844]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom is a significant contributor to NATO and the majority of UK armed forces can be made available for NATO deployments. There is no standing EU Rapid Reaction Force: nations' forces would come together for specific EU-led crisis management operations, for which it is envisaged that the maximum UK contribution would be up to 12,500 personnel. The South-east Asian Treaty Organisation ceased to exist in 1977.

Monte Bello Islands

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussion his Department has had with the Australian Government concerning cancer risk among the civilian population surrounding the British nuclear testing in the Monte Bello Islands in the 1950s; and if he will make a statement. [85172]

Dr. Moonie: There have been no recent discussions of this type.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research his Department has conducted into the levels of internal radiological contamination of British service personnel and medical auxiliaries who were present at atmospheric British nuclear tests; and if he will arrange for the relevant documents to be posted on his departmental website. [84269]

Dr. Moonie: Stringent safety precautions were in place during the atmospheric nuclear tests and environmental monitoring was carried out at the time. Two comprehensive and independent epidemiological studies were carried out on the Ministry of Defence's behalf by the National Radiological Protection Board, in conjunction with the Imperial Cancer Research Fund. The studies showed that participation in the test programme has had no detectable effect on the participants' expectation of life or on their risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases. Copies of both these reports, respectively NRPB reports R214 and R266, are available in the Library of the House. The results of a third study will be published next year.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travelling in 2001–02; [84795]

(2) what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84936]

Mr. Ingram: Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002 *Official Report*, column 1374–75W). The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–2003 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Police (Salisbury Plain)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to locate a regional headquarters of the Ministry of Defence Police on Salisbury Plain; and if he will make a statement. [84614]

Dr. Moonie: Consideration is being given to establish a western regional police headquarters at Bulford, Salisbury Plain, to cover the South West, Wales and the West Midlands. If this goes forward a new joint Ministry of Defence Police/Royal Military Police facility will be provided under Project Allenby/Connaught, which is the provision of new accommodation at the Aldershot and Salisbury Plain sites. The provisional time scale for completion is 2008–10.

The western headquarters will initially be located at the existing Operational Command Unit Headquarters at MOD Foxhill in Bath until the completion of the new accommodation.

Service Deaths

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the dates and circumstances were of the deaths of each serviceman and woman *(a)* from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001 and *(b)* from 1 January 2002 to 1 November 2002. [84871]

Dr. Moonie: Information relating to the causes of death of Service personnel in 2001 is contained in tables 2.25 and 4.2 of publication "UK Defence Statistics 2002" available in the House of Commons Library and on the DASA web site (www.dasa.mod.uk). Information for 2002 is not yet available.

Southern Africa

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what logistical support his Department has offered to address the humanitarian crisis in southern Africa. [85080]

Mr. Ingram: The Department for International Development (DFID) is the lead Department for humanitarian assistance by Her Majesty's Government. The Ministry of Defence has not received any requests to provide logistical support to those providing humanitarian assistance in southern Africa, but officials are in touch with those in DFID. The Ministry of Defence would naturally consider any requests for military assistance.

Submarines

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the order for the batch 2 Astute class submarines will be placed. [84376]

Dr. Moonie: A decision on the timing of future submarine orders is not expected before the first half of 2003.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and if he will make a statement on how it has changed since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [83498]

Dr. Moonie: Work is continuing on the development of a Ministry of Defence sustainable development strategy based on the Government's model, as set out in "A Better Quality of Life". The Strategy, which is to be taken forward by a Steering Group, chaired by Defence Estates, draws together a wide range of existing departmental activities into a single sustainability framework, comprising four separate but inter-related workstreams. These will address indicator development, appraisal tool development, training and awareness raising, and reporting.

Outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and first views on follow-up will be reflected in the annual report on United Kingdom progress on sustainable development for 2002. Our strategy will take account of these outcomes, where they are appropriate to, or impact on the activities of, the Ministry of Defence.

More information on our strategy is contained in the Sustainable Development in Government First Annual Report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Vehicle Mounted Active Denials Systems

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for British forces to use Vehicle Mounted Active Denial Systems. [84005]

Dr. Moonie: There are no plans for British forces to use the Vehicle Mounted Active Denial System, although we continue to assess the developments in this field of technology.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Sellers' Packs

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the pilot carried out in Bristol on seller's packs for house sales. [84380]

Mr. McNulty: The Bristol Pilot Scheme provided valuable information in the development of our proposals for sellers' packs. The pilot was set up to test how easily packs could be assembled and how the information in the pack would be received and used. The results showed that packs can be assembled quickly. They also confirmed consumer support for the pack, demonstrated the tangible benefits that the pack can bring to the home buying and selling process and identified areas where further work needed to be done.

Census Forms

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people have been prosecuted for not filling in their census forms *(a)* in Derby, North and *(b)* in the UK. [85079]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from J. Pullinger to Mr. Bob Laxton, dated 3 December 2002:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many people have been prosecuted for not filling in their census forms in *(a)* Derby North and *(b)* in the UK. I am replying in his absence. (85079)

In England and Wales there were 38 prosecutions for refusal to complete and return a census form. There were no prosecutions in the Derby North constituency. Scotland and Northern Ireland conducted their own Censuses and the prosecution for refusal to complete and return a census form was the responsibility of the respective Registrars General.

The Office for National Statistics followed a policy of only prosecuting in cases where it had obtained clear and sufficient documentary evidence of a refusal to return a completed Census form. Particular attention was given to those reported cases where refusals were accompanied by acts of intimidation towards field staff.

Coalfield Regeneration

Ms. Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what additional resources will be made available to increase the capacity of former coalfield communities to develop projects and bid for funds under the coalfield regeneration programme administered through English Partnerships; [83911]

(2) what the criteria are by which coalfield regeneration funding will be applied to coalfield communities adjacent to a designated site. [83910]

Mr. McNulty: The National Coalfield Programme, managed by English Partnerships, has an agreed budget of £385m to remediate up 98 coalfield sites and to bring positive change by encouraging new business and job creation. The programme also creates public open space, as well as leisure and social facilities.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has agreed new flexibility within the programme allowing English Partnerships to invest in projects outside of the immediate site boundaries where this approach offers greater benefit to that coalfield community. In these cases basic remediation of the programme site will still be carried out.

There is no system of bidding for projects under the programme. However, English Partnerships work closely with other stakeholders including local authorities, regional development agencies, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and community groups in formulating proposals under the flexibility agreement.

Projects to enhance community capacity are supported separately by the coalfield regeneration trust, including the recent appointment of a second midlands regeneration manager to help develop the capacity of community groups.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will increase the level of subsidy provided to local authorities for pensioners bus passes. [84600]

Mr. Leslie: The provisional local government finance settlement will include £50 million announced by the Department for Transport on 27 February 2002 in respect of the cost to local authorities of equalisation of bus pass eligibility at age 60 for men and women. Resources for bus passes are not separately identified within the system.

Fire Cover Task Group

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects the Fire Cover Task Group to make recommendations to the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council following the Pathfinder trials; and if he will make a statement. [82453]

Mr. Leslie: The Fire Cover Review Task Group agreed the text of its final report at the end of September 2002. The central Fire Brigades Advisory Council will consider the report at a future meeting.

Fire Service

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost is of the benefits that apply to a new entrant to the Fire Service; what financial and demographic assumptions are used to make this estimate; and when the mortality assumption for pensioners was last reviewed. [84905]

Mr. Raynsford: For the Review of the Fire Service Pensions published in 1998, the cost of the benefits under the Firefighters Pension Scheme was assessed at 34.75 per cent. of pensionable pay.The financial and demographic assumptions were based on the probabilities of firefighters leaving the service through various causes, their salary progression throughout their careers and their mortality rates once in receipt of benefits. The mortality assumption for pensioners was last reviewed in 1991.

Fire Service (Retirements)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the reasons for the incidence of retirement on ill health grounds in the fire service; and if he will make a statement. [84663]

Mr. Raynsford: The reasons for ill health retirements are collected and reviewed regularly. Figures for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 showing the percentages in the main categories:

Percentage

Reason	*Due to service (29.7 per cent.) of which:*	*Not due to service (70.3 per cent.) of which:*
Muscular skeletal	60.43	37.44
Hearing	1.30	7.34
Cardiovascular	0.43	7.89
Respiratory	0.86	4.77
Eye/vision	0.43	0.91
Neurological	0.86	3.67
Psychological	18.69	20
Other	17.00	17.98

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library e-mails containing advice given by his officials to the Fire Services Employers since the beginning of 2002 regarding the pay dispute with the Fire Brigades Union. [82687]

Mr. Raynsford: Officials at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister are in regular contact with the Fire Service Employers on a variety of issues. There are no

records of any e-mails sent from officials on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to the Fire Service specifically containing advice on the pay dispute with the Fire Brigades Union.

Housing

Harry Cohen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many local authority homes have been sold under right to buy in the last five years; how many new homes have been built by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* registered social landlords in the last five years; and how many people were classified as homeless in each of the last five years. [83867]

Mr. McNulty: The information collected is not in the form requested. Available information in respect of activity in England is presented in the table.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*Total*
Local authority sales of stock under RTB	41,330	40,270	54,250	52,380	51,970	240,200
New build by Las	320	190	100	390	110	1,110
New build by RSLs	21,400	18,920	17,360	16,610	14,370	88,660
Homeless households accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need by LAs	102,650	104,150	106,130	114,350	118,360	545,640

Notes:
Homeless decisions made under the 1996 Housing Act, plus any residual 1985 Housing Act cases, reflect households accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.
Sources:
RTB: DTLR/ODPM housing activity return P1B (quarterly).
New build: DTLR/ODPM housing activity return P2 (monthly).
Homelessness: DTLR/ODPM housing activity return PIE (quarterly).

Mr. Eric Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what effect the abolition of section 24(3) of the Housing Act 1985 as it relates to England will have on the level of public sector and regulated rents; what the Government's rent restructuring policy is; and what the effect will be on the landlord's ability to repair property subject to regulated rent where rent increases are held below the rate of inflation; [84431]

(2) whether the Government plans to set up a rent restructuring authority; [84429]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact that the changes proposed to the Social Security Administration Act 1992, relating to the rent rebate subsidy limitation on those local authorities where housing rents are above a certain level as described on page 41 of the explanatory memorandum of the Local Government Bill; and based on the present criteria, how many more affordable houses could potentially be built if all rents were allowed to rise to market levels; [84430]

(4) what reason the Government is seeking to repeal subsection 7 of section 140B of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 to give him additional powers to determine the level of rent rebate subsidy, rent allowance subsidy and council tax benefit subsidy; and whether local authorities will be required to provide information on these subsidies to the *(a)* ODPM and *(b)* Department of Work and Pensions. [84432]

Mr. McNulty: The Government's rent restructuring policy aims to achieve a more coherent and fairer structure of social rents, while keeping rents affordable and well below market levels. Over the next ten years, social landlords are being encouraged to move their rents towards a common rents formula, which links rents to relative property values, local manual earnings levels, and property sizes.

We believe that the arrangements are fair both to landlords and tenants. We shall be reviewing the implementation of rent restructuring after three years. We have no proposals for a rent restructuring authority. The level of social sector rents is a matter for local authorities and registered social landlords, taking account of rent restructuring policies.

The effective repeal of Section 24(3) of the Housing Act 1985 in England is not expected to have any significant effect on the level of public sector rents. Section 24(3) applies only to local authorities and requires them to have regard, when setting their rents, to the pattern of private sector rents. This might, towards the end of the ten year rent restructuring period, have impacted marginally on an authority's ability to set rents in line with the rents formula.

The changes proposed in the Local Government Bill to the Social Security Administration Act 1992 will not affect the policy of rent rebate subsidy limitation, which will continue to operate in line with our rent restructuring policy as now.

The repeal to subsection 7 of section 1406 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 would not confer any additional powers on my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. This subsection made unclear the true extent of my rt. hon Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's powers in relation to determining subsidies and we believe it should be repealed. Authorities will be required to provide information to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in relation to rent allowance subsidy and council tax subsidy. In relation to rent rebate subsidy, and in particular rent rebate subsidy limitation, authorities may be required to submit information to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in England (ODPM), or the National Assembly in Wales (NAW), who could pass this information to the DWP along with representations as to the form of rent rebate subsidy limitation formulae. This would be possible as an alternative to requiring authorities to send that information directly to the DWP. It is not intended that authorities should have to provide the same information to both the DWP and the ODPM/ NAW.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on the relationship between local authorities and tenant management organisations with specific reference to those local authorities seeking to pursue a large scale voluntary transfer of their stocks; [84816]

(2) if he will make a statement on advice he is offering to local authorities on the issue of tenant management organisations, with specific reference to those which are choosing to pursue large scale voluntary transfer; and whether this advice has changed following the case of Westminster City Council-Pimlico Village Housing Co-operative. [84817]

Mr. McNulty: The Housing Transfer Guidance 2002 Programme required that all existing and developing Tenant Management Organisations should be fully consulted at an early stage of the local authorities' investment appraisal process.

This guidance is not affected by the difficulties between Westminster City Council and Pimlico Village Housing Co-operative.

Local Authority Sheltered Accommodation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on the impact on rents in sheltered accommodation owned by local authorities of its introduction of Supporting People; [84942]

(2) how the assumed inflation rate following the introduction of Supporting People will impact upon rent levels and service charges for local authority sheltered accommodation if its actual rate of inflation is greater. [84944]

Mr. McNulty: Local authority rents are set in accordance with the Government's policy on rent re-structuring. From April 2003 any costs in respect of support services will require to be separately identified and will not be eligible for Housing Benefit. Authorities are being awarded Supporting People grant on the basis of relevant expenditure at 31 March 2003, uplifted by funding stream specific inflation factors.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the split between housing revenue account and supporting people budget, with specific reference to local authority sheltered accommodation from April 2003 onwards. [84943]

Mr. McNulty: Under proposals contained in the consultation paper "A New Financial Framework for Local Authority Housing: Resource Accounting in the Housing Revenue Account", the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister sought views on the options of accounting for the new Supporting People grant in either the housing revenue account or in the general fund. We will publish the outcome of that consultation very soon.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how transitional housing benefit will operate in the case of local authority sheltered accommodation with specific reference to those authorities that have previously used rate fund moneys. [84945]

Mr. McNulty: The Supporting People programme will transfer transitional housing benefit and a number of other housing related funding streams to a new grant. Rate fund moneys are not among these funding streams.

Local Education Authority Grants

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will increase grant payments to local education authorities to take account of the EU benchmarks. [83205]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The structure and organisation of national education systems is the responsibility of individual EL) member states. There are no education benchmarks at EU level that we are required to meet.

Local Government

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the new housing strategy which will be prepared for each local authority under the Local Government Bill will be required to consider the aims and objectives contained in the existing homelessness strategies; what arrangements will be made for *(a)* the public, *(b)* registered social landlords, *(c)* the private sector and *(d)* other non governmental bodies involved in housing to participate in the preparation of the strategy; and what estimate he has made of the compliance cost. [84412]

Mr. McNulty: Local housing authorities have produced housing strategies for a number of years although they are currently non-statutory.

Existing guidance emphasises the need for authorities to demonstrate robust links with relevant strategies such as Homelessness Strategies. The new framework for housing-related plans will give councils the flexibility to combine their housing and homelessness strategies and other related strategies in a single document, where this suits local circumstances. The Local Government Bill does not change the provisions in the 2002 Act which relate to the objectives which may be included in an authority's homelessness strategy.

Existing guidance also stresses the importance of involving stakeholders in the development of the strategy, including residents, partner organisations and members. However it is up to local authorities to decide the appropriate arrangements according to their local circumstances. Of course, if the authority chooses to incorporate the homelessness strategy in the broader housing strategy the duties under the Homelessness Act relating to consultation and involvement of other bodies would still apply.

The Bill does not place a new burden on authorities. No estimate has therefore been made of the cost to authorities of complying with this requirement.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how an empty home will be defined under the provisions of the Local Government Bill; what steps he took to ensure that evidence collected during the course of investigations to determine whether a home is empty is compatible with an individual's right to privacy under article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights; and if he will make a statement. [84413]

Mr. McNulty: Clause 75 of the Bill will allow billing authorities in England to reduce or end council tax discounts for classes of dwellings prescribed in regulations. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister hopes to produce a draft of regulations defining such a class of long term empty homes in time for the Commons' Committee consideration of this clause. The precise wording has still to be decided. We intend, however, to define empty homes as vacant dwellings which are not exempt from council tax. A dwelling is vacant if no-one lives in it and it is substantially unfurnished.

The provisions contained in the Local Government Bill will not impose any additional checks to those which local authorities already have to undertake to establish whether a domestic property is empty or not for the purposes of the existing 50 per cent. council tax discount for long term empty homes, or for the council tax exemptions for empty homes. Just as billing authorities will have to act compatibly with the Convention rights in investigating whether a dwelling is vacant for the purposes of the council tax, they will have to act compatibly with Convention rights in making any further use of the data as will be permitted by clause 85.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will list those authorities where the shortfall from handling stock transfer has resulted in an overhanging debt payment from his Department; and how much each of those payments amounted to; [84416]

(2) how much money his Department has set aside under clauses 40 and 41 of the draft Local Government Bill in each of the next three years to meet future payments of overhanging debt payable to *(a)* public works loans commissioners and *(b)* other lenders; and what the criteria will be for deciding whether such payments should be made. [84417]

Mr. McNulty: To date, seven one-off payments have been made. In 1999–2000 £20.99 million was paid to Burnley. In 2000–01 payments were made to Coventry (£111.68 million) Calderdale (£64.59 million) and Blackburn with Darwen (£78.9 million). In 2002–03 payments have been made to St. Helens (£87.2 million), Redcar and Cleveland (£25.4 million) and Knowsley (£126.13 million).

Resources required by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to meet commitments arising under clause 40 and 41 of the draft Local Government Bill will depend on the local authorities seeking to transfer their housing in any particular year. The resources are classified as Annually Managed Expenditure and as such are drawn down on an annual basis. Provision for 2003–04 is currently £616 million, and all payments would go to the Public Works Loans Commissioners. Provision for future years will relate to the 2003 transfer programme onward, for which applications from local authorities have yet to be invited. A local authority will be eligible where it has been accepted onto the housing transfer programme and where on disposal of its stock the receipt it will receive will be less than its housing attributable debt.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the arrangements will be for transferring subsidies from those authorities with surplus housing revenue accounts to those authorities in deficit under the proposals in the Local Government Bill; what proportion of that surplus will be affected; whether it will be varied on an annual basis; and what effect this transfer will have on the ability of those surplus authorities to deliver their own housing strategies; [84419]

(2) what criteria will be contained in the new formula for calculating housing revenue account subsidies under the Local Government Bill; how much his Department has allocated over the next three years for this; and whether authorities receiving central Government subsidy will be debarred from receiving subsidies from those authorities that have surplus housing revenue accounts; [84411]

(3) what assessment he has made of the effect that the combined policies of pooling capital receipts, transferring surplus housing revenue accounts and resource equalisation will have on the ability of those authorities affected to deliver the existing range of services to the public; and how much will be redistributed in any one year under each of these three mechanisms. [84420]

Mr. McNulty: Under the arrangements proposed in the Local Government Bill, authorities with an assumed surplus on their Housing Revenue Account (HRA) will be asked to pay the whole of that assumed surplus to central Government. The surpluses, together with a contribution from the Exchequer, will be redistributed to those authorities whose assumed expenditure on their housing stock exceeds their rental income. This will not involve direct transfer between authorities.

This redistributive mechanism operates already at present, as an authority's assumed HRA surplus is netted off against the rent rebate subsidy due to them in the HRA subsidy calculation, thus providing the national resources to pay subsidy to deficit authorities. However, that will not be possible once rent rebates are removed from the HRA and subsidised separately; hence the need for the new mechanism in the Bill. As surpluses are effectively captured at present, this proposal will not, therefore, have any effect on the financial position of most councils, or their ability to deliver their housing strategies.

The assumed surpluses and deficits will continue to be determined annually as now. Authorities will be consulted on the formulae proposed each year in the normal way.

The pooling of a proportion of housing capital receipts will also ensure that resources are targeted to those areas where housing need is greatest so that all authorities can meet national housing priorities.

As with HRA surpluses, it is proposed that pooled receipts should be redistributed in full. The amount of pooled receipts will depend on levels of Right to Buy sales at the time.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire. [85130]

Mr. Leslie: We will announce the new system for distributing Formula Grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which will be on the 5 December, subject to parliamentary business. Once the Government has allocated its grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that we will use grant "floors" to ensure that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much central funding has been given by his Department to *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council, *(b)* Chiltern district council, *(c)* Amersham Town council and *(d)* Chesham Town council in each year since 1 January 1996. [85131]

Mr. Leslie: Information on funding provided by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister under the main local government revenue and capital finance systems to Buckinghamshire county council and Chiltern district council are given in the following table.

£000

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2002–02*	*2002–03*
Buckinghamshire county council[1]								
Revenue funding								
Revenue support grant	*166,086*	*157,855*	*102,116*	*[1]102,324*	*101,215*	*95,891*	*111,397*	*91,977*
Redistributed business rates	*118,192*	*134,972*	*91,922*	*96,628*	*105,481*	*119,630*	*117,618*	*128,319*
Capital funding								
Basic credit approvals issued[2]	10,987	12,585	7,976	7,082	6,080	5,134	764	15,171
Chiltern district council								
Revenue funding								
Revenue support grant	834	571	730	309	160	0	188	0
Redistributed business rates	3,037	3,234	2,934	2,968	3,230	3,568	3,527	3,935
Capital funding								
Basic credit approvals issued[3]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50

[1] The area covered by Buckinghamshire county council decreased on 1 April 1997 when Milton Keynes became a unitary authority.
[2] In 2002–03 Buckinghamshire county council had a large transport annual capital guideline amounting to £12.3 million compared to a zero transport annual capital guideline in the previous year.
[3] Chiltern received zero basic credit approvals between 1995–96 and 2001–02 due to high levels of capital receipts. In 2002–03 a discretionary element was introduced.

I will write to the hon. Member shortly with information on funding provided to the authorities from other Office of the Deputy Prime Minister programmes.

No funding has been provided by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to Amersham Town council or Chesham Town council in any year since 1 January 1996.

Chesham Town council will, however, benefit from the grant of £30,000 per year towards best value costs that we announced in the local government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services". The Local Government Bill contains clauses to enable the Secretary of State to pay such a grant and, in advance of legislation, the Audit Commission has consulted on a proposal to provide about £10,000 of support to each best value parish and town council in 2002–03 by the waiving and reimbursing of recent audit fees. The outcome of the consultation exercise will be announced later this month.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84787]

Mr. Leslie: Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Minister's visits overseas. Details of travel during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1374–75W. Copies of the list are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister only came into existence in June this year following Machinery of Government changes. The former Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions expenditure on official travel was £6.6 million. For agencies now sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, total expenditure was £4.1 million.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84927]

Mr. Leslie: The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

For 2002–03, the Office's official travel budget is included in the overall administration resource budget. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's agencies budgets for official travel in 2002–03 is £4.4 million.

Rates

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for what reason the proposal in the draft Local Government Bill to merge new domestic rates and rates support grant has been dropped in the published Bill. [84418]

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the proposed merger of the rate support grant and national non-domestic rates. [85226]

Mr. Leslie: The draft Bill proposed the merger of Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and redistributed national non-domestic rates (NNDR) into a single grant stream. The intended purpose was to simplify the grant distribution mechanism by paying the combined total of central government unhypothecated grant support for local authorities and the amount of support raised via business rates using a single basis of distribution. The Government believed that this change would make the grant system more transparent and easier for stakeholders to understand.

A number of local authority responses to the consultation on the draft Bill agreed that the proposed changes would simplify the grant distribution system. However the overwhelming majority of consultation responses argued that the two funding streams should not be merged. The Select Committee also recommend against the proposed merger.

Having considered carefully all the consultation responses and the views of the Select Committee, the Government decided to not to proceed with the merger because it evidently did not achieve the desired objective of improving the clarity of the grant distribution system.

Standards Board

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many complaints have been received about the Standards Board since it was set up; and how many of these were upheld. [84423]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received a small number of representations about various aspects of the work done by the Standards Board. Having recently met the chairman of the Standards Board I have full confidence in the board and in the actions it is taking as a wholly independent body to fulfil the role which it was given by the Local Government Act 2000 of promoting high standards of conduct in local authorities.

Starter Home Initiative

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the categories and numbers of key workers to be helped in the starter home initiative were set; and if he will make a statement. [83817]

Mr. McNulty: The priorities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for assistance under the Starter Home Initiative are teachers, police, nurses and other essential health workers. This reflects the importance which the Government attaches to addressing recruitment and retention problems in the key public services of health, education and policing. The number of key workers being helped in each of these groups was informed by the overall number of key workers in each group, the scale of shortages and the ability of individuals in each group to access home ownership. A few other groups of key workers are also receiving assistance through the Initiative in the light of bids received.

Thames Gateway

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average residential density was of housing developments in the London part of the Thames Gateway that received planning permission in the last two years; and what estimate he has made of the average residential density of new housing developments in the London part of the Thames Gateway which will be needed to secure 50,000 new dwelling units within that area over the next 15 years. [83948]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The average density of developments completed between 1997 and 2000 in the boroughs that make up the London part of the Thames Gateway, as defined by RPG9a, are:

Borough	*Dwellings per hectare*
Greenwich:	47
Newham:	54
Barking and Dagenham	43
Bexley:	30
Havering:	34
Tower Hamlets:	107
Lewisham:	56

These figures are borough wide averages. Not all of the boroughs listed above are entirely within Thames Gateway.

Guidance on future levels of housing provision for these boroughs, up to 2016, is set out in the emerging London Plan (Spatial Development Strategy). The London Plan, once finalised, will provide the strategic planning framework for London.

The draft London Plan also contains policies directed at maximising the potential of sites. The emerging strategic policy framework for residential density is that in urban and central areas, densities of between 50 and 275 units per hectare should be provided. For suburban areas the density range should be between 30 and 65 units per hectare.

PRIME MINISTER

No. 10 Downing Street (Tea Party)

Mr. Christopher Chope: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many hon. Members have been invited to bring children from their constituencies to a tea party at 10 Downing Street; how many have accepted; and what criteria are applied to choosing invitees; [85124]

(2) how many hon. Members have been invited to nominate adults from their constituency to tour the main State Rooms and Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street and the State Room at 11 Downing Street; how many have accepted; and what criteria are applied to choosing invitees. [85125]

The Prime Minister: Hon. Members from all parties are invited on a rolling programme to nominate and accompany a small group of children from their constituencies to have tea at 10 Downing Street and a small group of adults from their constituencies to come for a tour of the House. The criteria applied are that selection is made by the hon. Member in a fair and open way for children and adults with a particular interest in visiting 10 Downing Street. Since 1998 approximately 340 MPs have accepted invitations for children to come for tea and 95 MPs have accepted invitations for tours of the House.

Official Travel

Mr. Christopher Chope: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what the total budget of his Office is for official travel in 2002–2003 [84926]

(2) what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84788]

The Prime Minister: Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1374–75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–2003 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

For information about members of my office, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie) on Thursday 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 462–3W.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Air Passenger Processing

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress with advanced passenger processing on incoming flights to the UK. [83845]

Beverley Hughes: The Government are committed to the modernisation of public services. Advance Passenger Processing is the framework for a modernised immigration control. It will comprise a range of operational and analytical initiatives which will provide a balance between expediting clearance of genuine passengers and targeting those passengers who present an immigration or security threat. Over the last few years, we have been building a platform of legislation to support this strategy: the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; the Immigration (Leave to Enter and Remain) Order 2000; the Immigration (Passenger Information) Order 2000; and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

The Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), with private sector partners, have recently completed a three month feasibility study to examine whether a system of advance passenger processing, akin to the electronic travel authority which operates in Australia, might be applicable to the United Kingdom. The initial conclusions are positive and IND are currently engaged in an evaluation of the study, which is being conducted in consultation with key stakeholders. It is expected that the evaluation will be completed by Spring 2003 and we will then consider the best way forward.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Turkish citizens applied for asylum in the UK in 2001; and how many were successful in their application. [83890]

Beverley Hughes: 3,700 Turkish citizens applied for asylum in the United Kingdom in 2001 (excluding dependants). In 2001 there were 7,660 initial decisions made on asylum applications from Turkish nationals, 195 grants of asylum, 275 grants of exceptional leave to remain (ELR), and 7,190 refusals. Data on initial decisions are independent of applications data, and do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same period.

During 2001, 1,840 appeals against Home Office decisions on Turkish asylum claims were determined by adjudicators of the Immigration Appellate Authority. Of these, 485 granted either refugee status or ELR, 1,295 were dismissed and 60 cases were withdrawn. Appeal outcomes in any given time period do not necessarily relate to initial decisions made in the same period. The figures exclude any further appeals (Immigration Appeals Tribunal, Court of Appeal, judicial review, House of Lords).

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government is taking to combat the illegal entry of Pakistani Pathan asylum seekers. [83891]

Beverley Hughes: A four tier screening process is in place for all new asylum applicants. Those holding documentation establishing their identity and nationality undergo the first level of screening, which is photographing, fingerprinting and taking personal details. In all other cases, more in-depth screening is undertaken to ascertain nationality and identity along with the route taken to the United Kingdom. The highest level of screening is used in cases where prosecution is a possibility and these interviews are conducted under caution by specially trained officers. Country information is available to immigration officers to assist in establishing nationality.

A pilot project took place at the Asylum Screening Unit in Croydon exploring ways of identifying nationality by the use of language analysis experts. Samples of conversations were forwarded to language experts to establish if the asylum applicant's language and dialect were consistent with his nationality. The results of this project are still being assessed.

Flights identified as potentially 'high risk' for carrying passengers who destroy their documents en route to the United Kingdom are met by specially designated and

trained immigration officers who escort them to the immigration control for further examination. On a number of occasions full document checks are carried out on arriving flights to ascertain that passengers have the appropriate travel documentation.

In addition specialist expertise and advice on passport and visa documentation is readily available from the British High Commission in Pakistan and this resource is used by the airlines when denying boarding to inadequately documented passengers.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contractual relationship exists between his Department and Clearsprings Ltd., with regard to the *(a)* processing and *(b)* housing of asylum seekers. [84175]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* There is no contractual agreement between Clearsprings Management Ltd. and the Immigration Nationality Directorate on the processing of asylum seekers. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) does have a contract with Clearsprings Management Ltd. to provide accommodation for destitute asylum seekers.

Asylum Seekers (Somalia)

Mr. Coleman: : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to return failed asylum seekers to Somalia; and if he will make a statement. [84041]

Beverley Hughes: Asylum seekers from Somalia who are found not to be in need of international protection following proper consideration of their claim have the option to return voluntarily to Somalia by way of a voluntary assisted returns programme.

If they choose not to return voluntarily they will be subject to removal to Somalia as soon as it is possible to conclude negotiations with the relevant authorities.

Criminal Records Board

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instruct Capita to deal first with the backlog of claims for the Criminal Records Board which have been waiting for adjudication for more than six months. [82073]

Hilary Benn: It is the agency's policy to process disclosure applications in the order that they are received, however, some may complete each stage of the process quicker than others. Some applications become delayed due to missing information from applicants or registered bodies.

Capita, the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Agency and local police forces work in partnership throughout the CRB disclosure process.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will write to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam regarding the Criminal Records Bureau. [84809]

Hilary Benn: I will write as soon as possible.

Cyclists (Pavements)

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there were in 2001 of cyclists riding on pavements, in each police authority; and if he will make it his policy to place these figures in the Library in subsequent years. [83440]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Statistics will be available once Criminal Statistics 2001 is published. This Command Paper is due to be published before the end of 2002.

Drugs Courts

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are being used to assess the success of the drugs courts pilot schemes. [82884]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Drug courts are not presently being piloted in England and Wales, but the STEP Project, a court based treatment initiative, ran in Wakefield and Pontefract from summer 1998 to autumn 2000. The nearest comparison now is with the court review process of the drug treatment and testing order (DTTO), which shares with drug courts in other jurisdictions sentencer review of the progress of offenders.

The Government believe that getting drug misusing offenders into treatment through court-based interventions can be effective in reducing drug misuse and crime, and officials are currently developing proposals for piloting drug courts drawing upon the good practice of dedicated DTTO review courts.

Ex-prisoners

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on resettlement of ex-prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [82087]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office is working to develop an action plan on a National Rehabilitation Strategy. The plan will respond to issues highlighted in the recent Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and Sentencing Enforcement Unit (SEU) reports and will draw on the experience and skills of a range of Departments and agencies working with vulnerable and excluded groups. Partnership between the prison service and national probation service will be important in the joint delivery of support to offenders both during and after custody and helping them to reintegrate successfully into the community on release.

The National Probation Directorate (NPD) provides funding to several voluntary sector organisations, including the Society of Voluntary Associates (SOVA) and the National Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO). Both NPD and the Prison Service work closely with partner agencies in the voluntary and not for profit sector to address offenders resettlement needs. Partnerships typically deliver services supporting offenders to access housing, prepare for and obtain employment and enter basic skills learning.

Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the grants funded by his

Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if he will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82186]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office has funded grants in 2001–02 for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply as follows:

Description of grant	*Expenditure (£)*
Refugee community development fund, 66 organisations awarded	350,000
Refugee integration challenge fund, 20 projects	500,000
European refugee fund (in calendar year 2000), approximately	5,400,000
(For funding: voluntary return measures, reception of asylum seekers, and integration of refugees) 44 projects awarded in 2002. Purposeful activity for asylum seekers 35 awards	500,000
Active Community Units	
Capital modernisation grants (1 year only) 42 awards	7,800,000
(To voluntary organisations for information technology and building projects; relocation or co-location (i.e. bringing various organisations under one roof) Mentoring project grants (£3.5 million over three years)) 38 awards	1,160,000
Mentoring capital grants (one year only) 30 awards	500,000
Active community grants (£5.1 million over three years) 34 awards	1,700,000
Family support grant 90 grants	5,300,000
The recovered assets fund, 2 awards	250,000
Race Equality Unit	
Connecting communities, 75 awards	4,151,467
Easter schemes (community cohesion activity schemes), 9 awards	267,107
Reduction of racial disadvantage grants, 12 awards	572,473
Summer schemes (community cohesion activity schemes) 208 awards	7,000,000
Drugs prevention advisory service, 155 awards	1,721,937
Total costs	37,172,984

Information about associated administration costs is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the average time it will take to determine applications for leave to remain in the UK on the basis of marriage for non-fast track cases for applications made in October; and what the average time taken was in each of the last five years. [83772]

Beverley Hughes: At present those marriage applications that cannot be dealt with on initial consideration can take approximately 12 months to decide. It is not possible to provide waiting times over the last five years, as records have not been kept. There have been exceptionally high numbers of applications throughout 2001 and continuing this year.

Efforts are being made to reduce the 12 months taken to decide all applications (including marriage cases) and we are confident that the delays will be reduced to nine months in the New Year. This will be achieved by making use of additional resources in Sheffield where we have trained up to 40 caseworkers to decide marriage applications.

Immigration Removal and Detention Centres

Mr. Humfrey Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports he has received during the last 12 months from the Chief Inspector of Prisons about immigration removal and detention centres; when he intends to respond to them; and if he will publish the reports and his responses. [85030]

Beverley Hughes: We have not received any reports during the last 12 months from the Chief Inspector of Prisons about immigration removal centres.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIP) has, over the last few months, visited a number of immigration removal centres. However, no reports of these visits have yet been published or received.

Leave to Remain Applicants

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice applicants for leave to remain in the UK on the basis of marriage whose applications cannot be fast-tracked are given on how long their cases will take to determine; and what the basis is for this advice. [84091]

Beverley Hughes: A letter is sent to all applicants whose applications cannot be decided on initial consideration. It gives an estimate of how long they can expect to wait for a decision. This is based on the current waiting time for such cases and an estimate of what it is expected to be in future.

Offences on Bail

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences have been committed by defendants on *(a)* police bail and *(b)* bail from the court in each of the last three years. [82089]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available centrally.

Passport Agency/Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy to allow the same person to be, at the same time, the chief executive of the Passport Agency and of the Criminal Records Bureau. [83899]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* On the 15 February 1999 the then Home Secretary (Mr. Straw), stated, in answer to a parliamentary question, that the Criminal Records Bureau would be established in Merseyside under the management of the United Kingdom Passport Agency.

On 30 March 2001 the then Home Secretary confirmed, in answer to a further parliamentary question, that the combined organisation was to be established as the Passport and Records Agency and the new agency framework document was placed in the Library.

Police Training

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of new recruits who started the training course at the Hendon Police Training School completed that course satisfactorily in 2001; how many are still serving police officers one year after completion and what the figures were in 1997. [82491]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The Commissioner for the Metropolitan police informs me that the proportion of new recruits who satisfactorily completed their training at Hendon in 2001 was 90 per cent.; *(a)* of 1,625 officers who were recruited in 2001, 1,465 completed their training and 1,386 are still serving; *(b)* in 1997 the number of officers recruited was 1,035, of which 992 officers completed one years service.

Prisons

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has for the construction of new prisons over the next seven years, with reference to the latest population projection; [84305]

(2) how many prisoners are held in police cells; and what action is being taken to reduce this number. [84298]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The numbers held in police cells (under Operation Safeguard) peaked at 448 on the night of 29 October 2002. Since then, new prison accommodation has been brought into use and this, combined with a fall in prisoner numbers during November 2002, has enabled the Prison Service to reduce its use of police cells. By the night of 26 November 2002, the number of prisoners being held in police cells had fallen to 160.

The Government have recently approved Prison Service plans for two new prisons, which will provide 1,290 places by 2004–05. The first is scheduled to open in the summer of 2004 at Ashford (near Heathrow), and will be a female prison of 450 places. An 840-place prison for 360 female and 480 male prisoners is scheduled to open at Peterborough in Cambridgeshire in the summer of 2005.

In addition, the Government have recently announced that £60 million will be made available to provide 740 prison places at existing prisons by March 2004. This is in addition to funding from the 2002 Budget to provide an extra 2,320 places within existing prisons by the end of this financial year.

Probation

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation service areas will *(a)* receive an increase in real terms in their budget for the next financial year, *(b)* receive the same budget as this year and *(c)* receive a reduction in their budget. [84304]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* All 24 Local Probation Boards will receive an increase in real terms in their budget for the next financial year.

Sussex Police

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of the total Sussex police force are from ethnic minorities working as *(a)* working time equivalents and *(b)* civilian support staff; and what plans he has to increase this number. [83313]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* On 31 March 2002, the latest date for which figures are available there were 30 minority ethnic police officers in Sussex police. This represents 1.0 per cent. of the force's officer strength.

On the same date there were 27 minority ethnic civilian support staff, 1.3 per cent. of support staff strength.

Under the dismantling barriers initiative, each police force has a 10-year target indicating the size of the minority ethnic communities in their area and setting a figure for the overall increase in representation required given the current size of the force in order that the force is representative of the community it serves. The target for Sussex police by 2009 is 2.4 per cent.

Young Offenders Institutions

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many teaching staff in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate have qualifications in special needs education. [83831]

Hilary Benn: There are 50 members of staff in juvenile establishments who have special needs qualifications. Others have received in-service training in various aspects of special educational needs, including recent training for Basic Skills teachers teaching students with learning difficulties. Funding has been allocated to all establishments in the juvenile estate to employ a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), who assess the needs of learners and guide teachers and learning support assistants.

The information is contained in the table.

Establishment	SENCO	SEN qualified staff
Onley	To appoint	0
Bulwood Hall	No	0
Wetherby	Yes	2
Brinsford	Yes	0
Ashfield	Yes	4
Huntercombe	Yes	4
Warren Hill	Yes	3
New Hall[1]	Yes	4
Castington	Yes	3
Stoke Heath	Yes	22
Werrington	Yes	1
Lancaster Farms	Yes	1
Hindley[2]	Yes	5
Feltham	Yes	1
Total	12	50

[1] Few juveniles
[2] Very recently received juveniles

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have attained *(a)* GCSEs, *(b)* AS levels and *(c)* A levels at each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000; how many qualifications they were each awarded; and at what grade. [83830]

Hilary Benn: Since April 2000, in juvenile establishments: *(a)* 279 candidates achieved 397 GSCE qualifications; *(b)* 10 candidates achieved 12 A/S level qualifications; and *(c)* three candidates achieved seven A level qualifications.

The information in set out in the tables.

(a) GCSEs

Young offender institutions	GCSE candidates	Total achieved	GCSE grades A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Onley	5	11	—	4	7	—	—	—	—
Bulwood Hall	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wetherby	94	30	—	—	4	10	8	5	—
Brinsford	0	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ashfield	7	9	—	1	3	5	—	—	—
Huntercombe	87	130	1	9	34	37	28	24	—
Warren Hill	26	90	3	4	21	26	12	5	—
New Hall	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Castington	28	79	4	7	20	25	9	9	5
Stoke Heath	3	8	—	2	—	—	—	3	1
Werrington	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancaster Farms	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hindley (recently received juveniles)	1	4	—	—	1	2	1	—	—
Feltham	28	36	1	7	11	6	6	3	2
Total	279	397	9	34	171	111	64	49	8

(b) AS levels

Young offender institutions	AS level candidates	Total achieved	AS level grades A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Warren Hill	10	12	—	1	2	5	4	—	—
Total	10	12	—	1	2	5	4	—	—

(c) A levels

Young offender institutions	A level candidates	Total achieved	A level grades A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Onley	1	3	—	1	1	1	—	—	—
Castington	2	4	—	1	1	2	—	—	—
Total	3	7	—	2	2	3	—	—	—

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been locked out of prisons overnight in the last 12 months; at which prisons; and at which police stations they were held. [83827]

Hilary Benn: The information is not held centrally and I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend when it is available.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there is a limit to the time a child can be held on a basic regime in prison. [83832]

Hilary Benn: The Operational Manager for the Juvenile Estate has made it clear to Governors of juvenile establishments that the basic regime must be used constructively as an incentive to responsible behaviour. Governors are expected to keep a juvenile on the basic regime for the shortest period possible, and normally not for longer than one week, at which time the case must be reviewed.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* section 17 assessments and *(b)* section 47 investigations under the Children Act 1989 have been carried out on children in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000. [83837]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not held centrally and I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend when it is available.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young prisoners have been subjected to restraint under rule 52 of the Rules for Young Offenders Institutions since April 2000. [83825]

Hilary Benn: The information is not held centrally and I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend when it is available.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times unfurnished cells have been used in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000. [83826]

Hilary Benn: The information is not held centrally and I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend when it is available.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times control and restraint was used in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000. [83833]

Hilary Benn: The information is not held centrally and I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend when it is available.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time was that children in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate spent out of doors every day in 2001–02. [83834]

Hilary Benn: The information is not held centrally and I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend when it is available.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been transferred to HMP and YOI Castington from Feltham YOI in each of the last 12 months; and what their *(a)* ethnicity, *(b)* age and *(c)* home area in each case was. [83835]

Hilary Benn: In the last 12 months 28 young people have been transferred from Feltham young offender institution to Castington prison and young offender institution. The breakdown of these figures is as follows:

April 2002

Age	*Home Area*	*Ethnicity*
15	Sutton	White English
16	West Sussex	Black Caribbean
17	Waltham Forest	Black Caribbean
17	Harringey	White English
17	Bexley	White English
17	Wandsworth	White English
17	Lemington Spa	White English
18	Essex	Pakistani

Total number transferred = 8

July 2002

Age	*Home Area*	*Ethnicity*
16	Haringey	Black Caribbean
17	Kent	White English
18	Chingford	White English
18	Uxbridge	White English
18	Kensington	Black African
18	East Sussex	White English

Total number transferred = 6

August 2002

Age	*Home Area*	*Ethnicity*
15	*Not available*	*White English*
16	*Haringey*	*Black Caribbean*
17	*Crawley*	*White English*
18	*West Sussex*	*Black African*

Total number transferred = 4

October 2002

Age	*Home Area*	*Ethnicity*
17	Brent	Black African
17	Haringey	Black African
17	London	Black Other
17	Barnet	White English
18	Enfield	White Irish
18	Southwark	Black African
18	Newham	Black Caribbean
18	Surrey	White English
18	Enfield	White English
18	Thameside	Other ethnic group

Total number transferred = 10

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Academic Staff (Assessment)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will publish the data from the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise relating to individual academic staff. [81504]

Margaret Hodge: The available data from the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise have been published by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), and can be obtained from the Higher Education and Research Opportunities website at www.hero.ac.uk/rae/.

Cost Saving

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what assessment he has made of the cost savings that could be achieved by allowing private institutions to run courses leading to an award or a degree. [84144]

Margaret Hodge: There has been no such assessment. There are currently around 125 private organisations already running courses leading to a degree awarded by a recommended UK degree awarding body.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when further guidance will be issued to registered bodies about the postponement of Criminal Records Bureau checks. [84607]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* My Department wrote to local education authorities last week about the need to manage demand for CRB Disclosures. The letter advised authorities that, for the time being, CRB checks should not be sought for school governors.

It also provided further advice about checking school volunteers and confirmed that the arrangements we put in place in September to enable staff and volunteers in schools to start work in advance of receiving a CRB Disclosure at the discretion of the head teacher will continue until the Secretary of State is satisfied that the CRB is reliably providing a service that meets the needs of the education service.

Parallel guidance is being sent to all schools next week.

Degrees

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to allow private organisations to award degrees. [83873]

Margaret Hodge: Section 76 of the FHE Act 1992 allows the Privy Council to specify any institution offering higher education as competent to grant degrees. Institutions are required to meet specific criteria, as set out by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, before degree awarding powers are granted. Any institution which believes it fulfils the relevant criteria is eligible to apply to the Privy Council, including private organisations. There are currently two private institutions that have secured degree-awarding powers: University of Buckingham and Henley Management College.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what reasons underlay the change in the number of staff employed by his Department between *(a)* 1996 and 1997 and *(b)* 2001 and 2002; and if he will make a statement. [81724]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The merger of the Department for Education and the Employment Department Group to form the Department for Education and Employment in 1995 led to substantial savings in support service jobs as the new departmental structure rolled out over the following two years. Between April 1996 and March 1997 the Department managed the voluntary early release of 542 staff.

Machinery of Government changes following the General Election in 2001 transferred responsibility for the employment portfolio away from the newly created Department for Education and Skills. As a result some 700 staff moved to one of the four Departments which now share that responsibility: the Department for Work and Pensions, Home Office, the Department for Trade and Industry and Cabinet Office.

Education Provision (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money was spent in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire through the Standards Fund in 2001–02 on class size reduction. [85129]

Mr. Miliband: In 2001–02 Buckinghamshire local education authority was allocated £2.3 million revenue and £0.8 million capital, to reduce infant class sizes for 5, 6 and 7-year-olds to 30 or fewer. In the constituency of Chesham and Amersham £0.2 million was allocated to schools to meet the limit. I should point out that not all schools have received funding to meet the pledge.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of classroom teachers are on the top of the main scale or have progressed through the upper pay spine in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire. [85127]

Mr. Miliband: The following table shows the latest available teacher data for Buckinghamshire. It is too early to provide data on teachers progressing to point two of the upper pay scale. The information is only available at LEA level.

Percentage[1] of qualified classroom teachers on point nine of the main pay scale and the post-threshold scale as at 31 March 2001 (provisional)[2]—Maintained schools sector

Buckinghamshire	
Main scale point 9	24.8
Upper pay scale	35.2
Not known[3]	4.9

[1] Percentage is based on all classroom teachers including advanced skills teachers

[2] The data are provisional and may understate the percentage of teachers who had passed through to the upper pay scales

[3] Following changes to the pay system in September 2000, an unusually high number of teachers were shown with a spine point of 'not known'. The majority of these teachers are expected to be on either spine point nine or the post-threshold scale

Exclusion Units

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many local education authorities have established total exclusion units to take pupils who have been permanently excluded from their schools. [84978]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Currently, 139 of the 150 local education authorities, including Barnsley LEA, have Pupil Referral Units, which are used in the education of permanently excluded pupils.

Further Education Lecturers

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average salary of further education lecturers on permanent contract was, and what the average hourly rate of pay to sessional staff was, in each of the past five years. [84121]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Department does not collect pay information disaggregated by the contract status of further education (FE) lecturers or about the average hourly rate of sessional staff. Figures for the average salary of full-time lecturers over the last five years for which we have published information are given in the table.

(£)

March 1996	March 1997	March 1998	March 1999	March 2000
23,240	23,720	24,160	24,940	25,760

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether there is a guaranteed minimum wage level for lecturers of further education or higher education courses; and what proportions of lecturers are employed on the bottom of the pay scale. [84293]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Individual FE colleges and HE institutions determine, within the context of current employment legislation, their own pay rates according to local needs and priorities.

The Association of Colleges, the Sixth Form Colleges' Employers' Forum and the Universities' and Colleges' Employers' Association publish recommended pay awards and pay scales for further and higher education lecturers following annual negotiations with their representative trade union bodies.

The Department does not collect information about the proportion of lecturers in FE or HE who are employed on the bottom of the pay scales.

Geographical Knowledge

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on geographical knowledge among schoolchildren; and what measures are planned to improve this. [85051]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: As part of the National Curriculum, all pupils aged five to 14 are required to study geography.

Pupils are taught geographical enquiry skills, leading to the development of knowledge and understanding of places, patterns and processes, both in the UK and the wider world. They develop an understanding of maps, atlases and globes and how to use them effectively.

Graduate Incomes

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the total taxation paid over the average working life of *(a)* graduates and *(b)* non-graduates. [82774]

Margaret Hodge *[holding reply 25 November 2002]:* Using earnings data from the Labour Force Survey over the four quarters autumn 2000 to summer 2001, we estimate that graduates whose highest qualification is a first degree could pay on average around £200,000 in income tax over a working life. This figure relates to Great Britain. The equivalent figure for graduates and non-graduates, collectively, is around £120,000. Lifetime income taxation for only non-graduates would be significantly lower than this figure.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the average income of graduates over their working lives compared to the average income this same group would have earned had they not obtained a higher education qualification. [82776]

Margaret Hodge *[holding reply 25 November 2002]:* The information requested is not available.

Numerous academic studies have attempted to estimate the average percentage increase in hourly or weekly earnings attributable to having various higher education qualifications. These studies control for a range of factors that affect earnings, other than having a HE qualification—such as age, gender, prior educational attainment—although they do vary in the extent to which other influential factors are taken into account. The studies do not tell us exactly what a particular graduate would have earned had they not have obtained a higher education qualification. We can only observe one reality for any individual—i.e. their actual earnings given that they did get a HE qualification. However, they do provide the closest estimates that we can get of the earnings they could have had.

There is, unsurprisingly, some variation in the results of these studies, indicating that the increase in earnings from having a first degree compared to two or more A-levels is in the range of around 20–30 per cent.

Graduates

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will publish the results of cost-benefit studies undertaken by his Department in the last five years which show the value of its graduate labour force. [83894]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The cost-benefit studies we have undertaken relate to the private and social rates of return to a degree. Private rates of return compare the costs and benefits of higher education to individuals, including their contribution towards course costs and post-tax earnings benefits. Social rates of return include these private costs and benefits, but also take into account the costs and benefits to society as a whole. Social rates of return estimate the value to the economy of investment in higher education by, broadly, expressing the net increase in national output relative to the resource cost of the higher education courses. The increase in national output is proxied by the difference in graduates' pre-tax earnings compared to those with only two or more A levels, after taking into account non-wage labour costs, which also reflect the value associated with employing a graduate.

The table provides the results of the studies undertaken in the last five or so years. They show that social rates of return have held up, with current estimates around 8–10 per cent.

Private rates of return to a first degree are higher than social rates. This is primarily because individuals contribute only partially to the costs, but also because social rates are likely to be under-estimates because they exclude social benefits that are difficult to quantify in financial terms, such as health benefits, longer life expectancy, lower infant mortality and reduced crime.

Private and social rates of return to a first degree

Percentage

		Current estimates: social	*Dearing estimates: social*	*Dearing estimates: private*
Entrants aged 18	Men and women	9–11	[1]—	[1]—
	Men	8–10	7–9	11–13
	Women	10–12	[1]—	[1]—
Entrants all ages	Men and women	8–10	7–9	11–14
	Men	6–8	6–8	9–11
	Women	9–12	8–10	14–17

[1] Not estimated.

Notes:

1. Dearing estimates are based on General Household Survey data for 1989–1995.
2. Current estimates are based on Labour Force Survey data for 1998.
3. The lower figures in each cell assume that only 60 per cent. of the difference in graduate and A level earnings is specifically attributable to having a degree, and the higher figures assume 80 per cent.—the remaining proportion assumed to be attributable to other factors, such as innate ability.

Higher Education Entrants

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of children whose fathers are coal miners or former coal miners entered higher education in each year since 1997; and how this compares with the national average. [82249]

Margaret Hodge: The available information, showing participation by young people in higher education for each of the standard social class categories, is shown in the following table. Participation rates for individual occupations within these categories are not held centrally. There was an increase in entrant numbers in 1997 related partly to the funding arrangements for higher education, with students choosing to enter HE rather than wait until 1998. There was a corresponding reduction in 1998 before the entry rates started to increase again in 1999.

The Government is committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent family backgrounds, and has introduced Excellence Challenge, including the AimHigher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

Age Participation Index (API)[1] by social class Great Britain

Per cen.t entering HE in academic year beginning Social class	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
I Professional	79	72	73	76
II Intermediate	48	45	45	48
IIIN Skilled non manual	31	29	30	33
HIM Skilled Manual	19	18	18	19
IV Partly skilled	18	17	17	19
V Unskilled	14	13	13	14
I —IIIN	48	45	45	48
IIIM—V	18	17	17	18
All classes	33	31	32	33

[1] The API is defined as the number of GB domiciled initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate HEaged under 21, expressed as a percentage of the average number of 18 and 19 year olds in the population.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Derek Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many units there are to deal with excluded pupils aged under 11 in *(a)* Kent, *(b)* East Kent education division, *(c)* Sittingbourne and *(d)* Sheppey; and if he will make a statement. [85000]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Currently, in Kent there is one Dedicated Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for Key Stage 1 and 2, and five others with provision for Key Stage 1 and 2. These include 1 PRU in East Kent with provision for Key Stages 1 and 2. There are no PRUs with such provision in either Sittingbourne or Sheppey.

The Department is aware of the challenging circumstances in East Kent, and is liaising closely with the Authority to ensure that every excluded child receives an education. Kent has indicated to the Department that every permanently excluded child is currently receiving a suitable, full time education.

School Federations

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many expressions of interest in forming school federations have been received by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [84230]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* We have received 42 expressions of interest to date. Federations have been discussed at a series of conferences across England running from October to December 2002, to which all secondary heads have been invited. The response from these conferences has been very positive.

Teaching Vacancies

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teaching vacancies there were in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each of the past five years in each London borough. [84120]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The table shows the numbers of vacancies[1] in maintained schools in London as at January of each year.

	1998		*1999*		*2000*	
	Nursery/primary	*Secondary*	*Nursery/primary*	*Secondary*	*Nursery/primary*	*Secondary*
City of London	0	0	1	0	0	1
Camden	12	2	21	8	17	13
Greenwich	31	22	52	9	16	14
Hackney	51	9	38	30	47	22
Hammersmith and Fulham	35	12	15	8	14	8
Islington	27	15	10	3	20	11
Kensington and Chelsea	17	3	3	6	3	2
Lambeth	6	6	46	12	36	12

	1998		1999		2000	
	Nursery/primary	Secondary	Nursery/primary	Secondary	Nursery/primary	Secondary
Lewisham	31	18	21	8	18	20
Southwark	54	6	47	14	42	30
Tower Hamlets	52	13	80	12	71	26
Wandsworth	29	5	17	12	13	10
City of Westminster	13	4	14	11	15	14
Barking and Dagenham	10	7	12	3	8	9
Barnet	8	14	11	21	29	20
Bexley	1	5	0	7	13	16
Brent	20	8	13	17	5	5
Bromley	11	4	6	7	9	3
Croydon	8	5	25	11	8	28
Ealing	17	30	32	22	14	18
Enfield	11	6	19	9	13	15
Haringey	20	10	20	13	19	14
Harrow	9	2	12	5	24	14
Havering	0	15	3	10	1	17
Hillingdon	15	13	8	19	9	14
Hounslow	8	14	5	10	3	5
Kingston upon Thames	5	1	6	3	1	7
Merton	7	0	5	6	3	13
Newham	61	21	34	3	40	14
Redbridge	7	10	7	7	6	1
Richmond upon Thames	2	1	2	2	3	12
Sutton	4	5	2	5	0	1
Waltham Forest	43	4	2	5	0	4

	2001		2002	
	Nursery/primary	Secondary	Nursery/primary	Secondary
City of London	0	0	0	0
Camden	30	27	13	16
Greenwich	22	39	23	36
Hackney	51	45	21	38
Hammersmith and Fulham	15	28	37	44
Islington	38	13	17	20
Kensington and Chelsea	19	16	2	5
Lambeth	35	10	32	19
Lewisham	33	35	36	23
Southwark	62	33	13	8
Tower Hamlets	96	55	66	13
Wandsworth	22	25	18	24
City of Westminster	35	12	10	15
Barking and Dagenham	13	10	0	5
Barnet	55	41	26	15
Bexley	35	47	5	42
Brent	8	15	21	27
Bromley	26	35	10	19
Croydon	29	46	13	28
Ealing	13	53	21	19
Enfield	29	33	27	33
Haringey	22	19	30	26
Harrow	32	24	29	23
Havering	0	38	6	10
Hillingdon	16	30	27	24
Hounslow	4	14	19	52
Kingston upon Thames	9	12	3	12
Merton	2	11	7	6
Newham	52	49	26	16
Redbridge	9	31	4	6
Richmond upon Thames	9	18	6	19
Sutton	0	10	4	15
Waltham Forest	0	7	24	17

[1] Advertised vacancies for full-time permanent appointments (or appointments of at least one term). Includes vacancies filled on a temporary basis for less than one term.

Top-up Fees

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the cross-subsidy effect top-up fees for higher education would have between high cost degree courses and lower cost degree courses. [84143]

Margaret Hodge: We have announced our intention to publish in January a strategy document setting out our vision for the development and reform of higher education, including the outcome of the review of student support. It would not be right to say now exactly what options we are considering or what analyses we have undertaken.

University Merger (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 96W, whether *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department were consulted about the proposal to merge Imperial College and University College, London. [84469]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Neither Ministers nor officials were consulted. The Provost of University College and the Rector of Imperial College sent me a letter on the day they announced their proposals, informing me of their plans.

WALES

Business Start-ups

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with colleagues in the National Assembly of Wales on new business start-ups. [81009]

Peter Hain: I regularly meet with colleagues in the National Assembly for Wales and discuss a range of issues including new business start-ups.

Figures from the Welsh Development Agency show that initiatives launched by the National Assembly for Wales are already producing increases in business start ups in Wales. In the first half of the year more than 2,000 new businesses have been created in Wales with WDA assistance, an increase of over 60 per cent. compared with the same period last year. The new lending body "Finance Wales" has already injected £17.8 million into 72 new or expanding companies, and 2002–03 is a record year for RSA offers in Wales. It should bring in £623 million investment from 270 projects and create or safeguard 13,100 jobs.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to visit Brussels and Strasbourg in an official capacity. [82379]

Peter Hain: On present plans, I shall be attending the Convention on the Future of Europe Working Group on External Relations in Brussels on 3–4 December. Subject to my commitments as Secretary of State for Wales, I will attend the plenary sessions of the convention, which are expected to be held twice a month in Brussels until the convention ends in June.

During these visits to Brussels, I also intend to take every advantage of opportunities to pursue Welsh business.

I have no plans to visit Strasbourg at present.

WORK AND PENSIONS

25 Plus New Deal

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants have participated on the 25 Plus New Deal on *(a)* more than one, *(b)* more than two and *(c)* more than three occasions. [84499]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* At September 2002, 534,600 people had started on the New Deal 25 plus (402,340 individuals). Of these 102,820 clients (26 per cent. of all individual starters) have entered the programme more than once, 25,830 (6 per cent. of all individual starters) have entered the programme more than twice and 3,500 (1 per cent. of all individual starters) have entered the programme more than three times.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database.

Departmental Training Weekends

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in his Department have taken part in training weekends in the past 12 months; and at what cost *(a)* in total and *(b)* per person on average. [85120]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Funerals

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will remove parochial fees from his Department's funeral fund payments and treat the fees for a religious service in line with other disbursements; [83239]

(2) if he will make a statement on the range of parochial fees charged for funerals. [83696]

Malcolm Wicks: We are committed to providing a payment for a respectful funeral to people receiving income-related benefits or tax credits who have good reason for organising the funeral.

Social Fund funeral payments cover in full the cost of certain necessary, specified charges including fees levied by burial authorities and crematoria. Not everyone wishes to use, or is required to pay for, the services of a minister of religion or other religious fees. However, up to £600 is allowed for other funeral expenses, which gives the person arranging the funeral the freedom to select the items or services they consider appropriate. On 27 November, we announced that from next April this amount will rise to £700.

The Department does not hold information on the range of parochial fees charged for funerals and we have no plans to include fees for a religious service among the charges specified in regulations. However, we will continue to keep the level of support provided for funeral costs under review.

New Deal

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to improve the effectiveness of the New Deal for Young People in areas with the lowest success rates. [80540]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The New Deal has helped over 380,000 young people move into work throughout the country.

We are building on the programme's success, focusing more help on the most disadvantaged unemployed people in the most deprived areas of the country. We are, for example: introducing StepUP pilots in 20 deprived areas to provide transitional jobs for people who remain unemployed after the New Deal; starting to roll out the second phase of progress2work, providing recovering drug misusers with the extra help they need to move into work; running the Minority Ethnic Outreach programme in wards within five areas to strengthen the support available to jobless people from minority ethnic communities; and starting pilots in nine areas giving extra support for other disadvantaged groups such as ex-offenders, alcohol misusers and homeless people.

In addition, Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones are operating in areas with persistently high levels of unemployment, and have so far helped nearly 78,000 people into work. We are currently developing proposals to extend Employment Zone help to other client groups including New Deal returners.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what research his Department has undertaken into the sustainability of employment under the New Deal; and if he will place it in the Library; [84437]

(2) if he will make a statement on the sustainability of employment under the New Deal. [84438]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The New Deals have already helped nearly three-quarters of a million people move into work, the vast majority of whom have entered sustained jobs. For example, up to September 2002, nearly 80 per cent. of people moving into work through the New Deal for Young People and the New Deal 25 plus entered sustained jobs.

We have in place a wide-ranging programme of evaluation of the New Deals. This evaluation examines the benefits that the New Deals are providing, including the sustainability of employment. Evaluation reports are placed are placed in the Library as they are published.

Information on the number of people moving into sustained jobs through the New Deal for Young People and New Deal 25 plus are published quarterly in the Statistical First Release. These are also placed in the Library as they are published.

New Deal for Lone Parents

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2002, refence 83513, on the New Deal for Lone Parents, (1) how many of the 152,230 lone parents referred to had previously entered the New Deal gateway *(a)* once, *(b)* twice and *(c)* three times or more; [84442]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2002, reference 83513, on the New Deal for Lone Parents, how many lone parents have found work on the New Deal for Lone Parents, disregarding lone parents who had entered the New Deal gateway on a previous occasion. [84443]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The figure of 152,230 provided in my previous answer is the number of individual lone parents who had found work through the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) by the end of June 2002. 28,310 of these lone parents (18.6 per cent. of those who have found a job) had been on NDLP twice, and 5,550 (3.6 per cent. of those who have found a job) had been on NDLP three or more times. Some of these lone parents have used the programme successfully on a previous occasion, as the total number of jobs obtained through NDLP by June 2002 was 172,460.

Post Office Card Accounts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out the timetable for the advertising campaign for the Post Office Card Account applications; and if he will make a statement. [83651]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Department for Work and Pensions will be converting people to direct payment over a two-year period, with the first payments going into accounts in April 2003. An information campaign will support the conversion.

Informing people about the availability of the Post Office card account is part of this campaign rather than a separate advertising initiative. We need to ensure that people are aware of the range of options open to them, and in a position to choose what is appropriate and convenient for them. Our information campaign will take customers through the changes, including getting their money from their account at the Post Office and the availability of the Post Office card account.

There will be two main elements to our campaign. Customers will be supplied directly with information, which clearly sets out their "account options" and enables them to decide which account is right for them. Customers do not need to take any action until they receive a letter about the change. Until then they can keep their order book or giro.

In addition, we plan to make more general information available and also undertake some advertising. This activity will be timed to coincide with the build up of the number of people transferring to direct payment into accounts. Again, this activity will include reference to all of the "account options" including the Post Office card account.

The Government and Post Office Limited are working together to ensure that front-line Post Office staff have all the information they need to answer any questions from customers about banking facilities in Post Office branches.

The first invitation letters asking for account details started to go out to some Child Benefit customers at the end of October, other customers will be contacted in due course. The Veterans Agency started writing to its customers in early October.

The Post Office plan to have their card account service available from April 2003. The banks' own basic bank accounts are scheduled to become available through Post Office branches at the same time.

Since many people will rely on the card account to collect their benefit, pension or tax credit, it is essential that the systems supporting the card account are reliable and robust. The Post Office are carrying out extensive testing of systems, and also intend to undertake some piloting work in advance of April 2003.

In line with good practice, and in order to minimise risk, the intention is gradually to build up (starting from April 2003) the number of benefit customers and pensioners that we pay through the Post Office card account. As the system proves itself in live running, we will increase the number of people paid through the card account. And, at an appropriate time, those new tax credit customers who have asked for a Post Office card account will start to have their payment made in this way. In the intervening period, Tax Credit customers opting for a card account will be paid by giro and DWP customers by order book or giro as appropriate.

Rehabilitation Services

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to improve vocational rehabilitation services; and if he will make a statement. [83855]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Improved vocational rehabilitation services are key to our strategy for enabling people with health problems and disabilities to move into employment, and so become and remain independent.

Jobcentre Plus, in partnership with the NHS, has already tested work-focused rehabilitation programmes in Salford and Bristol. The programmes provided integrated support to enable people with chronic back pain to return to work. Trials finished in 2001, with many participants finding work as a result.

Building on this partnership approach, our new Green Paper "Pathways to Work—Helping people into employment", published on 18 November, proposes the establishment of groundbreaking rehabilitation programmes. These will be piloted in six areas across the country starting from late 2003, combining support to find jobs with health-focused rehabilitation.

The programmes will be complementary to any clinical care already being provided by primary care and community services in pilot areas. Their key focus will be to help those with conditions such as depression, back pain and heart disease understand the impact that their condition has and increase their confidence to work or train and lead as normal a life as possible.

In addition, the Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilot Project, a joint initiative with the Department of Health, is currently exploring ways in which we can support people faced with losing their employment through prolonged sickness or disability. The pilot will run from early 2003 to 2005, and will aim to provide robust evidence about the relative impact of three intervention strategies (boosting healthp are, boosting workplace support and a combined approach) in helping people to return to work.

Staff Training

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money has been spent on staff training in his Department in the past 12 months; and how many staff took part. [85121]

Mr. McCartney: During the 12 month period ending March 2002, the most recent year for which these data are available, the Department spent £97.3 million on staff training and development. This equates to an average of just under £800 for each of the approximately 123,000 staff in the Department.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Websites

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what Government Departments have bought into the new design for departmental websites. [85065]

Mr. Alexander: There is no single design for departmental websites. "The Guidelines for UK Government Websites", published in June this year, set out the standards for Government Departments to follow. This document includes 10 design guidelines, ranging from content, usability and delivering services for the citizen.

Genetic Modification (Scientific Panel)

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the membership of the scientific panel established by the Strategy Unit to consider the issue of genetic modification is; and which members have undertaken work for the biotechnology industry. [84726]

Mr. Alexander: The Strategy Unit is not responsible for the appointment of the scientific panel that has been asked to consider the science of genetic modification. This is being handled by the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the last census of the Afghan population was; and what discussions are taking place on the question of a new one. [84202]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

The most recent estimate of the Afghan population by the World bank in 2001 was 26.6 million with a further 2.2 million refugees in Pakistan and 1.5 million in Iran.

There has not been a census in Afghanistan since 1963. The UN began work on one in October but it is likely to take five years to complete.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to register Afghan adults so as to ensure universal suffrage in future elections. [84203]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

There is currently no electoral register of Afghan adults. We are considering ways in which we can work with the UN to assist the Afghan Transitional Administration to prepare for the elections, due in mid-2004.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts (Fines)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many fine defaulters were imprisoned by Inner London magistrates courts in each of the past three years. [83809]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

The number of fine defaulters imprisoned by Inner London magistrates courts was 99 in 1999; 58 in 2000; and 42 in 2001.

Wasted Costs

Mr. Soames: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what powers courts have to make a 'wasted costs' order. [82468]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Section 19A of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 enables the court, in criminal proceedings, to disallow or order the legal or other representative to meet the whole or any part of the 'wasted costs' incurred by a party as a result of any improper, unreasonable or negligent act or omission on the part of any representative or his employee.

In civil proceedings, an equivalent power rests in Section 51 of the Supreme Court Act 1981 which provides that the costs of proceedings are in the discretion of the court, subject to any enactment, or rules of court. Rule 44.14 of the Civil Procedure Rules provides the court with the power to make an order for 'wasted' costs against the party or his legal representative where they have failed to comply with a rule, practice direction or court order or where their conduct at any point in proceedings was unreasonable or improper.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Employment Tribunals

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the funding for conducting fair employment cases through the tribunal system will be introduced. [84130]

Mr. Browne: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has powers to provide assistance 1998 to complainants under the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order. Similar powers for the Equality Commission to provide assistance exist in the sex discrimination, race relations and disability legislation. Decisions on whether to assist a particular case are a matter for the Equality Commission.

Fair Employment Commission

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have approached the Fair Employment Commission in each of the last five years; how many cases were taken on by the Fair Employment Commission in each year; how much compensation was paid out by the Fair Employment Commission in each year; how much money was invested in the construction of the new Fair Employment Commission headquarters; and what assessment he has made of whether the Fair Employment Commission has sufficient funding to fulfil its obligations in the current year. [84450]

Mr. Browne: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland was established on 1 October 1999. It assumed the functions of the former Fair Employment Commission, Equal Opportunities Commission, Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Disability Council. It also has additional functions in relation to disability discrimination and the duties on public authorities under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

The following table provides the number of inquiries made on Fair Employment issues and the number of cases supported by the Fair Employment Commission/ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Inquiries on Fair Employment issues and Cases Supported by the Fair Employment Commission and Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Year	*Inquiries*	*Cases supported*
1998–99 (FEC)	1,813	144
1999–2000 (FEC and ECNI)	1,296	123
2000–01 (ECNI)	1,106	142
2001–02 (ECNI)	901	289
2002–03[1] (ECNI)	304	[2]13

[1] For the period up to end November 2002.
[2] Applications for legal support across all grounds, received between April and July 2002, were not processed pending the development of a revised Legal Enforcement Policy and Assistance Strategy. These cases are now being processed by ECNI.

Neither the Equality Commission, nor its predecessor, the Fair Employment Commission, is empowered to pay compensation and therefore none was paid. The Equality Commission is a tenant in Equality House. The building is rented under a 10-year lease agreement. The interior fit out of the building cost £1,570,701.98 (excluding VAT) and this cost is rentalised to the Commission over a 10-year period. The Equality Commission's budget for the current financial year was £6.7 million. Resourcing the Commission is kept under review and it has recently been awarded an increase of £113,000 for new activities.

Fire Service

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on how the employers' side of the negotiating machinery for the Fire Service of Northern Ireland *(a)* is mandated and *(b)* formulates its negotiating positions at the time of pay and service conditions bargaining. [84474]

Mr. Browne: The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland appoints two members to represent it on the National Joint Council (NJC) for local authorities' fire brigades. They take their mandate from the authority, and are subject to reappointment annually.

The authority formulates its negotiating positions in consultation with the NJC employers' side, which also includes representatives of the fire authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the additional sum which would be required in Northern Ireland to satisfy the pay increase demands of firefighters in the province. [83710]

Mr. Browne: To meet the Fire Brigades Union demand for a 40 per cent. rise in pay for firefighters would result in a £14 million increase in the annual pay bill and an immediate increase in pension liability of £40 million for the Fire Service in Northern Ireland.

Irish Fertiliser Industries

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have taken place between Government departments and the owners of the IFI/ Richardsons Plant in Belfast over the announcement of the plant's closure. [84387]

Mr. Pearson: The owners of Irish Fertiliser Industries are ICI and the Irish Government. Since the announcement of the company's closure on 15 October I have exchanged correspondence with Mary Harney TD, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in the Republic of Ireland, and with the Chief Executive of ICI. I also met the ICI Chief Executive and an official representative of the Irish Government in London on 28 November. My objective throughout these contacts has been to stress the need to treat the Belfast employees fairly.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations have been made by the Government to the Government of the Irish Republic in respect of its involvement in the decision to close the IFI/ Richardsons Plant in Belfast. [84386]

Mr. Pearson: The decision to close Irish Fertiliser Industries was taken by the Irish Government and ICI, the owners of the company. Since the closure announcement on 15 October, I have written to Mary Harney TD, Irish Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, stressing the importance of treating the employees in a fair and equitable manner. I have also met with an official representative of the Irish Government, along with the Chief Executive of ICI, and discussed my concerns with them in detail.

Princess Victoria

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals the Northern Ireland Office has to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the sinking of the Princess Victoria off the coast of County Antrim. [85032]

Angela Smith: The Department for Regional Development has agreed outline arrangements for a small commemorative event at Donaghadee Harbour where survivors were landed by the local lifeboat. Ards borough council will erect a memorial plaque adjacent to the RNLI berth and the Department plans to erect a flagpole resembling the foremast of the MV Princess Victoria. These events will complement local church services, the laying of wreaths at sea by the Donaghadee and Campbeltown lifeboats and a commemorative event planned by Larne borough council, Larne being the port to which the MV Princess Victoria was steaming when she sank.

Social Housing

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many of the new social housing units projected for this financial year have been constructed; and when the rest will be constructed; [80584]

(2) what assessment he has made of the new build social housing programme for 2002–03. [80583]

Mr. Browne: Given that both questions relate to the new build social housing programme, I shall answer them together.

For the current year, my Department has a programme for Government commitment to fund housing associations to start 1,400 new social houses. However, that target has now been revised to 1,200. The 200 houses that have been deferred will start in the first quarter of the next financial year.

To date, 266 new homes have started on site. The remaining 934 will start between now and 31 March 2003. The reduction in the number of starts this year can be attributed to:

the need to allocate additional funding to other housing activity, for example, the Northern Ireland co-ownership scheme which is attracting a higher number of applicants than anticipated;

the planning moratorium that was in place earlier in the year which has delayed several schemes;

difficulties in acquiring sites and delays in processing planning applications; and

trouble at interface areas in Belfast which has had an adverse affect on previously agreed start dates.

New procedures, to be introduced for 2003–04, will help address some of these problems enabling targets for future programmes to be met.

Suicides

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the suicide rate in north and west Belfast. [85033]

Mr. Browne: I am concerned at the number of suicides in North and West Belfast. The North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust has developed a strategy for positive mental health promotion and suicide prevention which was launched in 1999. The Trust has appointed a suicide awareness co-ordinator who is working with a wide range of community and statutory agencies to provide information, training and support. In addition the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will be issuing a mental health promotion strategy and action plan early in the New Year which will include a separate section on suicide prevention.

Vacant Properties

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to prevent vacant properties in Northern Ireland falling into decay and dereliction. [84998]

Mr. Browne: The existence of empty property can be symptomatic of an underlying and complex interaction of wider social problems, including urban and rural decay, unemployment, crime and vandalism, anti-social behaviour etc. Solutions, therefore, are not just about good housing management, but require more complex strategies and inter-agency initiatives. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, as the comprehensive regional housing authority for Northern Ireland, has put in place a number of measures to address the problem of empty homes in the public and private sectors throughout the province.

Local strategies have already been implemented to address the range of problems occurring in difficult to let areas. The Housing Executive's existing action plan has been progressed as follows:

Estate strategies involving improvement, sale and/or selective demolition have been put in place for numerous estates (currently 1,500 public sector properties are scheduled for demolition).

The general over-supply problems of the 'new towns' growth centres (Craigavon, Antrim, Ballymena) have been systematically addressed and improved although further work is required.

Demolition and environmental improvement works at interfaces where feasible.

Urban renewal programmes in private areas involving improvement, replacement or a combination.

Grant aid including group repair schemes in some private areas exhibiting signs of decline.

Marketing, community safety and anti-blight measures in public sector estates including use of alarm systems, the appointment of neighbourhood wardens and other security measures.

Improvement or demolition of unpopular, non-traditional housing including decapitation (partial demolition); privatisation and more intensive management eg concierge.

The emergence of a number of locations as existing or potential over-supply areas have been under investigation and individual estate strategies have been and are being brought forward.

In addition, legislation is proposed that will provide for the introduction of a shorthold tenancy, to be managed by the housing associations. This is designed to allow vacant properties to be let for short periods where owners are reluctant to let for longer terms.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of empty dwellings in Northern Ireland *(a)* in Belfast, *(b)* in Derry and *(c)* outside Belfast and Derry, broken down by (i) county and (ii) district council areas. [84999]

Mr. Browne: Figures from the Northern Ireland House Condition Survey 2001 are currently being validated and will be published by the Northern Ireland housing executive early in 2003. The survey will provide up-to-date figures on the number of empty dwellings in Northern Ireland across all tenures.

In relation to the housing executive's own stock the following table sets out the position at August 2002. The figures include properties vested for demolition in urban renewal areas.

District council area	*Long term*[1]	*Pending demolition*[2]
Belfast	379	1,257
North Down	5	74
Ards	3	41
Castlereagh	14	51
Lisburn	0	45
Down	0	1
Banbridge	4	14
Newry and Mourne	24	58
Armagh	46	12
Craigavon	194	144
Dungannon	105	4
Fermanagh	14	0
Ballymena	47	127
Antrim	0	20
Newtownabbey	42	79
Carrick	28	136
Larne	135	92
Moyle	1	5
Ballymoney	0	0
Coleraine	85	93
Derry	16	7
Limavady	0	0
Magherafelt	17	0
Strabane	21	2
Omagh	123	3
Cookstown	19	0
Total	1,322	2,265

[1] Long term voids are dwellings which are difficult to let due to lack of demand.
Included within this category are dwellings which have been secured to prevent
vandalism and properties that have been fire damaged.
[2] Voids pending demolition are properties located in redevelopment areas or purpose built stock which have received housing executive board approval to be demolished.

HEALTH

Drug Addiction Programmes

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has collated on average waiting times for admission to *(a)* state-supported methadone programmes and *(b)* state-supported programmes aimed at overcoming heroin addiction that do not involve the prescription of methadone. [83858]

Ms Blears: This information is not available in the format requested. The table below provides waiting time figures collected by the national treatment agency in December 2001, along with locally agreed targets for 2002 and the national targets for 2002–03 and 2003–04. The specialist prescribing and general practitioner prescribing treatment modalities below include methadone programmes, and the other figures (with the exception of inpatient detoxification) include non-methadone treatments.

Treatment modality	*2001 figures (weeks)*	*Local 2002 targets (weeks)*	*NTA 2002–03 target (weeks)*	*NTA 2003–04 target (weeks)*
In-patient detoxification	12	7.1	4	2
Specialist prescribing	14.1	7.5	6	3
GP prescribing	5.7	4.3	4	2
Day care	6	3.9	4	3
Residential rehabilitation	9.1	6.3	4	3

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many state-funded places are available for heroin users on *(a)* methadone programmes and *(b)* programmes aimed at overcoming heroin addiction that do not involve the prescription of methadone. [83859]

Ms Blears: Up to March 2001, the number of drug users in treatment with drug misuse agencies and general practitioners (GPs) was around 118,500. The majority of those entering treatment are heroin users. Over the two-year period from 1998–99 to 2000–01 there has been a 16 per cent. increase in the numbers of drug users accessing drug treatment services.

The specialist prescribing and GP prescribing treatment modalities in the following table include places in methadone programmes, and the other figures (with the exception of in-patient detoxification) include non-methadone treatments.

Treatment modality	*Number in treatment*	*Percentage in treatment*
In-patient detoxification	2,424	2
Specialist prescribing	103,094	87
GP prescribing	8,180	7
Day care	706	1
Residential rehabilitation	1,902	2

Dentistry

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to review the scale of payment made to dentists undertaking NHS work. [82631]

Mr. Lammy: Dentists fees are reviewed annually by the independent Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body on remuneration, who consider evidence submitted by the Government and representatives of the profession. Officials from my Department are working closely with the profession to see how changes can be made to dentists' remuneration to improve the service for patients and the dental team.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of adults are registered with an NHS dentist. [82633]

Mr. Lammy: 44 per cent. of adults were registered with a General Dental Service (GDS) dentist in England at 30 September 2002, and this rate has remained stable since 1998. Those patients who do not wish to, or are unable to register may be seen on the NHS under occasional treatment arrangements.

Patients wishing to be treated under the NHS should be able to obtain details of dentists accepting new patients for registration in their area by contacting NHS Direct.

IT Systems

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on integration of the information technology system in the NHS. [82632]

Ms Blears: The NHS is preparing to implement the "Integrated Care Records Service", this will bring together all the health information of a single patient into one record. The record will be computer based and accessible from any point in the NHS.

Prisoners (Health)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of health provision, with particular reference to mental health, for inmates of HMP Eastwood Park. [82634]

Jacqui Smith: Eastwood Park has worked with its local NHS partners to complete a full health needs assessment, including the mental health needs for its inmates. Eastwood Park was also among the first prisons to join the NHS-funded prison mental health in-reach project in July 2001, providing services within the prison setting.

Foundation Hospitals

19. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on borrowing mechanisms for foundation hospitals. [82635]

29. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the prospectus for Foundation Hospital status bids. [82645]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) earlier today.

Primary Care

20. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to consult patients' representatives on the delivery of primary care. [82636]

Mr. Hutton: Patient Advocacy and Liaison services and Patients Forums will be established in every PCT to enable patients and the public to contribute to the design, development and delivery of primary care services.

The Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, to be established next year, will promote public involvement in community decision making processes.

Palliative Care

21. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the provision of palliative care is a core service. [82637]

Ms Blears: The principles of palliative care—holistic, patient-centred care— apply across all conditions and in all settings. Increasingly palliative care is being seen as an integral part of care and we are committed to delivering our pledge in the NHS Cancer Plan to increase support for specialist palliative care by £50 million by 2004.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the extra money allocated to primary care trusts for palliative care will be ringfenced. [84095]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health has made available an extra £10 million from central budgets for specialist palliative care for 2002–2003. This money has been allocated for primary care trusts (PCTs). It has been allocated to PCTs with clear instructions that it must be spent on specialist palliative care and that its use should be in line with local strategic plans and agreed by all relevant local partners.

To make sure this extra money is deployed appropriately, strategic health authorities have been asked to ensure joint National Health service and voluntary sector agreement to its use and to provide investment and out-turn reports showing how it has been spent.

Children's Mental Health

22. **Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will increase financial support for services for children with mental health problems and their families. [82638]

Jacqui Smith: On 16 October the Secretary of State for Health announced that mental health services for children would receive an additional investment of £140 million over the next three years through grants to local authorities. Together with new national health service investment this will help deliver a comprehensive mental health service for children in every area by 2006.

Osteopaths

23. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the regulation governing the accreditation of osteopaths. [82639]

Mr. Hutton: I have no current plans to review the regulations governing the accreditation of osteopaths.

Carson Report

24. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Carson report. [82640]

Mr. Hutton: The Government have accepted the conclusions of the Carson Report on the provision of Out of Hours Services and is making progress on its implementation.

There are now 34 integrated exemplar sites operating across England and covering some 10 million people. These are testing out the model recommended by the Carson Report. Some—such as those in Nottingham, Chesterfield and Folkestone are working exceptionally well. However, experience drawn from all the exemplars will inform future development.

Prescriptions

25. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the establishment of NICE on the variations in prescription practice between different areas. [82641]

Mr. Lammy: The majority of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance so far is focused on clinical activity by hospital specialists. We do not hold the detailed information required to make a comprehensive assessment in these cases. However, the Institute has commissioned a team from York university to undertake a study to describe and explain the extent and variation of guidance implementation. The study will make recommendations for implementation strategies and is expected to report shortly.

Dental Health

27. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to improve dental health in those areas where there is the greatest need for improvement. [82643]

Mr. Lammy: In this session of Parliament the Government propose to legislate for far-reaching reform of national health service dental services which will enable Primary Care Trusts to address local oral health needs and will give primary care dentists the opportunity to focus on prevention and health promotion as well as treatment.

We are seeking to strengthen the evidence base on the fluoridation of water so that health communities wishing to consider this option for reducing dental decay may have fuller information on the effects of fluoride on health. We have also introduced the "Brushing for Life" scheme whereby Health Visitors provide oral health advice to mothers of infants and give them a pack containing a toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste to encourage the early establishment of good oral hygiene habits. The scheme is supported in areas with the highest rates of tooth decay in children.

Mental Health Legislation

28. **Stephen Hesford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the production, formulation and presentation of a new Mental Health Bill. [82644]

Jacqui Smith: A draft Mental Health Bill and consultation document was published on 25 June 2002. The consultation exercise closed on 16 September and we are currently considering almost 2,000 replies. We intend to introduce a Bill as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Transplant Patients (Sheffield)

30. **Mr. Allan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the future care of heart and lung transplant patients from the Sheffield area. [82646]

Mr. Hutton: I visisted the Northern General Hospital Cardio-Thoracic Unit on 20 June this year.

I subsequently met the chair, chief executive and medical director of the Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust on 11 September 2002. On both occasions I received representations on the future care of heart and lung transplant patients.

I have also received three letters on this subject from hon. Members.

PHLS Laboratories

31. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future funding of PHLS laboratories located in district hospitals. [82647]

Ms Blears: The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) laboratories that are to be transferred to national health service trusts will be transferred with their current level of funding. The details of this funding are currently being discussed by the Department's Health Protection Agency project team with the key staff in the PHLS and the NHS trusts.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the transfer of management of Public Health Laboratories has been excluded from his regulatory reform proposals. [84254]

Ms Blears: The consultation paper "Health Protection: A Consultation Document on creating a health protection agency" made proposals for changes to primary legislation. Responses showed widespread support for creating the agency, and we aim to establish it as a non-departmental public body from 1 April 2004, subject to legislative time being available. At that stage, we intend that it will take responsibility for functions currently performed by the National Radiological Protection Board.

As an interim step towards this, we intend to establish a special health authority, also to be called the Health Protection Agency, from 1 April 2003. The intention is that this special health authority will be responsible for the functions proposed for the agency under the NHS Act.

The transfer of laboratories from the Public Health Laboratory Service to the national health service does not require change to primary legislation. A discussion paper on the transfer process was published in June 2002, and the intention is to complete the transfers by the end of March 2003.

Child Obesity

32. **Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government are taking to tackle child obesity. [82648]

38. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on measures to tackle obesity among young people. [82654]

Ms Blears: The Government are committed to tackling the rising trend in childhood obesity and we have put in place cross-Government programmes of work to improve eating habits and increase physical activity levels. As part of the national service framework for coronary heart disease, local programmes of effective policies on overweight and obesity are also in place.

Care Services (York)

33. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for health what steps his Department is taking to stimulate an increase in the number of nursing and residential care home beds and the availability of domiciliary care services in York. [82649]

Jacqui Smith: York was one of the 55 councils targeted for extra resources as part of the Building Care Capacity Grant. They are receiving nearly £1 million over the two years 2001–03, which they are spending on additional capacity in the independent care sector.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 23 July, we will be providing an extra £1 billion to councils over the next three years. These extra resources can be used to further stabilise the care home sector. It will also ensure that by 2005, there will be twice as many older people receiving the intensive help that they need to live at home than there were in 1995.

Heart Disease

34. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what he plans to do to prevent early deaths from heart disease in the areas where this is most common. [82650]

Ms Blears: The Government place a strong emphasis on reducing inequalities in health. The recently published planning and priorities framework set key targets for the national health service over the next three years. This document requires the NHS to 'contribute to a national reduction in death rates from coronary heart disease (CHD) of at least 25 per cent. in people under 75 by 2005 compared to 1995–97, targeting the 20 per cent. of areas with the highest rates of CHD'.

A further target, which requires the establishment of practice-based registers to cover the majority of patients at high risk of CHD, will focus the actions of primary care on the prevention of CHD.

The national service framework for CHD sets standards for the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of CHD. This requires primary care trusts (PCTs) to set in place policies to reduce smoking, to promote healthy eating, to promote physical activity and to reduce overweight and obesity. It is through focusing on these areas that PCTS in areas with high rates of CHD will make progress in reducing premature deaths from CHD.

Smallpox Vaccine

35. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of smallpox vaccine. [82651]

Mr. Hutton: Yesterday I gave a written ministerial statement setting out how the national health service would respond to a potential smallpox terrorist attack.

There are three components to the Department's preparation for response to a possible smallpox emergency: improved vaccine stocks, a plan of action setting out the steps to be taken in the event of an outbreak, and as a first step, immunising staff who could deal safely with any potential smallpox cases.

Copies of the Department's smallpox plan have been placed in the Vote Office and will be placed in the Library.

Private Health Care

36. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy on the use of private health facilities by the NHS. [82652]

Mr. Hutton: Our policy is to promote greater plurality and diversity in the provision of national health service care, including the use of private and voluntary sector providers where they offer high clinical standards and value for money.

Pulmonary Disease

37. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to reduce the number of deaths from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. [82653]

Ms Blears: The major cause of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is smoking. That is why the Government have set up a comprehensive smoking cessation service. In the four-year period to 2003, we have allocated £73 million to the national health service to provide a national NHS smoking cessation service. Smoking cessation aids have also been made available on NHS prescription. Additionally an important element of the overall tobacco strategy is the health education programme to which some £55 million has been allocated in the period 1999–2000 to 2002–03.

Officials are holding a meeting in the new year with the National Asthma Campaign, British Thoracic Society and the British Lung Foundation on 28 February to discuss respiratory illness in the national service framework (NSF) for older people, and the effect of general NSF principles including rehabilitation on COPD patients.

Expert groups such as the British Thoracic Society have developed clinical guidelines for the treatment of COPD.

Pulmonary rehabilitation is increasingly offered in COPD, particularly to older people, to help them achieve their highest level of function and independence. It has been shown to improve exercise capacity, and to reduce anxiety and depression.

Acrylamide

39. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on acrylamide. [82655]

Ms Blears: Acrylamide has been found to occur in a wide range of home-cooked and processed foods including chips and crisps. It has not been found in uncooked or boiled foods, and appears to be formed during cooking by methods such as frying and baking.

Acrylamide has been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals. However, this is not a new risk, as it is likely that we have been exposed to acrylamide in food for generations.

The Food Standards Agency is commissioning research and surveillance to ascertain the reason for, and extent of, acrylamide formation, but in the meantime has advised that on the basis of current evidence people should eat a balanced diet including a variety of fruit and vegetables, and that as part of a balanced diet people should moderate their consumption of fried and fatty foods.

Hospital Discharges

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review statutory guidance on hospital discharge to ensure that the needs of carers in paid employment are taken into account during discharge planning. [84233]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* In discharging people from hospital, account should be taken of the needs and personal circumstances of carers, including any extra support needed by carers in paid employment. This will be emphasised in the forthcoming revision of the hospital discharge workbook.

Care Homes (Insurance)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for care home insurance liability of the postponement of criminal records bureau checks and the protection of vulnerable adults list. [84592]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* A criminal record disclosure forms one of many checks persons caring for vulnerable adults have in order to work with this client group. Measures are already in place to ensure the projection of vulnerable adults from abuse. Persons caring for vulnerable adults continue to be subject to rigorous pre-employment checks, including confirming previous employment history and taking up references, to ensure their suitability for the position in question. Therefore these postponements should not represent an increase in the insurance liability of care homes.

Agency Nurses (West Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each primary care trust in West Sussex has spent this year on agency nursing staff. [83290]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Angina Treatments

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are being treated under the pilot schemes for enhanced external counterpulsation for angina; which hospitals are involved in the pilots; and what the cost is of a course of treatment. [83588]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The national research register, a register containing details of research funded by, or of interest to, the National Health Service, has details of the following projects involving enhanced external counterpulsation.

Project	*Hospital*	*Number of patients*	*Status*
Does EECP help patients with refractory angina?	Hammersmith hospital	15	complete
Does EECP help increase exercise capacity in heart failure?	Hammersmith hospital	20	ongoing
How does the efficacy of EECP for the relief of angina compare in patients whose angina is not controlled by usual medical therapy?	Castle Hill hospital, Hull	12	complete

No information is available about cost.

Antibiotics

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the amount of over-prescribing of antibiotics in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [84802]

Ms Blears: We have no direct evidence of over-prescribing of antibiotics in the National Health Service. Data from the prescription cost analysis system show that the number of prescriptions dispensed in the community in England was 23.3 per cent. lower in 2001 than in 1995, 37.9 million items compared to 49.4 million items.

Our strategy to combat infectious disease Getting Ahead of the Curve identified antimicrobial resistance as a priority and a targeted action plan is being developed. This will build on existing initiatives to promote prudent prescribing of antibiotics.

Birth Statistics (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many live births there were, broken

down by ethnic groups, in hospitals in Buckinghamshire in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 1998 and *(e)* 1997. [83335]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Cancer Care

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the money pledged for improved cancer care has been taken up by primary care trusts and hospital trusts. [83700]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect information on how much is spent on individual programmes. However, we know that all areas have invested in cancer services. The national cancer director, Professor Mike Richards, is working with chief executives of strategic health authorities to ensure that the money allocated for cancer services this year and next year gets through to cancer services and that Cancer Plan targets are met.

We are devolving power from the centre to locally run services to allow the freedom to innovate and improve care for patients. The increased resources that we have made available and will continue to make available to support the implementation of the Cancer Plan will move to the National Health Service frontline. Primary care trusts will have freedom to decide where NHS resources are best spent, but they will need to account publicly for how they have used resources against the test of high clinical standards and good value for money.

Cancer Treatment (Musgrove Hospital)

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are on the waiting list for cancer treatment at Musgrove Hospital. [83385]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of patients waiting for cancer treatment is not collected centrally. Waiting list information is collected at consultant specialty level and it is, therefore, not possible to derive those patients waiting cancer treatment.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the NVQ level 4 registered managers award for care homes; and if he will make a statement. [83763]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The Registered Managers (Adults) Level 4 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) is a new award that is based on the national occupational standards for registered managers, adult residential, that were developed by Topss England last year. This NVQ was first offered in March 2002 and the candidates undertaking these courses will not yet have completed the award. It is therefore not possible to assess how effective the new award will be in the workplace at this stage.

National occupational standards are reviewed on a five year rolling programme and any changes are then reflected in the associated NVQ. In the meantime, the reports done by National Care Standard Commission (NCSC) Inspectors should provide details of any improvements in the management of care homes and state whether a registered manager holds the new registered manager (adults) award.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the available capacity in the training sector to provide *(a)* care staff with NVQ level 2 and *(b)* registered managers with NVQ level 4, by 2005. [83764]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* We are aware that there is not a very strong National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) infrastructure within the care sector at present. This is why part of the £15 million in the training strategy implementation fund for 2002–03 is being used to support 11,500 line managers who are undertaking training to become NVQ assessors, verifiers and mentors. The fund is administered by Topss England, the former national training organisation for social care.

In order to receive some of these funds, social care employers are invited to develop, either alone or in partnership, arrangements to support the establishment and development of work based assessment, verification and mentoring arrangements. This will both improve the quality of existing provision and increase the availability of appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

Officials from my Department are also working with Department of Education and Skills and Topss England to reduce barriers to completion of NVQs and improve the quantityand quality of provision.

Child Migrants

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been disbursed under the aegis of the Support Fund for the Welfare of Child Migrants; how many benefited from the fund; and what assistance is now given to child migrants. [84030]

Jacqui Smith: The Government made available £1 million over three years, ending in 2002, for a support fund for travel and subsistence for former child migrants who wished to make first-time visits to the United Kingdom to be reunited with close family. By the end of October this year the Fund had helped 430 former child migrants. A further five may still be supported by it, depending on the state of their health.

This Government continues to fund the work of the child migrants trust, which helps former child migrants trace their families and provides support for family reunions.

Child Protection

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the Departments with which he has interdepartmental links regarding the protection of children from physical and sexual abuse; and when he has had meetings with each of these Departments since May 1997. [83349]

Jacqui Smith: The Department works closely with all other Government Departments which have an interest in safeguarding children.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has had no meetings with ministerial colleagues specifically regarding the protection of children from physical and sexual abuse. I have policy responsibility for child protection and therefore attend interdepartmental meetings in this connection.

Children in Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of young people leaving care in each year since 1993 were aged 16. [84024]

Jacqui Smith: The proportion of young people aged 16 leaving care in each year since 1993 is shown in the table.

Number of young people who left care aged 16, since 1993—England

Year ending 31 March	*Total number of leavers*	*Number of leavers aged 16*	*Percentage of leavers aged 16*
1993	32,400	3,000	9
1994	33,100	3,000	9
1995	33,200	3,400	10
1996	32,400	3,500	11
1997	30,300	3,400	11
1998	29,000	3,300	11
1999	27,100	2,900	11
2000	26,800	2,900	11
2001	25,100	2,400	10

Note:
All numbers rounded to the nearest 100
Source:
DH Form SSDA903

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of responses to the consultation on the complaints procedure for children in care, "Listening to People". [84806]

Jacqui Smith: We will place in the Library copies of responses to the consultation document "Listening to People", except those where respondents requested that replies remain confidential, in the next few weeks.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people left care in each of the past five years; and of those, how many left without having attained any GCSEs at A*-G grades. [84022]

Jacqui Smith: These data are only available from year ending 31 March 2000 onwards. The available information is set out in the table.

Number of Children who ceased to be looked after during the years ending 31 March 2000 to 2002 by age and educational qualifications

England *Numbers*

	2000	*2001*	*2002*
All care leavers in the year (0 to 18 years)	26,800	25,100	[1]—
Care leavers aged 16 and over	6,760	6,560	6,340
of which:			
The number with no GCSE passes (A*-G)	4,780	4,200	3,850

[1] Indicates figure not available until March 2003
All figures rounded to the nearest 10.
Above tables excludes all children looked after under agreed series of short term placements.

Colorectal Cancer Screening

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce colorectal cancer screening. [84031]

Ms Blears: In a speech to the Britain Against Cancer Conference on 5 November 2002, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health reaffirmed his commitment to introduce a national screening programme for colorectal cancer and to improve services for symptomatic patients. It will take several years to do this. The national cancer director will be working with all the relevant experts to determine the best way forward, and specifically to consider workforce, capacity and skills requirements for both screening and symptomatic services.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will extend the guarantee of employment under Shifting the Balance of Power by a further 12 months for CHC staff; what his policy is on the terms of 'CHC Transition Issues: Human Resource Framework' issued by his Department in November 2001; and if he will make a statement on the TUPE rights of CHC staff. [84404]

Mr. Lammy: A 12-month guarantee of continued employment was given until 31 March 2003, for all staff, including Community Health Council staff, affected by Shifting the Balance of Power (StBOP) who were transferring to strategic health authorites (StHAs) on 1 April 2002. Over 20,000 staff were involved in StBOP reorganisation. Because of the numbers involved, a one years employment guarantee was given to enable a smooth transition. The 'CHC Transition Issues: Human Resource Framework was issued to cover only the transfer to the StHAs. It was not intended for any other purpose. We are currently working with the trade unions and other interested parties on a new human resources document to support CHC staff and managers affected by the abolition of CHCs.

The commission for patient and public involvement in health is a non-departmental public body and is not part of the National Health Service. Its role will be very different to those of CHCs. As a result, the Government has received legal advice that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) would not apply.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the abolition date is for community health councils. [84444]

Mr. Lammy: Community Health Councils (CHCs) will be abolished once the new arrangements for patient and public involvement are functioning. We will make an announcement as soon as a date is set.

Contraception

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his action to reduce the rate of conceptions among women under 18-years-old. [83164]

Ms Blears: The Social Exclusion Unit Teenage Pregnancy Report was published in June 1999. This set out the Government's teenage pregnancy strategy with the goal of reducing the under 18 conception rate by 50 per cent., by 2010. An interim reduction target of 15 per cent., by 2004 is set out in the Government Manifesto and NHS Plan. A second goal of the strategy is to increase to 60 per cent., by 2010 the participation of teenage parents in education, training or employment to reduce their long term risk of social exclusion.

The strategy has a 30 point action plan. 26 of the action points have been completed with two action points, 11 and 20, due to be completed by the end of the financial year.

Action point 13 is to deliver guidance on the circumstances in which different health professionals may prescribe, supply and administer contraceptives to under 16s. Further work is being undertaken to identify the extent and nature of confusion among health professionals to inform the need and content of further guidance.

The target completion date for Action point 29 is 2003.

There are encouraging early signs that the strategy is working. There has been a 6 per cent., reduction in the under 18 and under 16 conception rate from the baseline year of 1998 with latest data showing a reduction in the under 18 conception rate for the 12th successive quarter.

However, considerable further work is needed to ensure that activity is sustained and monitored. Our response to the first annual report of the independent advisory group on teenage pregnancy was published in June 2002 and sets out a further programme of work to deliver our headline goals. Our commitment is further underlined by the inclusion of the under 18 reduction target in the public service agreements for both the Department and local government.

Delayed Discharges

26. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of delayed discharges was in *(a)* North Yorkshire and *(b)* England on *(i)* 1 April 1997 and (ii) 1 April 2002. [82642]

Jacqui Smith: The delayed discharge rate for people aged 75 and over in North Yorkshire in the first quarter of 1997–98 was 3.9 per cent. In the last quarter of 2001–02, the rate was 8.5 per cent. The equivalent rates for England were 13.3 per cent., and 9.4 per cent., respectively, a reduction of 21 per cent., in the number of older people whose discharge was delayed.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff in each *(a)* local authority, *(b)* primary care trust and *(c)* health authority in England will be required to implement the proposed fines for delayed discharge. [83850]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* Health and social care agencies have, over a number of years, developed local information systems to help them tackle delayed discharges. In the future, they will need to agree between themselves what data they need to prepare for the introduction of reimbursement. That information should flow from existing systems.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he will measure the degree to which delayed discharges are widespread in March 2004 in order to ascertain whether targets relating to delayed discharges have been met. [84043]

Jacqui Smith: This will be evident from the progress achieved by March 2004 in comparison with the number of delayed transfers of care at the time that the NHS Plan was published.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his definition of a delayed discharge is. [84044]

Jacqui Smith: The definition used in information collected via the Department's Service and Financial Framework Report returns specifies that "a delayed discharge occurs when a patient is ready for transfer from an 'acute' bed, but still occupying an 'acute' bed in a hospital. The patient being ready for transfer when a clinician in conjunction with the multi-disciplinary team have decided both that the patient no longer requires to occupy an 'acute' hospital bed and is safe to be transferred."

Dementia

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what amount of the NHS budget has been spent on providing specialist treatment for people with dementia in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [84856]

(2) what provision the NHS makes for specialist staff to treat people with dementia; and if he will make a statement; [84855]

(3) what plans he has to *(a)* develop specialist care and *(b)* to increase funding, for the treatment of people suffering from dementia; and if he will make a statement. [84857]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Government fully recognise the importance of ensuring that the needs of people with dementia and their carers are met. For that reason, the national service framework (NSF) for older people has set a standard and within this a service model that includes access to specialist care. NSF implementation will ensure that people with dementia receive the care and treatment they need. There are milestones to monitor progress.

The Government are making available by 2003–04 an extra £1.4 billion for new investment in better health and social services for older people. Older people with dementia will benefit from this new investment and the Government have confirmed its commitment to ensuring that, as appropriate, people with dementia receive drugs and treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. Final decisions on funding for mental health in 2003–04 will be made soon as part of the work on primary care trust allocations and central budgets.

In 2001 there were 350 consultants in the old age psychiatry in England—most established services now have more than one. Following publication of the NSF for older people, the Department is examining the training needs of all staff working with people with dementia.

Information on national health service spending on specialist treatment for people with dementia is not available.

Detained Children

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in England, who were the subject of inquiries in 2001–02 under *(a)* section 17 and *(b)* section 47 of the Children Act 1989 were in *(i)* prison service detention, (ii) local authority secure units subject to section 23(5) Children and Young Persons Act 1969 and (iii) local authority secure units subject to section 25 Children Act 1989. [84074]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Diabetes

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people under the age of 18 years were diagnosed as diabetic in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the North West of England in the last year for which figures are available. [82376]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally. However, The latest in-patient admissions information held by the Department for the number of people under the age of 18 years with diabetes in the Lancashire health authorities and the North West Region is shown in the table.

Admissions to hospitals by area of treatment for diabetic ketoacidosis in patients aged under 18 years old

2000–01	*Number*
QCX East Lancashire HA	21
QCY North West Lancashire HA	24
QC4 Morecambe Bay HA	7
North West	296

Notes:
The primary diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the diabetes national service framework. [85219]

Mr. Lammy: We shall be publishing the delivery strategy for the diabetes national service framework in the next few weeks.

Diagnostic Treatment (Mid-Surrey)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on plans to locate a diagnostic treatment centre in mid-Surrey. [83567]

Ms Blears: Work is currently on-going to finalise the Surrey and Sussex Strategic Health Authority's capacity plan. The Department's directorate of health and social care for the south of England is supporting the strategic health authority in this process. The capacity plan will identify a range of solutions to address the identified capacity constraints in the Surrey and Sussex health community. Any decision on the location of a diagnosis and treatment centre in Mid-Surrey will be taken as part of this process.

Dialysis

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are receiving dialysis treatments in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the North West of England and *(c)* England. [83791]

Jacqui Smith: The figures in the able are for 2001. They have been collated from estimates provided by the United Kingdom renal registry and from local National Health Service sources and should therefore only be used only as a guide. Activity information on hospital attendance for dialysis is being collected centrally for the first time in 2002–2003.

	Haemodialysis	*Peritoneal Dialysis*	*Total*
Lancashire	181	123	304
North West	1,090	712	1,802
England	11,076	5,187	16,263

The Department at the moment does not centrally collect information on dialysis patients. However, information is being collected for the first time in 2002–03 as part of the new 'regular day or night attenders' dataset.

East Elmbridge and Mid-Surrey PCT

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide funding to enable the East Elmbridge and Mid-Surrey PCT to maintain current service levels next year. [83568]

Ms Blears: The announcement of three-year allocations to primary care trusts will be made soon. It will then be for the East Elmbridge and Mid-Surrey Primary Care Trust to determine spending priorities consistent with the recently published priorities and planning framework 2003–06.

Electro-acupuncture

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the chief executive of St Richard's Hospital, West Sussex on the availability of staff to administer electro-acupuncture; and if he will make a statement. [83796]

Ms Blears: There have been no recent discussions with the chief executive of St. Richard's hospital. However I wrote to the hon. Member on 3 September 2002 about this matter.

GPs (Closed Lists)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners in *(a)* Kent and *(b)* the south-east are operating a closed-list policy. [82740]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Handrails

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which public bodies supply handrails to the elderly to prevent falls. [84047]

Jacqui Smith: Local council and national health service trust community equipment services are able to provide handrails to older and disabled people. These services, although currently separate, will be fully integrated by 2004 as set out in the NHS Plan.

In addition, local councils may provide handrails under other arrangements for housing adaptations.

Health Budget (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the total health budget for Leeds is dedicated to Leeds West. [81491]

Jacqui Smith: For the current financial year strategic health authorities share their recurrent revenue allocations between their primary care trusts (PCTs) in line with guidance issued by the Department.

In 2002–03, £94.8 million (revenue) was allocated to the Leeds West Primary Care Trust. This represents 15 per cent. of the total allocation to the five PCTs serving Leeds.

Heart Hospitals

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with O.R. International on their plans to establish several heart hospitals in England; and if he will make a statement. [82529]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Officials have had one informal meeting with OR International. Any discussions will need to be held in the context of the national revascularisation strategy and the proper process of tendering for bids to expand capacity.

Hepatitis C

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure he plans to undertake in 2002–03 to encourage public awareness of hepatitis C; and what proportion of that expenditure is planned for advertising on television. [83018]

Ms Blears: We have made approximately £430,000 available in 2002–03 to fund work connected with increasing professional and public awareness. We do not anticipate that this work will include television advertising.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the number of carriers of hepatitis C in the UK; and what proportion of that total are likely to develop *(a)* cirrhosis of the liver and *(b)* cancer of the liver. [83019]

Ms Blears: It is estimated that 0.4 per cent., of the general population in England, about 200,000 people, have chronic hepatitis C infection. Information on the prevalence of chronic hepatitis C infection in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can be obtained from the respective devolved Administrations.

Studies suggest that about 20 per cent., of individuals with chronic hepatitis C infection develop cirrhosis after 20–30 years. Of these, about 1–4 per cent., per year will develop primary liver cancer.

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish an expert group to consider the case for a compensation scheme for those persons infected with hepatitis C from NHS blood products. [83367]

Ms Blears: There are no plans to establish an expert group to consider this matter.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is being made available, and over what timescale, for the implementation of the hepatitis C strategy published by his Department in August. [83551]

Ms Blears: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith) on 19 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 102W.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue guidance to primary care trusts on increasing the priority given to the diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C. [83552]

Ms Blears: Consultation on the Department paper, "Hepatitis C Strategy for England", ended on 15 November 2002. We will be publishing a hepatitis C action plan based on responses to the consultation paper and comments received at recent meetings with stakeholders in the next few months. As part of this work, we will be considering the need to issue guidance on hepatitis C to the national health service.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidance to General Practitioners drawing attention to the risk of hepatitis C infection through needle misuse, and promoting good health practice among those most at risk. [83553]

Ms Blears: The Department issued a briefing pack entitled "Hepatitis C: essential information for professionals" to all general medical practitioners and practice nurses in England in March 2002. The information contained in the briefing pack includes advice on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C infection. The briefing pack also draws attention to further sources of information such as the Department's publication, "Hepatitis C—guidance for those working with drug users". The professional briefing paper and patient leaflet contained in the briefing pack are on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/hepatitisc.

The briefing pack supplements regional professional awareness-raising conferences held for primary care professionals in February and March 2002. Further conferences are planned for 2003.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the costs of an education campaign in England and Wales to alert the public to the risks of hepatitis C infection. [83554]

Ms Blears: We have currently allocated £0.9 million of central funding over 2002–03 and 2003–04 to raise professional and public awareness of hepatitis C in

England. Information relating to Wales can be obtained from the National Assembly for Wales. Funding for future years has yet to be determined.

HIV-positive Babies

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many live births to HIV-infected mothers were subsequently found to be HIV-positive in each year since 1997. [84023]

Ms Blears: The table shows the number of reported live births in England to HIV-infected women for the years 1997–2001, by the last reported infection status of child and year of birth.

Year of birth[1]	*Infected*	*Indeterminate*[2]	*Uninfected*	*Total reported live births*
1997	54	12	84	150
1998	39	14	118	171
1999	32	25	178	235
2000	32	71	238	341
2001	11	245	187	443

[1] For recent years, numbers may increase as late reports are received.

[2] Those children categorised as indeterminate are probably uninfected but it takes up to 18 months (due to persistence of maternal antibodies in the child) before a negative antibody test can rule out infection in the child.

Home Care Services

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to ensure that home care services are free at the point of need. [83337]

Jacqui Smith: Councils have had the power to charge for non-residential social services since the 1948 National Assistance Act. Councils have wide discretion on how to set their charges, although it is stipulated that if they choose to charge for services, the charges generally should be 'reasonable'.

The Department issued statutory guidance to local councils for home care charges in November 2001. This guidance does not seek to change councils' power to charge, or not, but seeks to ensure that, where councils do charge, this will be based on fairer, well designed charging policies. An important principle of the guidance is that charges should not reduce a person's income below basic levels of income support plus a 25 per cent. buffer.

Hospices

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had on allowing hospices to apply for lottery funding. [84061]

Ms Blears: Department officials have been closely involved in discussions on the eligibility of hospices to apply for lottery funding. I am content that the results of a widespread and public consultation exercise undertaken by the New Opportunities Fund indicated the possible merits of applications for lottery funding from hospices.

The New Opportunities Fund Board is responsible for the operation of the fund. Support for adult hospices has been made by the fund under the Living with Cancer programme and further funding is being made available for adult community palliative care services and children's hospices. I understand that a number of hospices have applied to the Fund through this programme and that decisions on applications will be announced in the new year.

Hospital Discharge Workbook

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to update the hospital discharge workbook. [84042]

Jacqui Smith: The guidance on hospital discharge is currently being reviewed with a view to publishing a revised workbook shortly.

Linten Hospital Site

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will decide whether Maidstone and Weald primary trust will be allowed to take forward their proposal for a 48 bed interim care centre at the former Linten Hospital site; and if he will make a statement. [84009]

Ms Blears: Discussions on the future of the Linten Hospital site have been underway for some time. Kent and Medway Health Strategic Health Authority is in close contact with the Maidstone and Weald Primary Care Trust to look at a number of options for the development of intermediate care and associated services in the locality. No decisions have yet been made by the health economy but I am advised by the strategic health authority that a number of proposals are under active consideration.

Medway Secure Training Centre

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many suicides there have been at Medway Secure Training Centre since 1999. [84016]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

None.

Mental Health

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to *(a)* maximise compliance and *(b)* minimise compulsion in relation to the use of antipsychotic medicines for severe mental illness. [83805]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr Loughton) on Monday 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, col. 129W.

Mental Health Grant

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surplus resources will remain after the survey process for the final out-turn of the mental health grant has been completed. [84034]

Jacqui Smith: There will not be any surplus resources of the Mental Health Grant as it is redistributed to councils with social service responsibilities in accordance with a detailed bidding process.

National Care Standards

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will issue guidance to local authority inspectors to enable them to interpret according to individual circumstances the physical standards regulations within the National Care Standards, when registering new community housing projects where service users will not have major physical support needs, including brain injury rehabilitation community housing services; [82924]

(2) if he will consult voluntary and charitable sector organisations who provide care home, supported and community housing services for people with disabilities in reviewing the effects of the National Care Standards; [82927]

(3) if he plans to review the effect of the National Care Standards on the provision of care home, supported and community housing services to people with disabilities; [82926]

(4) what representations he has received from voluntary or charitable sector providers of care home, supported and community housing services for people with disabilities concerning the application of the National Care Standards. [82925]

Jacqui Smith: We have made it clear in the past that the National Minimum Standards will be continuously monitored. We had always proposed to review them within the first three years of operation, and in the light of the review consider any changes needed. Where significant changes are proposed, the Government have pledged that there will be another consultation process to ensure that the views of the sector are fully represented.

The Department issued a consultation document, "Care Homes for Older People and Younger Adults: Consultation Document—August 2002", on 16 August. It set out how the National Minimum Standards should be amended so that certain environmental standards will no longer apply to care homes which existed before 1 April 2002.

The consultation document draws attention to the package of measures the Department launched in January 2002 to smooth the introduction of the national standards. This included comprehensive statutory guidance to the Commission, under section 6 of the Care Standards Act, setting out the supportive way in which the standards should be applied. The guidance indicates that the standards should be used to help guide all care homes on action they can take to improve their services. In addition, in August 2002, we issued guidance on the regulation of supported housing and care homes.

Responses to the consultation have been received from a range of interested parties, including the voluntary and charitable sector organisations. We are currently considering these and will shortly be issuing an amended set of national minimum standards for care homes for older people and for care homes for younger adults.

We have received a number of representations including some from voluntary or charitable providers of care services about the application of National Care Standards.

National Healthy Schools Standard

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of schools have adopted the National Healthy Schools Standard. [84046]

Ms Blears: Over half of the 25,600 schools in England are involved in the national healthy schools programme and over 8,000 are working towards achievement of the full standard.

All schools have received information about the national programme and there are 105 local education and health partnerships recruiting and supporting schools to achieve the standard.

National School Fruit Scheme

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of primary schools are participating in the National School Fruit Scheme. [84013]

Ms Blears: The national school fruit scheme will entitle every child aged four to six to a free piece of fruit each school day from 2004. The scheme is currently being expanded to all eligible schools through large scale pilots on a region by region basis with funding of £42 million from the New Opportunities Fund.

It is currently available to all primary, infant and special schools attended by four to six year olds in London and West Midlands regions and selected schools in small pilot areas in other regions.

In West Midlands 89 per cent, of eligible schools are currently participating. In London, from 2 December, 78 per cent, will be participating. These are schools which have joined the scheme at the first time of asking. We expect the percentage of participating schools to rise in the new year.

Participating schools in West Midlands, London and the small pilot areas represent 20 per cent, of primary, infant and special schools in England attended by four to six year olds.

Nurses

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trained nurses there were in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in each year since 1 January 1996. [85136]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected by constituency. Information for the former Buckinghamshire Health Authority is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff within Buckinghamshire Health Authority area as at 30 September each year

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
						whole-time equivalent
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	2,490	2,520	2,610	2,670	2,680	2,820
						headcount
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	3,210	3,430	3,490	3,760	3,830	3,860

Notes:
2001 is the most recent year for which figures are currently available.
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
Figures exclude learners and agency staff.
HA figures are based on trusts and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of health care.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Oncology Consultants

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many oncology consultant vacancies there were in each of the cancer networks. [83308]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The information requested is not available; there are 34 cancer networks, which are based around flows of patients to tertiary centres so they are not co-terminus with strategic health authorities (StHA). We can only provide data about oncology consultant vacancies by StHA.

The number of three-month clinical and medical oncology vacancies in StHAs is shown in the table. The current vacancy rate for clinical oncology in England is 6.4 per cent. and in medical oncology is 2.3 per cent.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2002—vacancies in NHS trusts by DHSC and strategic health authority, specific consultant specialties—three month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

	Clinical oncology (excluding HA staff)			
	Three month vacancy rate (percentage)	*Three month vacancy (number)*	*Staff in post (wte)*	*Staff in post (hc)*
England	6.4	20	290	320
Midlands and Eastern	5.4	10	90	90
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	0.0	0	20	20
Birmingham and the Black Country	23.1	0	10	10
Coventry, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Essex	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	0.0	0	10	10
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	9.7	0	20	20
Shropshire and Staffordshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Trent	0.0	0	10	10
London	4.5	0	40	50
North Central London	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
North East London	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
North West London	6.4	0	10	20
South East London	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South West London	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Northern	10.8	10	90	100
Cheshire and Merseyside	8.2	0	10	10
County Durham and Tees Valley	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Cumbria and Lancashire	38.5	10	10	10
Greater Manchester	5.3	0	20	20
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	7.3	0	10	20
South Yorkshire	0.0	0	10	10
West Yorkshire	5.9	0	20	20
South	2.7	0	70	80
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	0.0	0	20	20
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	8.5	0	10	10
Kent and Medway	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Somerset and Dorset	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South West Peninsula	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Surrey and Sussex	0.0	0	10	10
Thames Valley	0.0	0	10	20
Special HAs	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]

	Medical oncology (excluding HA staff)			
	Three month vacancy rate (percentage)	*Three month vacancy (number)*	*Staff in post (wte)*	*Staff in post (hc)*
England	2.3	0	150	180
Midlands and Eastern	5.5	0	30	40
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Birmingham and the Black Country	7.1	0	10	10
Coventry, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Essex	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Shropshire and Staffordshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Trent	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
London	0.0	0	40	50
North Central London	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
North East London	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
North West London	0.0	0	20	20
South East London	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South West London	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Northern	0.0	0	40	50
Cheshire and Merseyside	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
County Durham and Tees Valley	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Cumbria and Lancashire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Greater Manchester	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South Yorkshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
West Yorkshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South	3.9	0	40	50
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Kent and Medway	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Somerset and Dorset	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South West Peninsula	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Surrey and Sussex	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Thames Valley	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Special HAs	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]

[1] Figures where sum of staff in post and vacancies is less than 10.
[2] Figures where sum of staff in post and vacancies is zero.
Key notes:
3. Three month vacancy information is as at 31 March 2002.
4. Three month vacancies are vacancies which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
5. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post.
6. Three month vacancy rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey and the Consultant Census, March 2002.
7. Staff in post data are from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2001 and the Mini Consultant Census, March 2002.
8. Staff in post data exclude staff employed by health authorities, as vacancy information was only collected from trusts, PCTs and special health authorities.
9. Medical and dental figures exclude staff in training.
10. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.
11. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
Other notes:
12. Due to rounding, totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
13. Due to rounding, calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
14. StHA figures are based on trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of healthcare.
15. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.
Sources:
Vacancy Numbers and Rates: Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2002 and Consultant census March 2002
Medical and Dental Staff in Post: Department of Health Consultant census March 2002

Patient Discharge

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a pilot scheme of the delayed hospital discharge fines from 1 April 2003. [83494]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has set up a reimbursement implementation team to work alongside its change agents team with a number of health and social care agencies around the country. They will be examining how best any barriers to implementation can

be overcome. Their work will inform the drafting of detailed regulations and guidance on this.

Premature Babies

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many premature babies have developed chronic diseases in each year since 1997. [83169]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Quality Protects

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what improvements in the outcomes for children and young people Quality Protects has delivered. [82766]

Jacqui Smith: There is real evidence that Quality Protects is beginning to improve children's lives. For example, since the programme began we have seen:

More corporate working across councils and greater understanding of councils' and councillors' role as 'corporate parents';

More partnership working with voluntary organisations;

An increase in the proportion of children looked after placed for adoption—3,400 looked after children were adopted in England in the year to 31 March 2002, 11 per cent. more than in the previous year and 25 per cent. more than in 1999–2000;

Children in care experiencing fewer placements—16 per cent. of children now experience three or more placements in one year as opposed to 19 per cent, in 1997–98;

A reduction in the number of re-registrations on the child protection register from 20 per cent. in 1997–98 to 14 per cent. in 2001–02;

More support being given to care leavers;

More councils listening to children and young people in their care;

Improvements in the collecting and use of management information.

We shall shortly be publishing an overview report of councils' fourth annual management action plans, which set out their progress in and future plans for implementing Quality Protects.

Radiological Protection

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what radiological protection, with specific reference to protective coverings, is required when using new scanners; and whether the cost of protective items is covered by the funds set aside for extra CT and MRI scanners. [84015]

Ms Blears: The following regulations, standards and guidelines are designed to ensure that all aspects of safety, including radiation protection issues, are addressed whenever diagnostic medical equipment is installed in the United Kingdom.

For general safety issues, all equipment must be CE-marked in accordance with the requirements of the Medical Devices Regulations, 2002, S.I. 2002, no. 618, which are derived from the Medical Devices Directive, 93/42/EEC. In addition medical electrical equipment should meet the British and European standards, such as the General Requirements for Safety, BSEN 60601.

The Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999 (IRR99) provide radiation protection to workers and the public and are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive.

Department of Health regulations concerning radiation protection for patients are the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000 [IR(ME)R 2000].

To ensure that imaging equipment is installed in suitable accommodation, NHS Estates publish guidelines that describe issue that should be considered. References to the relevant publications are provided below.

Consultations regarding the allocation of extra computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging scanners are under way with strategic health authorities and local healthcare commissioners. These discussions will ensure that adequate funding is in place to allow the safe installation of all new equipment.

References:

Facilities for Diagnostic Imaging and Interventional Radiology, NHS Estates, London, HMSO. ISBN 0–11–322000–0

Health Building Note 6 Supplement 1. Accommodation for magnetic resonance imaging. NHS Estates 1994, London, HMSO. ISBN 0113217307

Health Guidance Note Magnetic Resonance Imaging. NHS Estates, London, HMSO. ISBN 0113220510

Rehabilitation

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support he is making available to improve vocational rehabilitation services through the national service framework for chronic and neurological disorders. [83854]

Jacqui Smith: The national service framework for long-term conditions (NSF) will focus on neurological conditions and some of the generic issues relevant to a wide range of people with disabilities and long term conditions. We have appointed an external reference group to take forward the detailed development of the NSF and to consider the range of issues it should tackle which could include vocational rehabilitation. We recognise the importance of supporting people with long-term conditions to remain in or return to work wherever possible. We plan to publish the NSF in 2004. Implementation will cover a 10-year period starting in 2005. We will consider the resource and funding implications of implementing the NSF during its development.

The Government are currently testing out which health and employment interventions are most effective in supporting people with illness or disability to stay in work.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were in residential and nursing homes in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* at the latest available date. [83537]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not centrally available on the number of residents in residential and nursing homes. The number of places in residential and nursing care homes in England is shown in the table for 1997 and 2001. Data for 2002 are not yet available.

Number of residential and nursing care home places[1] in England at 31 March, 1997 to 2001

As at 31 March	Residential	Nursing[2]	Total
1997	338,100	196,300	534,400
2001	341,200	186,800	528,000

[1] Data include places in dual registered homes.
[2] Nursing home places covers general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures are provided to the Department by the NCSC regarding the average time it takes to open a new *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing home; and if he will make a statement. [83713]

Jacqui Smith: No such figures have been requested or provided.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average levels of fees for residential and nursing home residents were in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001; and what the average is. [83536]

Jacqui Smith: Information regarding the average fee levels charged by care homes is not kept centrally. However, figures by independent health and community care consultants Laing and Buisson indicate the following average weekly fee levels in February 1997, March 2001 and March 2002:

	Residential care homes	Nursing care homes
1997	247	338
2001	280	393
2002	302	422

Ritalin

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what long-term assessment has been made of the use of the drug Ritalin; and if he will make a statement. [83478]

Jacqui Smith: Ritalin is indicated as a part of a comprehensive treatment programme for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children over six years of age where remedial measures alone prove insufficient. In October 2000, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published an appraisal of the use of the drug methylphenidate (main brand name Ritalin) in the treatment of childhood ADHD, and issued clinical guidelines for its use, including the need for regular monitoring of children receiving this therapy. NICE recommended long-term follow-up of adverse effects and the potential for misuse of the drug in assessing long-term benefits and health gain into adulthood.

As with all medicines, the safety of methylphenidate is continually monitored by the Medicines Control Agency and the independent advisory body, the Committee on the Safety of Medicines. Comprehensive information on the use of methylphenidate, including possible side effects, contraindications and precautions is contained in the summary of product characteristics produced by the manufacturer and approved by the licensing authority. Review by NICE of its guidance on the use of methylphenidate is scheduled for August 2003.

Sexual Health and HIV Services

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of primary care trusts have an identified lead for sexual health and HIV services for their area; what proportion have in place arrangements for commissioning such services in consortia with neighbouring PCTs; what proportion have neither; which primary care trusts have yet to name a lead for sexual health and HIV services for their area and have not made provision for commissioning in consortia with neighbouring PCTs; and when the report of the baseline service mapping exercise of sexual health and HIV services will be published. [83555]

Ms Blears: Of the 304 primary care trusts (PCTs), including two designated as care trusts, in England, 273 have notified the Department of a sexual health and HIV lead for their area. We are currently taking action to identify remaining leads. We have not collected information centrally on commissioning arrangements for sexual health services. The local baseline review mapping exercise reports are currently being analysed and a summary report will be published early next year.

We are still awaiting details of sexual health leads from the following PCTs:

Bedford
Bedfordshire Heartlands
Billericay, Brentwood and Wickford
Bournemouth
Bracknell Forest
Burntwood, Lichfield and Tamworth
Chingford, Wanstead and Woodford
Dacorum
Derwentside
Dudley South
Eastleigh and Test Valley South
Enfield
Gateshead
Gedling
Haringey
Herefordshire
Hinckley and Bosworth
Huntingdonshire
Islington
Lincolnshire South West
Mid Devon
Mid Sussex
North East Oxfordshire
North Surrey
Rotherham
South Peterborough
Wednesbury and West Bromwich
Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead
Witham, Braintree and Halstead
Woking Area

Smear Tests

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long it took to provide the result from a smear test in each health authority in the last year for which figures are available. [83457]

Ms Blears: The information is not available in the format requested. Information on waiting times for screening tests is only available for those areas where the result letters are sent to women directly by the health authorities. Around two thirds of health authorities and primary care trusts do this.

In 2001–02, 50 per cent., of women in these health authorities received their written cervical screening test result within six weeks. 85 per cent., of women received their written results within 10 weeks.

Source:

Statistical Bulletin: Cervical Screening Programme, England: 2001–02.

Smoking Cessation Services

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department makes available to support smoking cessation; and what cost benefit analysis has been conducted of this spending. [84454]

Ms Blears: In 2002–03 the Department allocated £37 million to support smoking cessation. Drawing on a range of evidence and research findings the Department concludes that smoking cessation services are very cost effective, with a cost per life year saved of less than £1,000.

Soft Drinks

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Food Standards Agency has taken with regard to the safety of unregulated imported soft drinks. [84026]

Ms Blears: All food, including soft drinks, is subject to the same food safety legislation, whether produced in the United Kingdom or imported. This legislation is enforced by local authorities. In addition, soft drinks imported from countries outside the European Union are subject to checks by local port health authorities.

Somerset Drug Service

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much money has been allocated annually to the Somerset Drug Service since its inception; [82606]

(2) how many individuals have been treated by the Somerset Drug Service through *(a)* self-referral, *(b)* court referral and *(c)* other referral in the last two years. [82607]

Ms Blears: I am advised by Dorset and Somerset Strategic Health Authority that the annual allocation to Somerset Drug Service was as follows:

£

	Allocation
2002–03	1,562,000
2001–02	1,265,000
2000–01	900,000

These are the only years for which information is readily available from the strategic health authority.

The number of individuals referred for treatment at Somerset Drug Service is not collected centrally. Again, the strategic health authority has advised me that referrals to the service in 2000–01 were 248 and in 2001–02 were 288.

Tobacco Products

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department has taken in accordance with Article 7 of the EU Tobacco Directive, to ban the use of texts, names, trademarks and figurative or other signs suggesting that a particular tobacco product is less harmful than others, on the packaging of tobacco products. [81683]

Ms Blears: Following a three month consultation exercise, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly make and lay before Parliament Regulations to transpose the Directive including its requirements under Article 7. These Regulations will ban the use of such terms, which suggest that a particular tobacco product is less harmful than others. The Directive requires this ban to be in effect by 30 September 2003. Article 7 is subject to a challenge in the European Court of Justice and judgement is expected shortly. If necessary, the Regulations will be amended to reflect the judgement.

Tuberculosis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which primary care trusts have a higher than average tuberculosis level; and how much each trust will receive of the money being made available for tuberculosis. [83323]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Data currently available through the statutory notification system collected by the public health laboratory service are not broken down by primary care trust (PCT). Data are currently provided by health authority only.

Funding will be allocated to those health authorities with the highest incidences of tuberculosis, who will in turn distribute money to the PCTs in their area.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to meet the head of the tuberculosis unit at the Public Health Laboratory Service. [83327]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Departmental officials maintain close working contact with the public health laboratory service leads on tuberculosis, who in turn report back to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which primary care trusts have levels of tuberculosis higher than the national average. [83328]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Notification data currently available through the statutory notification system, collected bythe public health laboratory service, is not broken down by primary care trust. Data is currently provided by health authority only.

Zyban

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions for Zyban have been issued in each month since the drug was licensed, broken down by health authority. [80547]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of prescriptions for Zyban issued by month since the drug was licensed, broken down by Strategic Health Authority, have been placed in the Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Access Radio

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether she has carried out a regulatory impact analysis of the effect of the proposed changes in the Communications Bill, with specific regard to the introduction of access radio; and what assessment she has made of the impact on existing local commercial radio stations, if *(a)* access radio is fully funded out of the public purse and *(b)* access radio is allowed to raise revenue through selling advertising slots. [84818]

Dr. Howells: Access radio formed part of the Draft Communications Regulatory Impact Assessment published in May for consultation.

The Radio Authority are currently undertaking a pilot study of a number of access radio stations. The purpose of the study is to establish whether access radio is viable and how it might be licensed, regulated, funded, promoted and organised. The Radio Authority evaluation will also seek to assess the possible impact on the commercial radio sector. The completed evaluation is expected to be published next February.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how she intends to regulate the activities of access radio; and if she will make a statement; [84861]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact of access radio on the ability of local commercial radio stations to attract funding by carrying advertising; [84860]

(3) how she expects access radio will be funded; and if she will make a statement. [84859]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Radio Authority are currently undertaking a pilot study of a number of access radio stations. The purpose of the study is to establish whether access radio is viable and how it might be licensed, regulated, funded, promoted and organised. The Radio Authority evaluation will also seek to assess the possible impact on the commercial radio sector. The completed evaluation is expected to be published next February.

BBC

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on how many occasions in the last 12 months the BBC has paid goodwill cheques to the victims of maladministration of licence fee collection. [84468]

Dr. Howells: Neither the BBC nor TV Licensing are subject to the powers of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and there are therefore no formal findings of maladministration against the BBC or TV Licensing. However, TV Licensing operates its own complaints procedures and if a member of the public remains unsatisfied with the outcome the BBC will also consider the complaint. Goodwill payments in relation to the administration of the television licensing system are made by TV Licensing rather than the BBC. Information on the number of such payments is available only for the period since Capita took over the TV Licensing contract in July this year. From July to October 2002, TV Licensing made a total of 825 goodwill payments.

Broadcasting

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of her Department's role in facilitating and promoting the competitiveness of UK broadcast-related industries and the early take-up of digital broadcast services; and if she will make a statement. [83742]

Dr. Howells: My Department continues to encourage the competitiveness of the UK broadcast-related industries through its wide-ranging support for the creative industries, working in partnership with all stakeholders within Government and the industry to examine ways of enhancing performance at home and overseas. As part of this work, in November 1999 DCMS published the report of the UK Television Exports Inquiry which specifically looked at how Government and the industry could work together to enhance export performance, to lower barriers to investment and to increase the international attractiveness of UK television programmes. DCMS continues to work with the industry and with Skillset in taking forward the recommendations of the Audio Visual Industries Training Group to meet future skills needs.

We are also promoting competitiveness through targets set for BBC commercial income and through the promotion of digital broadcasting, where the UK has maintained world leadership, with 40 per cent. of households having access to digital television across the platforms. We have approved new digital BBC services which enhance the digital proposition. With the Department of Trade and Industry, and in consultation with broadcasters, manufacturers and consumer representatives, we have published the Digital Television Action Plan. This sets out what needs to be done by whom and by when in order to meet the criteria for full switchover. We have also taken steps to encourage digital radio development by aligning the licence period for digital and analogue licences. The Communications Bill provides the framework for enhancing competitiveness further and extending the take-up of digital television.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals she has for a future regulatory system for broadcasting which recognises market and technological developments; and if she will make a statement. [83743]

Dr. Howells: On 19 November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State introduced the Communications Bill, which will establish the new regulatory framework for broadcasting and the communications industries. This framework recognises, both within Ofcom's general duties and the detail of the regulatory provisions, the importance of competition, of investment and of innovation in delivering the dynamic market for communications services which we want to see in the United Kingdom. A dynamic, competitive market will encourage the development and take-up of new technologies, to the benefit of business, consumers and the UK economy. The proposals in the Bill also address the challenges of technological convergence, in providing for regulation by a single body and for a flexible regime capable of accommodating further change.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of levels of *(a)* standards and diversity of broadcasting output, *(b)* broadcasting content being socially inclusive and *(c)* access to broadcast material; and if she will make a statement. [83753]

Dr. Howells: It is the responsibility of the broadcasters and the broadcasting regulatory bodies, that is the BBC Governors, Independent Television Commission, Radio Authority and Broadcasting Standards Commission, to ensure that broadcasters meet their obligations for quality, diversity, social inclusion and accessibility, in accordance with the regulatory requirements agreed by Parliament. They report on these in their Annual Reports and, in establishing new regulatory requirements as set out in the Communications Bill, we have also had the benefit of wide-ranging consultation.

Counterfeit Goods

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding the sale of counterfeit and illegal music album sales; and if she will make a statement; [85305]

(2) how many illegally produced music singles and albums she estimates to have been sold in the UK in 2002; [85307]

(3) she has made of the total cost in 2001 of illegal sales of music singles and albums; and what measures she is taking to prevent this. [85306]

Dr. Howells: This Department and the Department for Trade and Industry work together closely on the fight against music piracy and the protection of copyright, and are in regular contact with the industry on these issues. Among other things, the Government supported the Private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), which was enacted on 20 November as the Copyright, etc. Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Act 2002; this increased the maximum sentence for copyright offences from two to 10 years' imprisonment and an unlimited fine. Furthermore, the role of this Department's new music industry adviser, Stephen Navin, includes the provision of advice on combatting piracy. The British Phonographic Industry estimates that the total value of commercially pirated singles and albums in 2001 totalled £27.6 million; information on the number of illegally produced records in 2002 is not yet available.

Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the grants funded by her Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if she will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82193]

Dr. Howells: The information you requested is as follows:

2001–02 grant	*Total number of awards*	*Total value of grants paid (£000)*
Designated Museums Challenge Fund (administered by Resource)	56	8,465
Wolfson Public Libraries Fund (administered by Resource)	16	2,580
Spaces for Sport and Art (administered by Sport England on behalf of DCMS and DfES)	306	579
Listed places of worship	707	1,659

This table covers grants paid directly by the Department or by its NDPBs from ring-fenced monies allocated by the Department for a specific scheme to which individuals or organisations may apply. Grants paid to third parties by NDPBs from general grant-in-aid or lottery funds have not been included in the table.

The administration of the specified grant programmes is carried out by a number of different units within the department and relevant NDPBs to which a range of staff make a contribution. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of these costs centrally other than for the listed places of worship, where administration costs incurred in the last financial year were nil.

Heritage Grant Fund

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department has taken to transfer responsibility of the Heritage Grant Fund; and if she will make a statement. [83755]

Dr. Howells: Responsibility for the Heritage Grant Fund was transferred to English Heritage on 1 April 2000.

Museums

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been *(a)* made available through her Department's challenge fund and *(b)* spent in each year since 1998–99 by each museum; and if she will make a statement. [83734]

Dr. Howells: The 62 museums with designated collections have each received awards from the designation challenge fund, administered by Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, to help meet the costs of caring for and interpreting their designated collections. The awards are set out in the following table.

Designation challenge fund awards 1999–2004

£

Ref/name of museum	*Amount awarded* 1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	*Total awarded* 1999–2002	*Awards made* 2002–04
1 University of Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum	54,193.44	96,613.52	146,845.48	297,652.44	100,025.00
2 University of Cambridge, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology	32,732.69	88,879.78	83,701.06	205,313.53	11,400.00
3 University of Cambridge, Whipple Museum of the History of Science	48,000.23	164,815.96	113,562.38	326,378.57	99,912.00
4 Courtauld Gallery, London	50,000.14	75,000.00	75,000.00	200,000.14	100,000.00
5 University of Manchester, Manchester Museum	50,004.00	47,071.17	113,068.00	210,143.17	50,000.00
6 University of Manchester, Whitworth Art Gallery	44,690.00	115,000.00	122,000.00	281,690.00	86,500.00
7 University of Oxford, Ashmolean Museum	60,000.00	100,291.93	102,329.26	262,621.19	154,800.00
8 University of Oxford, Museum of the History of Science	150,000.00	58,000.00	0.00	208,000.00	0.00
9 University of Oxford, Museum of Natural History	31,420.69	114,639.84	102,276.49	248,337.02	86,843.00
10 University of Oxford, Pitt Rivers Museum	59,484.00	122,885.97	129,972.00	312,341.97	149,716.00
11 University of Reading, Rural History Centre	62,076.30	95,244.04	87,709.08	245,029.42	91,500.00
12 Horniman Museum, London	96,295.78	99,812.00	63,500.00	259,607.78	157,000.00
13 Museum of London	0.00	117,970.67	232,029.34	350,000.01	153,000.00
14 Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	34,408.69	135,000.00	89,401.00	258,809.69	91,750.00
15 Birmingham City Museums and Art Gallery	66,482.56	170,000.00	187,974.00	424,456.56	239,178.00
16 Leeds Museums and Galleries	63,319.00	36,469.92	116,000.00	215,788.92	0.00
17 Manchester City Art Galleries	60,112.00	31,843.42	84,220.44	176,175.86	92,810.00
18 Stoke-on-Trent Museums Service	104,036.80	110,280.60	106,417.04	320,734.44	96,476.00
19 Tyne and Wear Museums[1]					
20 York Museum Service	90,193.15	129,812.49	200,660.21	420,665.85	100,000.00
21 Beamish, the North of England Open Air Museum	30,000.00	0.00	770,000.00	800,000.00	500,000.00
22 Bowes Museum	57,383.50	29,906.50	95,400.00	182,690.00	222,000.00
23 Wiltshire Heritage Museum	35,000.00	45,815.17	20,423.37	101,238.54	0.00
24 Dulwich Picture Gallery	52,000.00	80,000.00	59,687.79	191,687.79	52,723.00
25 Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust	71,520.00	90,106.00	99,654.21	261,280.21	80,000.00
26 Jewish Museum	62,960.00	73,989.76	76,171.00	213,120.76	97,533.00
27 London Transport Museum	52,500.00	95,000.00	95,500.00	243,000.00	50,000.00
28 Mary Rose Trust	77,658.00	120,000.00	137,770.20	335,428.20	100,000.00
29 National Motor Museum	31,298.66	63,166.59	123,208.81	217,674.06	71,395.00
30 National Tramway Museum	33,054.20	97,273.56	215,181.74	345,509.50	100,000.00
31 Wordsworth Trust	66,149.07	86,080.00	86,882.00	239,111.07	67,400.00
32 Museum of British Road Transport, Coventry	20,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00	220,000.00	145,000.00
33 Tank Museum, Bovington Camp	50,000.00	88,221.20	79,117.26	217,338.46	135,000.00
34 Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums	6,060.00	44,218.00	56,117.82	106,395.82	40,000.00
35 Northampton Museums and Art Gallery	60,000.00	80,000.00	160,000.00	300,000.00	0.00
36 Norfolk Museums Service	86,776.36	112,994.14	182,617.60	382,388.10	249,813.00
37 Harewood House	78,197.63	99,225.00	177,097.00	354,519.63	196,000.00
38 Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham	77,751.00	48,657.54	30,000.00	156,408.54	68,475.00
39 University College London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology	62,618.35	104,634.96	125,510.69	292,764.00	137,158.00
40 Colchester Museums	42,188.82	85,080.00	57,960.00	185,228.82	48,000.00
41 Exeter City Museums and Art Gallery	117,297.39	173,389.08	71,867.89	362,554.36	99,700.00
42 Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum	26,034.56	114,460.00	64,000.00	204,494.56	27,760.00
43 Royal Engineers Museum, Chatham	22,849.09	68,554.23	75,320.19	166,723.51	0.00
44 National Museum of Labour History, Manchester	64,216.67	96,949.38	83,580.00	244,746.05	86,760.00
45 University of Cambridge, Sedgwick Museum of Geology	50,731.55	148,479.21	178,029.79	377,240.55	178,000.00
46 University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge	36,355.00	33,025.00	219,361.00	288,741.00	100,230.00
47 Southampton City Council Cultural Services	43,928.00	39,528.44	62,031.20	145,487.64	50,000.00
48 Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, Chichester	74,949.66	64,000.00	75,800.00	214,749.66	10,000.00
49 Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery	46,331.52	59,925.25	69,278.40	175,535.17	50,000.00
50 Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums	28,250.00	0.00	0.00	28,250.00	135,000.00
51 Bristol Museums and Art Galleries	59,492.42	73,639.45	112,693.05	245,824.92	96,644.00
52 National Waterways Museum	52,533.36	116,608.00	93,184.50	262,325.86	50,000.00
53 The Wedgwood Museum Trust	0.00	42,880.88	61,250.00	104,130.88	5,000.00
55 Roman Baths Museum and Museum of Costume, Bath	0.00	43,625.18	109,874.82	153,500.00	50,000.00
56 Museum of Artillery in the Rotunda	0.00	101,250.00	91,589.20	192,839.20	0.00
57 Sir John Soane's Museum	0.00	95,000.00	82,360.00	177,360.00	81,007.00
58 Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art	0.00	83,393.21	32,882.31	116,275.52	0.00
59 Kingston upon Hull City Museums and Art Galleries	0.00	67,871.48	58,855.12	126,726.60	0.00
60 Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust	0.00	120,536.78	70,444.61	190,981.39	0.00

Designation challenge fund awards 1999–2004

£

Ref/name of museum	Amount awarded 1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	Total awarded 1999–2002	Awards made 2002–04
61 Lancashire County Museums Service, Textile Industry Collection	0.00	32,693.85	122,210.28	154,904.13	80,000.00
62 Museums of the Royal College of Surgeons of England	0.00	50,955.27	31,613.58	82,568.85	94,400.00
Joint Manchester Project	25,000.00	—	—	25,000.00	30,000.00
Totals	2,858,534.28	5,080,764.42	6,671,191.21	14,610,489.91	5,445,908.00

[1] Joint project with Beamish—see number 21

Note:

Awards for 1999–2002 have now been spent. New awards made in July 2002 for the period 2002–04 total sum not yet claimed by grant recipients.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department has taken to maintain the quality of exhibitions in major museums funded by her Department since the removal of entry charges; and if she will make a statement. [83739]

Dr. Howells: The day-to-day operation of Government-funded museums and galleries, including the staging of exhibitions, is a matter for the Boards of Trustees and management of such bodies. In October 2002, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, announced the provision of increased grant-in-aid to the national museums and galleries to enable them to continue the Government's highly successful policy of free admission.

National Football Centre

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will visit the National Football Centre development near Burton upon Trent to view the construction already in place. [84627]

Mrs. Dean: (2) when she *(a)* last met and *(b)* next plans to meet the Football Association to discuss the development of the National Football Centre. [84628]

Mr. Caborn: The Government appreciates that the present uncertainty about the completion of the National Football Centre has created some concern, both locally and among those with a general interest in the future success of the England team. However, this is entirely a matter for the Football Association. Neither I nor my right hon .Friend the Secretary of State have discussed the matter with the FA, and Ministers have no plans to visit the site. The Government's priority is the continued development of grass roots football, which my Department funds through the Football Foundation. The arrangements made for the coaching of elite players must remain the responsibility of football itself.

Public Bodies

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what recent assessment she has made of her Department's non-departmental public bodies' *(a)* outputs, *(b)* efficiency, *(c)* access, *(d)* quality, *(e)* income generation and *(f)* private sector funding; and if she will make a statement; [83750]

(2) what assessment she has made of the targets for her Department's non-departmental public bodies' funding agreements announced since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [83762]

Dr. Howells: During the course of the 2002 Spending Review, the Department has looked at the performance of its sponsored bodies and at the effectiveness of funding agreements as a means of performance management. The conclusions from our assessment are positive, but we have plans for further improvements: the introduction of more streamlined funding agreements that will focus on delivery of our four strategic priorities; and the earmarking of resources in the 2003–06 period, specifically to help non-departmental public bodies improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Sport Representations

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received from and discussions she has had with *(a)* Sport England, *(b)* UK Sport, *(c)* Special Olympics Great Britain and *(d)* other organisations and individuals, regarding the allocation of funding for Special Olympics Great Britain from *(i)* Sport England and (ii) UK Sport. [84409]

Mr. Caborn: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have received any such representations nor had any discussions with Sport England, UK Sport, Special Olympics Great Britain or other organisations and individuals regarding the allocation of specific funding for Special Olympics Great Britain from Sport England or UK Sport.

I would also refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 81–82W.

Sport Scotland

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money Sport Scotland has received since 2000. [84548]

Mr. Caborn: Sport in Scotland is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

Street Advertisments

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what regulations protect

hand—painted street advertising, what plans she has to improve the protection of hand-painted street advertising; and if she will make a statement. [82717]

Dr. Howells: there are no regulations specifically to protect hand-painted street advertising. It is possible that such advertising can be protected by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires the Secretary of State to compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. An advertisement that has been painted on to a building would be protected if the building itself was listed.

At the launch of the State of the Historic Environment Report on 25 November, we announced plans—in partnership with English Heritage—to improve and refocus the way the UK's built environment receives statutory protection. These will include a review of the current designation system, with a view to changing it to one that sustains the historic environment as a whole rather than relating in a piecemeal way to its constituent parts. This review will take around a year to report.

Sub-titling

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the producers of videos about the provision of sub-titles for the hard of hearing; and if she will make a statement. [84862]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* My officials have been in contact with a number of organisations, primarily the Film Council and British Video Association, the BBC, ITV and the ITC and, via the Broadcasters Disability Network, ITFC Ltd, a company which produces sub-titling for both broadcasters and DVD production houses. We have been looking at the current availability of equipment and videos, and emphasising the importance which we attach to access for the hard of hearing. DVDs normally include sub-titles.

Worcester Cathedral

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what costs she estimates will be incurred by Worcester Cathedral under the proposals in the Licensing Bill. [84962]

Dr. Howells: I have made no estimates of the costs that will be specifically incurred by Worcester Cathedral under the proposals in the Licensing Bill. Any costs would depend on the licensable activities, if any, which are undertaken at the Cathedral and their frequency.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 4 December 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Cetaceans

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the number of cetaceans killed as a result of fishing by catch in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [84463]

Mr. Morley: Information on the full extent of dolphin casualties caused by fishing is not available.

Sample surveys carried out by the Sea Mammal Research Unit on behalf of DEFRA on UK vessels have recorded 61 animals killed since January 2001 as a result of bycatch in the bass fishery, of which eight occurred in the last 12 months. In this period, no bycatch has been observed in any other fishery. We are currently conducting trials into the use of exclusion devices to reduce bycatch in the bass fishery.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to decide whether to allow the new rights of access under part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to be implemented on a regional basis; and if she will make a statement. [83853]

Alun Michael: I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that this issue has now been resolved and I announced my decision to implement the new right of access on a regional basis via a written ministerial statement on 28 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 48–49WS.

Desalination

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the desalination of sea water for drinking water purposes. [84743]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* There are a number of sources for providing raw water for treatment to drinking water standards for the public water supply. The principal sources from which water is abstracted at present are surface waters (rivers and reservoirs) and groundwater (e.g. chalk aquifers).

Desalination of sea water is energy intensive and results in waste products that are difficult to dispose of, and is currently not viewed as a sustainable option. Desalination would need to be identified as an option in a water undertaker's water resources plan, and agreed with the Environment Agency, if it were to be considered an option for public water supply.

Fisheries

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what United Kingdom legislation will restrict the number of days at sea for fishing vessels capturing and landing cod from 1 January 2003; whether amendments to legislation are necessary to achieve Government objectives; and if she will make a statement. [85508]

Mr. Morley: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Fuel Poverty

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of fuel poverty in rural areas. [84137]

Mr. Morley: A summary report published in August 2001, Fuel Poverty in England 1998, estimated that around 19 per cent. of rural households were in fuel poverty, compared with 15 per cent. of urban households. These figures will be updated in due course with the release of the 2001 English House Condition Survey.

The depth of fuel poverty in rural areas may be affected by a number of factors. These include the disproportionate number of households which are off the mains gas network and properties which are considered hard to heat.

A working group was established in 2001 to investigate extension of the gas network. There is evidence that lack of access to mains gas, which is currently the cheapest and most efficient fuel for domestic heating, contributes to keeping households in fuel poverty. The Working Group concluded that a full-scale extension of the gas network could not be justified on cost benefit grounds, but that extension to a more limited extent would be justified in certain cases. Work is progressing on identifying priority areas for any possible future extensions of the gas network.

My Department recently commissioned a scoping study which is looking at the potential for alternative technologies to help tackle fuel poverty. This could be of particular relevance for rural communities, especially areas without access to the gas network. The study will also consider alternative methods for the treatment of 'hard to heat' homes. The report is expected early in the new year.

The Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, which was set up to advise Government on achieving its goal of ending fuel poverty, is also looking at issues which effect rural areas. It has already considered a paper on households without access to gas and is due to discuss households which are considered to be 'hard to heat'.

Kyoto Protocol

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects that the United Kingdom will meet its emission standards under the Kyoto Protocol. [84191]

Mr. Meacher: We expect to meet our current commitment under the Kyoto Protocol during the period 2008 to 2012. The UK is committed under the Protocol to achieve an emissions reduction of at least 12.5 per cent. on average over these five years. The reduction is relative to base year emissions in 1990 for carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, and 1995 for the fluorinated greenhouse gases. Compliance will be assessed after 2012. UK greenhouse gas emissions in 2000 were 13 per cent. below those in the base year.

Livestock Premiums

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are in place to ensure prompt payments to farmers in respect of the beef premium, suckler cow premium and slaughter premiums. [84965]

Alun Michael: EC rules do not allow payment of premium in respect of the Beef Special Premium, Suckler Cow Premium and Slaughter Premium to be made before 16 October of the calendar year to which payments apply.

The prompt payment of claims for advance payment of 2002 bovine premia depends on a number of factors including:

- the animals must have completed their retention period;
- claims must be error free;
- the animals must have completed their cross check against the Cattle Tracing System database.

To date, payment has been made on 48.54 per cent. of Beef Special Premiums and 33.04 per cent. of Slaughter Premiums claims. The remaining unpaid claims have been delayed because they have failed to meet one of the criteria outlined above.

No payments have yet been made on the Suckler Cow Premiums because of the need to re-write the Suckler Cow Premiums IT system. Payments are however expected to begin in late December.

Official Engagements

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list her official engagements in the week commencing 25 November 2002. [84229]

Alun Michael: The Secretary of State makes it a practice not to publish her diary. Much of her time this week has necessarily been taken up with essential meetings with ministerial colleagues and officials on the various aspects of this Department's wide ranging portfolio. In addition to this, she had speaking engagements on both Monday and Tuesday. Immediately after Cabinet on Thursday, she travelled to Brussels, to attend the monthly Agriculture Council for the remainder of the week.

Water Abstraction

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been conducted for *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency on sites which *(i)* have been damaged by water abstraction and (ii) are threatened by continued water abstraction since 1995; and if she will list the locations of these sites. [84734]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The Environment Agency has set up the Restoring Sustainable Abstraction Programme to co-ordinate the assessment of the impact of water abstraction upon the environment. The programme brings together work relating to:

- the review of consents required on European designated sites under the Conservation (Habitat &c.) Regulations 1994
- the statutory duty under Section 28G of the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 in relation to Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- non-designated sites.

The aims of the programme are to identify and investigate sites, both rivers and wetlands, where water abstraction may potentially be causing an impact upon the environment. Where it is demonstrated that such an impact is taking place, steps are taken to identify, justify and develop alternative, more sustainable sources of water.

The Agency is working closely with English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales to identify designated sites that should be included in the programme. Sites within the programme are prioritised according to their importance, i.e. the level of designation, and urgency, i.e. the environmental risk posed. The Agency is developing a timetable for progressing investigations of these sites taking into account its available resources.

Until the investigation work has been completed there is no definitive list available of all sites which have been, or are threatened with damage as a result of abstraction except for a list of SSSIs where investigations have shown that abstractions are having a detrimental impact. The table details sites where investigations have shown that abstractions are having a significant detrimental impact and remedial action has been taken and completed.

SSSI name	*County*	*Abstractor*	*Action taken*
Chippenham Fen	Cambridgeshire	—	Compensation borehole
Thriplow Peat Holes	Cambridgeshire	—	Compensation borehole
Ashwell Springs	Hertfordshire	—	Compensation water provided
Cornard Mere	Suffolk	—	Compensation water increased
Edgbaston Pool	West Midlands	Golf club	Alternative supply found
Old Rectory Meadows	Buckinghamshire	Thames Water and Three Valleys Water	River Misbourne alleviation scheme
Redgrave and Lopham Fen	Suffolk	Essex and Suffolk Water	Cessation of abstraction and relocation of borehole
Sandwich Bay and Hacklinge Marshes	Kent	Southern Water	Licence revocation.
River Gelt	Cumbria	United Utilities	Modification of intake structures
North Dartmoor (Taw Marsh)	Devon	South West Water	Licence revocation

The sites in the table have had funding agreed through the Periodic Review of water prices for the period 2000–04 to allow implementation of solutions to alleviate the impact of water company abstractions. Other sites have been funded for investigation only, and any necessary remedial action will be taken as appropriate.

SSSI name	*County*	*Abstractor*	*Action taken*	*Completion date*
River Eden and Tributaries	Cumbria	North West Water	Relocation of the discharge of compensation flow to remove dry stretch.	2002
East Ruston Common	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Reduction of licensed abstraction by 50 per cent. at East Ruston.	2003
Bowland Fells	Lancashire	North West Water	Investigation, reduction and relocation as well as new treatment works.	2003
The Moors, Bishop's Waltham	Hampshire	Portsmouth Water	Close pumping station and develop new source.	2003
Severn Trent Water: Blakedown Brook South Staffs Water: Hurcott and Podmore Pools	Worcestershire	Severn Trent Water and South Staffordshire Water	Severn Trent Water: low flow river compensation works to provide up to 2Ml/d into the Blakedown Book. Diverted output and additional flow. Reduction in groundwater abstration.	2003
Arundel Park	West Sussex	Southern Water	Partial licence revocation.	2003
River Camel	Cornwall	South West Water	Investigate and adjust licence operating conditions	2003
Speen (part of Kennet and Lambourn SAC)	Berkshire	Thames Water	Precautionary investigation of possible impact through monitoring of shallow groundwater head. Implement solution.	2003
River Avon	Wiltshire	Wessex Water	Reduction of abstraction at Chitterne and use of other sources	2003
River Itchen	Hampshire	Southern Water (SW) and Portsmouth Water (PW)	Input to catchment modelling investigations and implementation. SW: general R. Itchen SAC investigation. PW: R. Itchen model Fish Screen not included in price limits	2004
Didlington Park Lakes	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Investigation and abstraction reduction (25 per cent. at two boreholes).	2005
Kenninghall and Banham Fens and Quidenham Mere	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Investigation to identify potential impact and abstraction reduction by 25 per cent. at three boreholes.	2005
Sheringham and Beeston Regis Common	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Investigations and relocation of public water supply boreholes.	2005
Yare Broads and Marshes	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Investigation and reduction of licensed abstraction by 75 per cent. at Strumpshaw.	2005
Fowlmere	Cambridgeshire	Cambridge Water	Investigation and reduction in licensed abstraction by 50 per cent.	2005
Cattawade Marshes	Essex	Essex and Suffolk Water	Investigation and reduction in licensed abstraction	2005
Aqualate Mere	Staffordshire	Severn Trent Water	Investigate low-flow river and implement solution	2005
Hewell Park Lake	Worcestershire	Severn Trent Water	Implement compensation from Brockhill source during low water levels	2005
Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows	Berkshire	Thames	Investigate and implement solution, including possible modification to licence at Pangbourne	2005

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the sites where action has been taken by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency since 1995 on SSSIs which *(i)* have been damaged and (ii) are threatened with damage from water abstraction, and in each case list the nature of this action. [84735]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: The Environment Agency regulates water abstraction and is the statutory body with a duty to secure the proper use of water resources in England and Wales.

The Environment Agency and English Nature are working closely together to identify those SSSIs which are, or may be, affected by abstraction. In September 1999 the joint Agency and English Nature document 'Water abstraction and Sites of Special Scientific Interest in England' was published. This document contains details of SSSIs identified as being potentially linked to abstraction. Subsequently a limited number of additional sites have been highlighted and included in the Agency's Restoring Sustainable Abstraction Programme.

The following table details sites where investigations have shown that abstractions are having a significant detrimental impact and remedial action has been taken and completed.

SSSI name	County	Abstractor	Action taken
Chippenham Fen	Cambridgeshire	—	Compensation borehole
Thriplow Peat Holes	Cambridgeshire	—	Compensation borehole
Ashwell Springs	Hertfordshire	—	Compensation water provided
Cornard Mere	Suffolk	—	Compensation water increased
Edgbaston Pool	West Midlands	Golf club	Alternative supply found
Old Rectory Meadows	Buckinghamshire	Thames Water and Three Valleys Water	PWS; River Misbourne alleviation scheme
Redgrave and Lopham Fen	Suffolk	Essex and Suffolk Water	Cessation of abstraction and relocation of borehole
Sandwich Bay and Hacklinge Marshes	Kent	Southern Water	Licence revocation
River Gelt	Cumbria	United Utilities	Modification of intake structures
North Dartmoor (Taw Marsh)	Devon	South West Water	Licence revocation

The sites in the table below have had funding agreed through Asset Management Plan 3 (AMPS) for implementation of solutions to alleviate the impact of abstraction. Other sites have been funded for investigation only, any necessary remedial action will be taken as appropriate.

SSSI name	County	Abstractor	Action taken	Completion date
River Eden and Tributaries	Cumbria	North West Water	Relocation of the discharge of compensation flow to remove dry stretch	2002
East Ruston Common	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Reduction of licensed abstraction by 50 per cent. at East Ruston	2003
Bowland Fells	Lancashire	North West Water	Investigation, reduction and relocation as well as new treatment works	2003
The Moors, Bishop's Waltham	Hampshire	Portsmouth Water	Close pumping station and develop new source	2003
Severn Trent Water: Blakedown Brook	Worcestershire	Seven Trent Water and South Staffordshire Water	Severn Trent Water: low flow river compensation works to provide up to 2Ml/d into the Blakedown Brook	2003
South Staffs Water: Hurcott and Podmore Pools			Diverted output and additional flows. Reduction in groundwater abstraction	
Arundel Park	West Sussex	Southern Water	Partial licence revocation	2003
River Camel	Cornwall	South West Water	Investigate and adjust licence operating conditions	2003
Speen (part of Kennet and Lambourn SAC)	Berkshire	Thames Water	Precautionary investigation of possible impact through monitoring of shallow groundwater head. Implement solution	2003
River Avon	Wiltshire	Wessex Water	Reduction of abstraction at Chitterne and use of other sources	2003
River Itchen	Hampshire	Southern Water and Portsmouth Water	Input to catchment modelling investigations and implementation. SW: general R. Itchen SAC investigation. PW: R. Itchen model Fish Screen not included in price limits	2004
Didlington Park Lakes	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Investigation and abstraction reduction (25 per cent. at two boreholes)	2005
Kenninghall and Banham Fens and Quidenham Mere	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Investigation to identify potential impact and abstraction reduction by 25 per cent. at three boreholes	2005
Sheringham and Beeston Regis Common	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Investigations and relocation of PWS boreholes	2005
Yare Broads and Marshes	Norfolk	Anglian Water	Investigation and reduction of licensed abstraction by 75 per cent. at Strumpshaw	2005
Fowlmere	Cambridgeshire	Cambridge Water	Investigation and reduction in licensed abstraction by 50 per cent.	2005
Cattawade Marshes	Essex	Essex and Suffolk Water	Investigation and reduction in licensed abstraction	2005
Aqualate Mere	Staffordshire	Severn Trent Water	Investigate low-flow river and implement solution	2005
Hewell Park Lake	Worcestershire	Severn Trent Water	Implement compensation from Brockhill source during low water levels	2005
Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows	Berkshire	Thames	Investigate and implement solution, including possible modification to licence at Pangbourne	2005

The Environment Agency, in liaison with English Nature, are currently reviewing existing abstraction licences and other permissions in accordance with the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994. The investigation and subsequent remedial action at European designated sites will also contribute to the protection of SSSIs as they make up Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas.

Investigation of SSSIs, identified through the Restoring Sustainable Abstraction Programme, will be undertaken on the basis of the priority assigned. A

number of sites where there is a potential link to water company abstraction have been identified for possible funding through AMP4, although further progression will be subject to further Ministerial Advice and the outcome of the 2004 Periodic Review process.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many water abstraction licences were revoked in each year since 1995; and if she will list *(a)* the holder of the licence, *(b)* the location of the licence, *(c)* the reasons for the action, *(d)* the total water volume of the original licence and *(e)* the amount of compensation paid as a result, in each case. [84736]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: The information requested is not currently held in a central, accessible form within the Environment Agency. A requirement has been identified, through the Agency's Restoring Sustainable Abstraction Programme, to store such information centrally. Work is currently in progress to modify existing database systems to allow this.

In seeking to address environmental problems resulting from the effects of abstractions the Agency seeks wherever possible to secure negotiated and agreed solutions that avoid the necessity to use its statutory powers of revocation and the need for compensation. To date it has not used its statutory powers.

The Agency has, however, identified three examples where it has secured environmentally beneficial solutions by making contributory payments. This may not be an exhaustive list.

River Worfe

The then NRA, pursuing its programme of resource recovery, negotiated with the holder of a surface water spray irrigation licence having a major impact on river flows during low flow periods. Agreement was reached to replace the unconstrained licence by a new borehole having significantly less impact on the river. The NRA undertook to construct and test pump the borehole at a cost of about £60,000.

Redgrave and Lopham Fen

A high profile scheme was agreed to rescue this fen from damage by an abstraction by Essex and Suffolk Water. It involved relocating a public water supply borehole away from the fen. Total cost of the project was £3.2 million of which the Agency contributed £0.78 million. The rest came from Essex and Suffolk Water (£1.02 million) and an EC life grant (£1.4 million).

River Mun

To restore flows in a small north Norfolk river, the Agency persuaded a local farming company to replace a summer surface water licence with a groundwater source. Licensing the borehole involved laying a water main to some isolated properties to prevent derogation of the rights of other abstractors. The Agency paid the £30,000 cost of that.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the abstraction management requirements are which the UK must implement in order to comply with the EC Water Framework Directive. [84737]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: In respect of the management of the abstraction of fresh surface water and groundwater, Article 11(3)*(e)* of the EC Water Framework Directive requires that:

there must be controls over abstraction of fresh surface water and groundwater;

a register of abstractions must be maintained;

abstractions must have prior authorisation; and

controls must be periodically reviewed, and where necessary updated.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what work her Department is doing to ensure that the proposed Water Bill will fully implement the requirements of the EC Water Framework Directive on water abstraction management. [84738]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The controls on abstraction in Part II of the Water Resources Act 1991 and the clauses in the draft Water Bill will together be largely sufficient to deliver the obligation under Article 11(3)*(e)* of the Water Framework Directive. However, there are a number of small, but potentially significant, aspects of the abstraction licensing system that will require further consideration. The Department is currently consulting on what additional measures beyond the proposals in the Water Bill may be needed to fully implement the requirements arising under that Article.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Assisted Suicide

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the action taken by his Department concerning British nationals seeking assisted suicide overseas, with special reference to the practice in European jurisdictions. [82245]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Government policy is that British nationals seeking assisted suicide overseas, in European jurisdictions or otherwise, are not given advice by this Department which might help achieve that outcome.

EU Membership

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Danish proposals to alter the financial terms for the countries applying for EU membership in 2004. [85058]

Mr. MacShane: The Danish Presidency has tabled final proposals to EU candidates including increases in some agricultural quotas and in financing. The Government remains determined to conclude the enlargement negotiations at the Copenhagen European Council (12–13 December). The final agreement must be fair and respect the agreement reached at the Berlin European Council in 1999 on financing enlargement.

Referendums Protocol

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions he gives *(a)* ambassadors and *(b)* other embassy staff on making statements in *(i)* written and (ii) broadcast media; what particular instructions he gives about public comment on political matters when referendums are to be held in a country; and how he decides when the rules relating to comment on referendum campaigns should take effect. [84661]

Mr. Straw: FCO officials who deal with the press are governed by the Civil Service Code and are guided by Cabinet Office advice to government information and communication officers (Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service), both of which can be found on the Cabinet Office website *(www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk)*. British diplomats are under instruction not to engage in any activity that might be interpreted as party political.

TRANSPORT

Air Transport

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the consultation period on the future development of air transport in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [84831]

Mr. Jamieson: A statement was made by the Secretary of State on Thursday 28 November in which he confirmed that the consultation would be extended.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many aircraft orders each United Kingdom airline placed, in the last 12 months. [85614]

Mr. Jamieson: Fleet planning decisions are a commercial matter for the airlines concerned. The Government does not maintain statistical data on the aircraft orders placed by the 150 air carriers licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what account he has taken of *(a)* aircraft orders placed and *(b)* passenger growth in determining the criteria for the future development of air transport in the UK. [85616]

Mr. Jamieson: As described in the national aviation consultation documents, forecasts of unconstrained passenger demand out to 2030 are the starting point for assessing demand for airport capacity. However, this is not a 'predict and provide' approach: the forecasts only identify what additional capacity would be needed if demand were to be met, either fully or partially, so that the positive and negative aspects of that additional capacity can be appraised so as to reach a view on what, if any, degree of airport expansion is appropriate. The passenger forecasts are long term forecasts, anddepend on key factors influencing demand such as GDP and fares; they do not use aircraft orders to assess supply over shorter periods ahead since the availability of aircraft is not assumed to be a constraint.

Airports (Slot Allocation)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the ownership of take-off and landing slots at *(i)* Gatwick and (ii) Heathrow airport. [84869]

Mr. Jamieson: The ownership of slots will be considered as part of the consultants' study now being carried out for the commission on the possible use of market-based solutions for the allocation of slots at congested airports.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to submit proposals to the European Commission on the revision of Article 14 of Council Regulations (EEC) 95/93 on slot allocations at community airports; what timetable has been established for such proposals to be submitted; and what nature of consultation he envisages; [84865]

(2) what his Department's policy is on the *(a)* sale and *(b)* swapping of take-off and landing slots at (i) Gatwick and (ii) Heathrow by airlines. [84870]

Mr. Jamieson: We believe that the auctioning of new slots, and the trading of existing slots, would help maximise the efficiency of use of slots at congested airports. My officials will be consulting interested parties, including the Scottish Executive, about proposals for amendments to the Commission's proposals for amending Regulation 95/93, and for amending Regulation 2408/92 on Public Services Obligations. The aim is to submit proposals to the Commission in early 2003.

Carriageway Closure (M1)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason the northbound carriageway of the M1 motorway near junction 34 has been closed; what steps have been taken to reduce traffic congestion and delays; and when all three lanes on both north and southbound carriageways in this area will be fully operational. [84609]

Mr. Spellar: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Greg Knight, dated 4 December 2002:

I have been asked by the Minister for Transport, John Spellar, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the closure of the northbound carriageway of the M1 motorway at junction 34.

The Highways Agency is currently carrying out major strengthening of the Tinsley Viaduct which carries the M1 Motorway across the Don Valley. The works cannot be completed without some limited carriageway closures. These take place overnight when traffic levels are low. The northbound carriageway was closed for each night between Monday 18 and Saturday 23 November. Alternative routes had been agreed with local authorities and were signed and publicised in advance.

The contractor has been carrying out welding work overnight and this has necessitated closures. Following work on the night of Saturday 23 November, cracking developed in the structure which, if untreated, would have deteriorated. Work could only be

carried out with a complete closure of the road. No work could be undertaken on Sunday night because fog made it impossible to install traffic management safely. On Monday the position, which had been kept under review, began to deteriorate further. Taking into account the fact that delay would prolong the closure the decision was taken to close the carriageway that afternoon. This was done and the carriageway remained closed from 4 pm on Monday to 6.45 am on Wednesday. It closed again briefly later that night to allow clearance of the remaining traffic management.

In taking the decision the Agency took into account the severe congestion that the closure could cause in the area. Local authorities and the Police were informed of the closure as soon as the decision was taken. They assisted with traffic management using the Urban Traffic Control systems to adjust timings on traffic signals in the area. Local and long distance diversion routes were put in place and the closure was publicised through press, radio and the Agency's own website and information line. The information was updated throughout the time the carriageway was closed. Further works on the northbound carriageway will involve a series of closures starting mid February as part of the strengthening works.

The Viaduct is expected to re-open fully to three running lanes plus hardshoulder in each direction following completion of the strengthening contract in early 2005.

If you would like any further information on the works being carried out to the viaduct please contact Simon Diggle, the Project Manager for the works, on 0113 283 5309 or e mail simon.diggle@highways.gsi.gov.uk

International Hub Airports

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard to the *(i)* economic, (ii) social and (iii) environmental costs and benefits which (A) have been obtained and (B) could potentially be obtained from changes in the number of international passengers passing through international hub airports in the United Kingdom; and if he will place copies of related documentation in the Library. [81405]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 181W.

Journeys (Environmental Impact)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the environmental impact of a journey between London and Manchester by *(a)* rail, *(b)* air and *(c)* car. [85336]

Mr. Jamieson: The estimates for carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions are as follows:

(a) rail (average per passenger): 10.5 kg

(b) air (average per passenger): 32 kg

(c) car (average petrol):

per car: 58 kg

average per passenger: 37 kg

(d) car (average diesel):

per car: 35 kg

per passenger: 22 kg.

These CO_2 emissions estimates have been produced using factors developed for the guidelines for company reporting on greenhouse gas emissions published by DETR in 2001 and are based on a journey distance of 177 miles. In the case of air travel and rail travel, they make no allowance for travel to the airport or railway station. Emissions per passenger for travel by car will depend on the size of the vehicle, and the number of passengers. Estimates are based on an average car and average car occupancy over all journeys of 1.59 passengers per car derived from National Travel Survey in the period 1999–2001.

Estimates for air quality pollutants are available from the Commission for Integrated Transport in: "A Comparative Study of the Environmental Effects of Rail and Short-haul Air Travel", September 2001.

Emissions from regional journeys by private car, high-speed rail and domestic aircraft

Grammes per passenger journey

	Car journey (single person)	*High-speed rail (current)*	*Domestic air*
NO_x	330	31	99
PM_{10}	8	2	3
CO	2,162	6	130
NMVOC	297	1	13
SO_2	7	71	9

Local Transport Improvements

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to increase the local authority resources and to provide the expertise required to identify and implement the major local transport improvements envisaged in the Ten Year Transport Plan. [83801]

Mr. Jamieson: The primary responsibility for equipping themselves to deal satisfactorily with their responsibilities for transport rests with local authorities themselves. We recognise that there is currently a shortage of personnel qualified in a number of disciplines relevant to local transport. My Department is therefore helping to fund the Transport Planning Skills Initiative, which is examining how more people can be attracted into the transport profession together with questions of staff training and retention. We are also funding the provision of 111 travel plan co-ordinators at 84 local authorities at a cost of £9 million over three years, to promote the widespread adoption of travel plans in order to help tackle congestion. It is important, too, that the most effective use is made of the available expertise. Our Centres of Excellence initiative is designed to disseminate best practice in the preparation and implementation of Local Transport Plans (LTPs). We are funding the authorities responsible for 17 of these plans to undertake a programme of dissemination covering a range of local transport issues.

Modern Facilities at Stations Programme

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding under the modern facilities at stations programme has been spent, ranked by local authority area of England and Wales. [85026]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The Rail Regulator will first determine a fair and efficient price to be charged by Network Rail for the modern facilities at stations

programme to implement the programme. The Regulator's determination is expected before the end of the year.

Public Service Obligation

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many public service obligations have been imposed on peripheral or development regions since the passing of Article 14 of Council Regulation (EEC) 95/93, broken down by *(a)* subsidy and *(b)* non-subsidy. [84867]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK has imposed Public Service Obligations on 16 routes to peripheral or development regions. All routes are within Scotland. Services currently operate on 15 of these routes and all receive subsidy.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road traffic speed cameras there were in Lancashire in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [84975]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of speed enforcement cameras operational in the Lancashire police force area was 97 in 1996–97 and 147 in 2001–02, the latest year for which figures are available.

Transport Subsidies

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much subsidy was paid to operators in the *(a)* aviation and *(b)* rail industries from public funds in each of the last five years. [84751]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK aviation industry normally operates free of Government subsidy. Assistance totalling some £39.7 million was paid to eleven UK airlines during winter 2001–02. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 the UK introduced a scheme of up to £40 million in financial assistance to UK airlines affected by closure of US and other airspace

The Scottish Executive pays a grant to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. (RIAL) which ensures the continuation of operations at the company's 10 airports. The Executive also pays a subsidy for lifeline air services on which Public Service Obligations have been imposed under EC Regulations.

Payments are as follows:

Year	*HIAL payments (£ million)*	*Lifeline air services payments (£)*
2001–02	19.45	986,200
2000–01	15.142	1,003,402
1999–2000	12.291	526,579
1998–99	6.179	533,871
1997–98	7	346,465

Subsidies to operators in the rail industry comprise Support for Passenger Rail Services, paid by the Strategic Rail authority to train operating companies (TOCs), and grants paid by passenger Transport Executives to Train Operating Companies which provide services in their areas. Payments are as follows:

Year	*Subsidy (£ million)*
2001–02	1,721
2000–01	1,130
1999–2000	1,343
1998–99	1,533
1997–98	1,804

Traffic Managers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to bring forward legislation to introduce traffic managers; how many traffic managers he intends to appoint and what the relationship will be in London between the traffic manager, Transport for London, the Mayor of London, and boroughs of London and utility companies. [84240]

Mr. Jamieson: We have made it clear that better management of our roads is essential and that the present legislation can be improved. It is vital that someone is responsible for minimising the disruption caused by roadworks. The priority is London and we have already held urgent discussions with the key players about the best way forward.

Uckfield Line Electrification

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what terms of reference were given to Booz Allen when commissioned to report on the electrification of the Uckfield line through Edenbridge; [85236]

(2) if he will review his decision under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to place all the information in the Booz Allen Report on the electrification of the Uckfield line through Edenbridge in the Library; [85008]

(3) what categories of material in the Booz Allen report on the electrification of the Uckfield line through Edenbridge he regards as commercially sensitive. [85237]

Mr. Spellar: The terms of reference given to Booz Allen were to make an assessment of the costs and benefits of electrifying the route.

The report includes information drawn from the Best and Final Offers (BAFOs) for the South Central replacement franchise. These offers were submitted to the SRA in confidence, as part of a competitive bidding process.

The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information provides for exemption from publication of information which could affect "commercial and contractual activities". As the Booz Allen report includes such information and as I have already placed in the Library a summary of the Booz Allen report, I do not propose to place the report in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Responsibilities

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the responsibilities of *(a)* the Department of Work and Pensions, *(b)* HM Treasury and *(c)* the DTI for *(i)* minimum wage policy and (ii) social security policy; and if he will make a statement. [85304]

The Prime Minister: The National Minimum Wage ensures fair minimum standards of pay and underpins the Government's tax and benefit reforms. HM Treasury has overall responsibility for tax reform and for ensuring with the DTI, which has the policy lead, that the national minimum wage makes a full contribution to the Government's objectives to relieve child poverty and increase work incentives. The DTI sets the remit for the independent Low Pay Commission and provides, jointly with HM Treasury, analysis which informs its deliberations. DTI and HMT together advise Ministers on the response to the Commission's recommendations on minimum wage rates and other issues. The Inland Revenue has operational responsibility for enforcement activities.

The Department for Work and Pensions is responsible for implementing the Government's Welfare to Work strategy. The Department delivers a range of benefits and services for people of working age, those with disabilities, pensioners and children. Jobcentre Plus brings together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency dealing with working age people to deliver a fully integrated work and benefit service for claimants. The Pension Service will deliver services to older people.

WALES

Antisocial Behaviour

10. **Geraint Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Home Office on introducing fixed penalty notices for antisocial behaviour in parts of Wales. [83077]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with colleagues about matters affecting Wales.

The Government are committed to tackling antisocial behaviour, which can cause considerable distress and upset to those who live in the localities where it occurs.

Fixed penalty notices for certain types of antisocial behaviour are currently being piloted in a part of North Wales.

The intention is to roll the scheme out nationally.

26. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the use of antisocial behaviour order in Wales. [83093]

Peter Hain: The targeted use of antisocial behaviour orders—and less formal sanctions such as acceptable behaviour contracts, curfew and parenting orders and 'On the Spot' fines has been effective in tackling offenders.

We are committed to legislation in this session to reduce further the scourge of anti-social behaviour.

Socially Deprived Communities

11. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary about measures to improve the health of individuals in socially deprived communities in Wales. [83078]

Mr. Touhig: I have regular meetings with my ministerial colleagues at the National Assembly for Wales and health care is an issue that regularly arises in our discussions.

Red Dragon Project

12. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with Ministers on the Red Dragon Project in the Vale of Glamorgan. [83079]

Peter Hain: I very much welcome the agreement on the Red Dragon Project in St Athan between the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, DARA and WDA, in August, for a state-of-the-art aircraft maintenance facility and a high tech aerospace park which will safeguard around 4,000 jobs.

Assembly Finance

13. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to discuss the implications of the pre-Budget review for the financing of the Assembly with the First Secretary. [83080]

Peter Hain: I have already discussed this with the First Minister.

Crime Statistics

14. **Mr. Djanogly:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on levels of crime in Wales. [83081]

Mr. Touhig: Recorded crime in Wales has fallen by 16 per cent. since 1997.

Aerospace Industry

15. **Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the Department for Trade and Industry and *(b)* the Treasury on repayable launch aid for the development of the aerospace industry in Wales. [83082]

Peter Hain: The Government have been, and continue to be, supportive of the aerospace industry in the UK. Since 1997, we have committed nearly £1 billion in Launch Investment (previously known as Launch Aid) for major new large aircraft and engine projects.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, announced on 16 May this year the establishment of the Aerospace Innovation and Growth Team (IGT), led by Sir Richard Evans. The IGT, as part of its remit, is considering medium to long-term strategic issues affecting the aerospace sector, including the future of Government support mechanisms. Sir Richard and his team are currently about halfway

through their work, and I expect the IGT to report by next spring with recommendations and an agreed action plan to take the industry forward.

Eye Tests

16. **Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the National Assembly for Wales about the degree to which exemption from charges for eye tests can be extended. [83083]

Mr. Touhig: The National Assembly for Wales is able to determine fees for NHS sight tests and the groups that qualify for free sight tests, in the same way as the Department of Health can in England.

Sight tests should not be confused with eye health examinations. The Wales Eye Care Initiative provides for free eye health examinations for certain groups of people identified as being at higher risk of developing eye disease than the rest of the population.

Industrial Relations

17. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding industrial relations in north-west Wales. [83084]

Peter Hain: I regularly meet Cabinet colleagues and discuss a range of issues including industrial relations.

The Government have noted the decision of the Employment Tribunal in respect of Friction Dynamics, and will study the full judgment once it is available.

The law on dismissal of striking workers is under review as part of the Employment Relations Act 1999. The Government are currently talking to unions, employers and others to gather evidence, and will produce a consultation document in early 2003.

GP Services

18. **Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about the provision of GP services in Wales. [83085]

Mr. Touhig: I have regular meetings with the Assembly's First Minister, and the provision of health care in all parts of Wales is a matter that we regularly discuss. The National Assembly has put in place a number of actions to attract GPs to Valley's communities—for example, the discretionary recruitment and retention initiatives, and improvements to premises.

Objective 5

19. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress being made under Objective 5 of his 2002–03 objectives. [83086]

Peter Hain: A revised version of the Statement of Funding Policy, "Funding the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly" was published in July this year at the time of Spending Review 2002. It is available from HM Treasury and can also be found at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/fundingguidance.

Top-up Fees

20. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding top-up fees for Welsh universities. [83087]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend meets regularly with the First Minister to discuss a range of issues, including higher education.

Bovine TB

21. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the spread of bovine TB in Wales and in English/Welsh border areas. [83088]

Peter Hain: I have regular discussions with the First Secretary about a variety of agricultural matters.

I welcome the recent announcement of relaxation on movements from mid January, which will come as some relief to the industry.

However, this UK wide relaxation will be based on rigorous risk assessment as part of the on-going drive towards control and eradication of this disease.

Police Community Support

22. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Home Office on the use of police community support officers in Wales. [83089]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with colleagues about matters affecting Wales.

Community Support Officers are a key part of our Police Reform programme. They are an additional resource aimed at further reducing crime and the fear of crime. They will be police authority employees who will help provide a highly visible policing presence on the streets and help tackle nuisance crime.

27 forces in England and Wales have successfully bid for funding. Gwent is one of these forces and will receive £900,000, which will pay for 30 officers in 2003–04.

Manufacturing

24. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement regarding the state of manufacturing in Wales. [83091]

Peter Hain: While manufacturing output in Wales fell in the last four quarters by 7.3 per cent. compared with the same figures a year ago, output for the last quarter rose by 2.6 per cent.

The general UK slowdown in manufacturing, which began in 2001, was clearly influenced by the synchronised global slowdown, collapse in demand for ICT-related goods and heightened uncertainty in the aftermath of 11 September.

The slowdown remains a global phenomenon, but Wales and the UK stand ready to benefit from any sustained recovery due to the Government's pro-active enterprise agenda.

Learning, Leisure and Sport

25. **Dr. Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the Welsh Assembly on improvements in learning, leisure and sporting opportunities. [83092]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend meets regularly with the First Minister and I hold regular meetings with the National Assembly Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to discuss a range of areas, including the significant improvements which continue to be made in opportunities for education, training, leisure and sport in Wales.

Transport

27. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly regarding co-ordination in transport in Wales. [83094]

Peter Hain: I meet with the First Minister of the Welsh Assembly Government regularly to discuss a range of issues, including the co-ordination of transport in Wales. Recently my hon. Friend the Under Secretary of State for Wales met with the Assembly's Minister for the Environment to discuss, among other things, integrated transport in Wales.

We are working closely with the Assembly Government to identify the best means of developing integrated transport networks.

Farming

28. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding the farming industry in Wales. [83095]

Peter Hain: I have regular meetings with the First Secretary at which a variety of issues are discussed, including the Welsh farming.

I look forward to meeting representatives of the farming industry and doing all I can on behalf of the industry in Wales.

Courts

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Lord Chancellor's Department about the closure of magistrates' courts, Crown courts and their administrative offices in Wales. [83096]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with colleagues about matters affecting Wales.

Decisions on the future of individual magistrates' courts are a matter for the Magistrates' Courts Committees (MCC). Each MCC is responsible for providing an efficient and effective service to court users in its area, including the provision of adequate accommodation, in consultation with the local paying authority or authorities.

There are no plans to close any Crown Court Centres in Wales.

Heroin

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent estimate he has made of the scale of heroin misuse in coalfield areas in Wales. [83069]

Mr. Touhig: Due to the illegal nature of drug taking it is extremely difficult to estimate the number of users. We have to rely on the number of people in treatment and the number of people arrested testing positive in order to get an estimate of the scale of heroin misuse.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84790]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Expenditure on travel by my Department in 2001–02 was some £260,000.

My Department has no agencies.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84938]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Travel costs are met from within the general running costs budget. There is no discrete budget solely for travel.

My Department has no agencies.

Police Funding

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues and the First Secretary of the National Assembly about police funding in Wales. [83090]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues, and with Assembly Members about matters affecting Wales.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing, Community Safety and Young People will tomorrow be announcing details of the provisional funding settlement for police authorities for 2003–04.

Public Appointments

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his ethnic minority strategy for public appointments. [83075]

Mr. Touhig: Although the Wales Office does not make public appointments, where recommendations are given, we seek to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all people.

DEFENCE

Army Exercises

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army exercises have been cancelled since January 2001. [84535]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* For details on those exercises cancelled between January and November 2001, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 374W to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) The following table covers those Army exercises which have been cancelled since November 2001. It includes details on the defence exercise programme, but not unit-organised exercises, details of which are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Exercise name	*Dates*	*Country*	*Reason for cancellation*
Flying Rhino 02	Not finalised	Germany	Operational commitments
Gobi Dust 02	Not finalised	USA	US could not provide troops
Winged Star 02	Not finalised	USA	Firefighters strike
Bass Rock 02	Not finalised	Canada	Canada could not provide troops
Readiness Challenge 02	1–27 April 2002	USA	US cancelled exercise
Artful Issue 02	October 2002	Germany	UK withdrawal from multi-national division centre
Snowshoe 1 and 2	January-March 2002	Canada	No longer required
Arrcade Globe 02	July 2002	Germany	Cancelled by HQ ARRC
Glacial Engima	January 2002	Norway	Operational commitments
Ardent Ground 02	May 2002	Germany	UK withdrawal from AMF(L)
PFP 1/02	Not finalised	Central Asia	Cancelled by CENTCOM
Ponte Vecchio	Not finalised	Italy	Cancelled by Jt. NBC Regt.
Iron Ram 02	1–30 November 2002	Italy	Firefighters strike
Gaulish 4/02	November 2002	France	Firefighters strike
Asterix 4/02	October 2002	France	Firefighters strike
Kelp Fire	January-March 2002	Falkland Islands	Operational commitments
Rock Work	Not finalised	Gibraltar	Unit cancellation
Britannia Way/Iberian Focus	September 2002	Spain	Firefighters strike
Lark Song/Foxtrot	Not finalised	Denmark	Cancelled by Denmark
Island Spell	June 2002	Falkland Islands	Cancelled by unit
Power Drive	November 2002	Gibraltar	Cancelled by host command
Courageous Bat	September 2002	Denmark	Cancelled by unit
Cygnet Goose	September 2002	Falkland Islands	Cancelled by unit
Grand Prix 3/02	25 October-6 December 2002	Kenya	Firefighters strike
Panther Cub 6/02	17 September-30 October 2002	Belize	Ex returned to UK 4 days after deployment due to firefighters strike
Panther Cub 7/02	30 October-12 December 2002	Belize	Firefighters strike
Iron Foray	5–11 November 2002	UK	Firefighters strike
UK Milan Concentration	10–21 November 2002	UK	Firefighters strike
Druids Dance	18 November-8 December 2002	UK	Firefighters strike
Reynard Chase	25 November-8 December 2002	UK	Resource constraints
Ulan Eagle	26 August-21 September 2002	UK	Downsized due to resource constraints

Audits

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* external and *(b)* internal bodies that audit the Ministry of Defence. [84542]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Comptroller and Auditor General is the external auditor of most of the Ministry of Defence's activity, covering the MOD's 11 top level budgets and six of the MOD's seven executive non-departmental public bodies. KPMG are currently the external auditor for the seventh, the Oil and Pipeline Agency.

The main source of internal audit is provided by the MOD's Defence Internal Audit Service, which covers the 11 top level budgets and two trading funds (ABRO and DARA). Of the remaining three trading funds, PKF are internal auditors for the Met Office, Deloitte and Touche are internal auditors to DSTL and Bentley Jennison for the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office. Of the non-departmental public bodies, Walton & Co are auditors to the Royal Marines Museum, the Royal Naval Museum and the Royal Navy Submarines Museum. KPMG are internal auditors to the Oil and Pipeline Agency. Baker Tilly are internal auditors to the Fleet Air Museum, while Daly, Hoggett & Co are internal auditors to the National Army Museum.

European Headline Goal

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress by the UK in achieving the European Headline Goal; and what discussions he has had with his European counterparts with regard to achieving the Goal. [84845]

Mr. Hoon: While achieving the Headline Goal is a matter for all member states, the United Kingdom's contribution is substantial. Up to 12,500 troops, 18 warships and 72 combat aircraft could be made available for EU-led operations, covering a range of capabilities. The UK plays a leading role in the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP), in which panels of national experts are producing options for solutions to capability gaps. The UK is a member of all but one of the 18 panels formed so far and chairs four of them.

Progress was reviewed at the Informal Meeting of EU Defence Ministers on 4 October and the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) on 18 November. Capabilities issues are also often discussed bilaterally with other member states.

Fire Dispute

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of United States Air Force personnel based at RAF bases to fight fires during the firefighters' strike. [84744]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* United States Air Force personnel based at RAF bases are not being used to provide fire cover for the civilian community, during the firefighters' strike.

The emergency nationwide firefighting cover which has been provided by our service men and women during the strikes is proving effective, and personnel who have been called upon to assist are coping very well with all that has been asked of them.

Gulf Operations

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost has been of preparation to move *(a)* service personnel and medical auxiliaries and *(b)* military equipment to locations in the Gulf regions in the last 12 months. [84215]

Mr. Ingram: The cost of preparing equipment and personnel for routine movement to and from the Gulf is not recorded separately and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 29 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 709W setting out the overall additional expenditure incurred by the Ministry of Defence as a direct result of operations in the Gulf from 1992–93 onwards.

Harrier

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the financial consequences for his Department of withdrawing the RN Sea Harrier from service. [84838]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) on 5 November, *Official Report*, column 171W and to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). on 16 April, *Official Report*, columns 821–2W and 29 April, *Official Report*, column 529W.

Home Defence

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what regular armed forces are committed to home defence; if numbers are to be increased; and if he will make a statement. [84842]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces have a long-standing mission to help ensure the protection and security of the United Kingdom, providing military aid to the civil authorities as required.

The Home Office has responsibility for counter terrorism policy and the lead on domestic security lies with the civil agencies, particularly the police. There are no service personnel purely dedicated to home defence although United Kingdom based force elements can be deployed at short notice to provide assistance to the civil authorities. In addition, the RAF is responsible for the defence of our airspace and the Royal Navy has a role in ensuring the integrity of our territorial waters.

The Strategic Defence Review New Chapter considered enhancements to those force elements that could contribute to the capability of the armed forces to meet requests from the civil authorities for home defence and security purposes. It concluded that 14 new civil contingency reaction forces should be established from existing volunteer reserve personnel, and some 700 new volunteer reserve posts established to provide improved command, control and planning capabilities. Action on this is in hand.

Prague Summit

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Prague Summit, with particular reference to increasing European defence capability, interoperability and enlargement. [84847]

Mr. Hoon: The NATO Summit in Prague on 21–22 November opened a new chapter in the Alliance's history aimed at ensuring that NATO has the tools to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Alliance leaders agreed a comprehensive package of measures: a streamlined Command Structure; a new NATO Response Force; reinvigorated Alliance Partnership programmes, including building on the success of the NATO-Russia Council; and modernisation of NATO's internal structures and processes.

The Summit also launched a new capabilities initiative, the 'Prague Capabilities Commitment' (PCC), which will focus on improvements in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence, Information Superiority, Combat Effectiveness, and Deployability and Sustainability. Interoperability and multinational solutions to capability shortfalls are key themes of the initiative. The PCC will be complementary to the European Union's Headline Goal.

Invitations to join the Alliance were issued to seven countries. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia will now begin accession talks, with formal accession expected in 2004. The invitees will continue to prepare for membership through NATO's Membership Action Plan.

Royal Navy Personnel

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many trained *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks have left the Royal Navy in each of the past five years; what estimate he has made of likely future trends; and what steps he is taking to reduce the numbers of trained personnel leaving the Royal Navy. [84370]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is set out in the table, including Royal Marines:

Exits during financial year	*Trained officers*[1]	*Trained ratings/ other ranks*[1]
1997–98	500	3,560
1998–99	450	3,600
1999–2000	500	3,610
2000–01	400	3,100
2001–02	440	3,540

[1] Source—Defence Analytical Services Agency. Figures have been rounded to the nearest multiple of 10, consistent with the presentation in DASA's Quarterly Press Release.

The latest published figures, for 1 October 2002, show that during the 12 months to 30 September 2002 the rate of outflow has slowed to 400 officers and 3,230 ratings/ other ranks, and this favourable trend is expected to continue.

The rate of outflow is reducing, but retention is still recognised as a major challenge. A range of measures are in hand to address the issue holistically throughout the service.

Sea Dart

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on upgrading of the Type 42s Sea Dart missile; and what the effect of the upgrade will be. [84841]

Dr. Moonie: The Sea Dart missile system has undergone a number of modifications and updates to improve its reliability and capability. The final element of the programme incorporates an infra red fuse in the missile. This fuse, which has now come into service, will improve the Royal Navy's medium and long range defence against aircraft and missile threats.

Sea Trials

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* HMS Albion and *(b)* HMS Bulwark will commence sea trials. [84377]

Dr. Moonie: Sea trials for HMS Albion are expected to begin later this month. HMS Bulwark is expected to start sea trials in 2004.

Ship Deployments

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which ships were on deployment on *(a)* 1 November 2000, *(b)* 1 May 2001, *(c)* 1 November 2001, *(d)* 1 May 2002 and *(e)* 1 November 2002. [84375]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is as follows:

1 November 2000
- HMS Invincible
- HMS Fearless
- HMS Ocean
- HMS York
- HMS Liverpool
- HMS Cardiff
- HMS Newcastle
- HMS Northumberland
- HMS Argyll
- HMS Sutherland
- HMS Marlborough
- HMS Iron Duke
- HMS Cornwall
- HMS Cumberland
- HMS Endurance
- HMS Somerset
- HMS Scott
- HMS Grimsby
- HMS Middleton
- HMS Pembroke
- HMS Sandown
- HMS Penzance
- HMS Dumbarton Castle
- RFA Black Rover
- RFA Grey Rover
- RFA Bayleaf
- RFA Brambleleaf
- RFA Orangeleaf
- RFA Fort Austin
- RFA Fort Rosalie
- RFA Fort Victoria
- RFA Fort George
- RFA Sir Bedivere
- RFA Sir Galahad
- RFA Sir Geraint
- RFA Sir Percivale
- RFA Sir Tristram
- RFA Sea Centurion

1 May 2001
- HMS Glasgow
- HMS Gloucester
- HMS Westminster
- HMS Somerset
- HMS Lancaster
- HMS Richmond
- HMS Sheffield
- HMS Endurance
- HMS Sutherland
- HMS Bangor
- HMS Grimsby
- HMS Atherstone
- HMS Leeds Castle
- RFA Black Rover
- RFA Gold Rover
- RFA Oakleaf
- RFA Orangeleaf
- RFA Diligence
- RFA Sir Tristram
- RFA Sea Crusader
- RFA Sea Centurion

1 November 2001
- HMS Superb
- HMS Trafalgar
- HMS Triumph
- HMS Illustrious
- HMS Fearless
- HMS Ocean

HMS Edinburgh
HMS Nottingham
HMS Southampton
HMS Northumberland
HMS Montrose
HMS Monmouth
HMS Marlborough
HMS Kent
HMS Cornwall
HMS Chatham
HMS Roebuck
HMS Endurance
HMS Bangor
HMS Bridport
HMS Quorn
HMS Cattistock
HMS Walney
HMS Inverness
HMS Leeds Castle
RFA Black Rover
RFA Gold Rover
RFA Bayleaf
RFA Brambleleaf
RFA Oakleaf
RFA Fort Austin
RFA Fort Rosalie
RFA Fort Victoria
RFA Diligence
RFA Sir Bedivere
RFA Sir Galahad
RFA Sir Geraint
RFA Sir Percivale
RFA Sir Tristram
RFA Sea Crusader
RFA Sea Centurion

1 May 2002
HMS Splendid
HMS Ocean
HMS Nottingham
HMS York
HMS Newcastle
HMS Portland
HMS Richmond
HMS Campbeltown
HMS Sheffield
HMS Endurance
HMS Grimsby
HMS Pembroke
HMS Ramsey
HMS Leeds Castle
RFA Grey Rover
RFA Bayleaf
RFA Oakleaf
RFA Fort Austin
RFA Fort George
RFA Diligence
RFA Sir Geraint
RFA Sir Percivale
RFA Sir Tristram

1 November 2002
HMS Turbulent
HMS Tireless
HMS Ark Royal
HMS Edinburgh
HMS Cardiff
HMS Southampton
HMS Argyll
HMS Somerset
HMS Westminster
HMS Grafton
HMS Cumberland
HMS Scott
HMS Endurance
HMS Leeds Castle
HMS Bangor
HMS Sandown
HMS Brocklesby
HMS Blyth
HMS Walney
HMS Pembroke
HMS Dumbarton Castle
RFA Grey Rover
RFA Bayleaf
RFA Oakleaf
RFA Orangeleaf
RFA Fort Austin
RFA Fort Victoria
RFA Diligence
RFA Sir Bedivere
RFA Sir Galahad
RFA Sea Crusader

In addition, the Royal Navy has continuously maintained an SSBN on strategic deterrent patrol.

Surplus Land

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the value of land held by his Department which is surplus to requirements. [82554]

Dr. Moonie: The value of property sold is eventually determined by the market at the time of sale, and is clearly subject to many uncertainties. However, the Ministry of Defence is conducting a review of its estate to determine which are its long term core sites that are to be the focus of future investment. Those sites that are non core will come forward for disposal in the medium to long term. In the meantime, the Department agreed to generate income of £500 million from the disposal of surplus land and property over the next three years.

Swingfire Missiles

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how old are the Swingfire missiles that have been lost in the Bristol Channel. [85061]

Dr. Moonie: The Swingfire warheads which were lost at the St. Thomas's Head Range last March had been removed from the missiles in preparation for disposal. The warheads are 20 to 21-years-old.

Type 45 Destroyer

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on procurement of the Type 45 Destroyer. [84953]

Dr. Moonie: The Type 45 Destroyer project remains on track to meet its planned in-service date. There are six ships on contract and it is currently planned that production will begin in spring 2003 with an in-service date for the first of class of late 2007.

Urban Battlefield Trainer

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Urban Battlefield Trainer, with particular reference to its use in training soldiers for fighting in built-up areas. [84848]

Dr. Moonie: The Urban Battlefield Trainer (URBAT) is a computer system facilitating procedural training in an urban environment up to company level. It is designed to test and practice procedures through the generation of a battle picture, rather than having to deploy men and equipment physically. In particular, it tests headquarters in the timely issue and dissemination of orders, monitoring the effective flow of information and reaction to the unexpected. The current URBAT is located at Copehill Down training village on Salisbury Plain training area and is the only computer training system able to provide the required level of terrain definition to allow urban operations to be exercised effectively. A new system, known as URBAT 2, is currently being procured and should be in service by the end of July 2003. It will significantly enhance the training benefit by making use of different urban terrain mapping and increasing operator participation.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Entertainment Licences

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had about *(a)* liquor and *(b)* public entertainment licensing of village halls. [85158]

Dr. Howells: In addition to the White Paper public consultation on the proposals now contained in the Licensing Bill, Ministers have had numerous discussions and entered into a great amount of correspondence with a variety of different organisations and individuals. As the new regime proposed in the licensing Bill will cover all premises where licensable activities take place, discussions have focused on how the system will work for all types of premises, and of course the impact on village halls has been considered.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list *(a)* the organisations she contacted offering consultation and *(b)* those who responded, in respect of entertainment licence proposals in the Licensing Bill. [84617]

Dr. Howells: We sent the White Paper, that was published in April 2000, to 231 organisations in order to gain their responses in respect of our proposals. I am arranging for a list of these organisations to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Any organisation or individual was, of course, free to respond to the White Paper, which was published and made freely available on Government websites.

We received 1,215 responses to the consultation of which 656 were from organisations. Copies of these responses were placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Funding

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list new *(a)* companies, *(b)* work and *(c)* venues funded by her Department since 1998; and if she will make a statement. [83747]

Dr. Howells: We have contacted the Arts Council of England to request the information required, and my my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of her letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sports and Social Clubs

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received concerning the level of closures of social and sports clubs; what measures the Government are taking to support social and sports clubs; and if she will make a statement. [85162]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are committed to supporting amateur sports clubs, which play important roles as local social centres. Over the last two years, my Department has worked closely with HM Treasury, Sport England, the Central Council of Physical Recreation and sport's governing bodies on the provision of financial support for such clubs. In the course of that work, my Department has received a large number of formal and informal representations on club numbers from the Council, governing bodies and other interested parties.

Following detailed work with the Charity Commission, amateur sports clubs have had the opportunity to apply for registered charitable status under new guidance announced in April. Clubs who successfully apply will benefit from mandatory 80 per cent. business rate relief, tax exemption for trading income, and Payroll Giving, and tax reliefs for gifts by individuals and companies.

Clubs who do not wish to apply for charitable status can apply for a package of tax reliefs available direct from the Inland Revenue. For the majority of amateur sports clubs these two packages offer an excellent way forward, potentially saving them millions of pounds a year in tax.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many sports and social clubs *(a)* in England and *(b)* in York and North Yorkshire there were on 1 May *(i)* 1997 and (ii) 2000; and how many are there now. [85163]

Mr. Caborn: The most accurate estimate of the numbers of amateur sports clubs in the UK was obtained by my Department earlier this year following a wide consultation of governing bodies. Based on those discussions, 110,000 departmental guidance leaflets on the benefits of charitable status were sent to individual clubs.

Earlier work by the Central Council of Physical Recreation was based on random sampling and suggested that sports club numbers had fallen slightly over recent years. Neither the Council nor Sport England holds details of the numbers of sports clubs in England, or in York and North Yorkshire, or of numbers of purely social clubs.

Wembley Stadium

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Government will *(a)* give, *(b)* loan and *(c)* underwrite further funding for the building of Wembley Stadium. [85071]

Mr. Caborn: The Government's contribution to the English National Stadium project is Limited to a grant of up to 20 million towards non-stadium infrastructure. The London Development Agency is also granting up to £21 million and the Sports Lottery Fund's grant of £120 million has already been paid and spent by Wembley National Stadium Limited. Full details of the National Stadium project's costs and funding are set out in the final report of the English National Stadium Review led by Patrick Carter, copies of which were placed in the House Library on 16 October and which can be downloaded from my Department's websiteat http://www.culture.gov.uk/sport.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many abandoned vehicles were dealt with under the Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978 in each year since 1997; and what the average cost is of dealing with abandoned vehicles under this Order. [84520]

Angela Smith: There are no data available for the numbers and the costs associated with the collection of abandoned vehicles for the years 1997 to 1999. However, at the start of this year the Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of the Environment commissioned a survey to obtain data and information about End of Life Vehicles (ELVs), including abandoned vehicles, in 2000.

In 2000, the number of abandoned vehicles disposed of by district councils was 2,899 and the direct costs associated with collection and disposal of these ranged from £0 to £50. The average cost was £40.67. Additional costs, including the costs of storage and officer time, increased the average cost to £53. The total cost to councils for collecting all abandoned vehicles in 2000 was estimated to be £117,902.

An Executive Summary of the survey will be published in early 2003.

Car Crime

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to increase penalties for joy riders and car thieves. [84381]

Mr. Browne: The Government are committed to undertaking a comprehensive review of the law relating to road traffic penalties in Northern Ireland. This will include the offence of aggravated vehicle taking.

Preparatory work is under way on a consultation paper in anticipation of this review. I hope to be in a position to issue this document to a wide range of interested parties early in the coming new year.

Any decision on the future of these penalties must be made on the basis of the recommendations of the review.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for a review of penalties available to courts dealing with the perpetrators of car thefts and joy riding in Northern Ireland. [83113]

Mr. Browne: The Government are committed to undertaking a comprehensive review of the law relating to road traffic penalties in Northern Ireland. This will include the offence of aggravated vehicle taking.

Preparatory work is under way on a consultation paper in anticipation of this review. I hope to be in a position to issue this document to a wide range of interested parties early in the coming new year.

Nursing Staff

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action is being taken by the Department of Health to ensure that there are enough specialised nursing staff to monitor patients on drugs. [83039]

Mr. Browne: I recently announced an additional £100,000 recurrent funding to improve the staffing infrastructure needed to support services for people who suffer from Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Electronic Tagging

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to introduce electronic tagging for certain categories of criminals in Northern Ireland. [84478]

Mr. Browne: I have no immediate proposals to introduce the electronic tagging of criminals. The Criminal Justice Review recommended that electronic monitoring be kept under review in the light of developing experience elsewhere, including in England and Wales. The issue is currently being considered as part of a review of the Northern Ireland sentencing framework.

Fertiliser Industry

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions will be held with the Irish Government regarding the loss of 200 jobs in the fertiliser industry in North Belfast; and what action will be taken to ensure that all staff statutory requirements

are met in respect of pension fund, redundancy payments and the issuing of statutory notices of employment. [82043]

Mr. Pearson: As well as meeting with Richardsons' management and Unions representing the work force, I have written to the company shareholders, including the Irish Government, expressing my concern over the treatment of the work force. I have met with ICI and a representative of the Irish Government. Further I hope to meet Mary Harney TD Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment shortly.

The issues relating to pensions are complex. There are four different pension schemes and the shareholders have asked the trustees of each scheme to establish the facts and options to mitigate the impact on members. The shareholders are proposing to meet with the four pension fund trustees and while the Government's influence in relation to the operation of private pension schemes may be limited, I will await the outcome of this meeting with interest.

In relation to statutory payments, former employees at the Belfast plant may make an application to the Department for Employment and Learning for statutory redundancy payments. If the employees believe that IFI, Richardson's parent company, failed to consult about the redundancies in proper time they can bring a complaint to an industrial tribunal.

Inward Investment (Strangford)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he is taking to support inward investment in the Strangford area, in particular *(a)* Newtownards and *(b)* Killyleagh. [82025]

Mr. Pearson: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, through its Agency Invest Northern Ireland, is actively seeking to attract high quality knowledge-based investment to Northern Ireland. Invest Northern Ireland is working with district councils, including the Ards and Down councils and other local stakeholders to develop regional propositions that will promote the key benefits of those areas. As part of this process Ards council facilitated a meeting last month to develop a sales proposition for the area and follow-up actions are under way.

Research Base

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to give Northern Ireland an improved research base; and how he plans to achieve this. [82031]

Mr. Pearson: An improved research base, which is dependent on the combined efforts of Government, academia and the private sector, is critical for the development of a modern, competitive, knowledge based economy in Northern Ireland. I launched a draft Regional Innovation Strategy for public consultation on 21 November 2002. Entitled "think, create, innovate" it identifies a series of actions to build on Northern Ireland's strengths and address its weaknesses. It also seeks to ensure that there is a strategic framework for action by all the key stakeholders. The public consultation phase will end in January 2003 and I intend to publish the final version in March 2003.

Scallops

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide compensation to the Northern Ireland scallop industry following the recent imposition of a retrospective ban on the Irish Sea scallop grounds; and when he intends to re-open the fishery. [84456]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No. It remains Northern Ireland policy not to pay compensation during such outbreaks. The ban in the Irish Sea does not extend to the North Sea or Strangford Lough where scallops may still be caught by fishermen subject to the requirement that they be taken to an approved processing plant for shucking under a movement permit.

It is not possible at this stage to indicate when the fishery will reopened.

Teachers' Pay

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will extend the consultation period for submissions on the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Inquiry in Northern Ireland. [85034]

Jane Kennedy: A letter from the Inquiry's Chairman was sent to all schools on 2 December informing them that it has decided, following representations from school governors, to extend the date for the receipt of evidence for its main report to 31 January 2003.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Solicitor-General what the total expenditure of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84801]

The Solicitor-General: The total expenditure of the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers on official travel in 2001–02 was £65,919.

The total expenditure of the Crown Prosecution Service on official travel in 2001–02 was £4,255,472.

The total expenditure of the Treasury Solicitor's Department on official travel in 2001–02 was £22,151.

The total expenditure of HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate on official travel in 2001–02 was £89,096.

The total expenditure of the Serious Fraud Office on official travel in 2001–02 was £356,000.

Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas.

Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, 1374–76W).

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Employment Delays

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what delays are being experienced by schools between employing *(a)* teaching, *(b)* classroom support, *(c)* voluntary and *(d)* other staff and their deployment into activities with children, arising from delays in screening by the Criminal Records Bureau. [85068]

Mr. Miliband: My Department has not been made aware of any delays in schools deploying staff or volunteers to work with children since we issued advice about interim arrangements in September. Those arrangements allow new staff and volunteers in schools for whom a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure is required to be deployed to work with children while awaiting the Disclosure at the discretion of the Head teacher. Schools should check my Department's list of people who are barred from working with children in the education service (List 99) and complete other recruitment checks such as taking up references, before staff or volunteers start work.

Adult Learning

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what help will be given to rural areas to help with adult learning. [85060]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Support for adult learners in rural areas is a key priority in our national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy, launched in March 2001. Good progress is being made, and through the Learning and Skills Council, we are expanding the range of provision, and providing better access. For example, extended schools are providing centres for adult learning within rural communities, and in some locations, may also provide access to sports and other facilities. Online centres have also been established in rural areas, and trials are under way to pilot the use of ICT in pubs.

In 2001–02 a total of 8,064 new child care places were created in Devon, Cornwall, Durham and Lincolnshire, helping more parents to access learning provision. And the modernisation of the Higher Education student support system will consider how to improve access through online application and interactive help facilities for students.

We shall be reporting fully on all our activities to the Countryside Agency as part of the annual cycle of rural proofing reporting by the Government. We shall also be working closely with DEFRA on their review of skills and learning in rural areas announced on 21 November.

Child Care Review

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made with the implementation of the Inter Departmental Child Care Review. [83439]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Following the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 July, a single inter-departmental Unit responsible for both Sure Start and Early Years and Child Care programmes has been established, accountable for delivery to the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions. My Noble Friend Baroness Ashton the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for Sure Start, Early Years and Child Care is lead Minister for the work of the new Unit and a member of the Ministerial team of both Departments.

The new Unit will have a £1.5 billion budget, including more than doubling Child Care spending, by 2006. Its work will include: reforming local and national infrastructure and simplifying funding; establishing a network of Children's Centres, providing integrated Child Care, early education, family and health services for up to 650,000 children in disadvantaged areas by 2006; and creating at least 250,000 new child care places by that date, on top of the existing target of creating new places for 1.6 million children by 2004.

The report of the child care review, "Delivering for Children and Families", was published on 6 November. A copy is available in the Library.

Drugs Awareness

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have a teacher trained in drugs awareness and education. [85036]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not collected centrally.

Education Costs

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much the Government allocates to educate a child aged 11 to 16 years in the *(a)* Tamworth and *(b)* Sutton Coldfield constituencies. [84178]

Mr. Miliband: In 2002–03, Staffordshire's average funding per pupil aged 11–15 is £3,440, and for Birmingham it is £4,230. We do not identify separately the amounts for individual constituencies. The reason for the difference is the higher levels of deprivation in Birmingham as a whole. Funding is distributed to schools and children through local education authorities' own funding formulae: these formulae can be a significant cause of the differences in funding between similar schools in neighbouring authorities, since they often do not take enough account of the needs of deprived children. We have issued guidance to LEAs about their use of deprivation funding in order to persuade them to target funding for deprivation at those children and schools that most need it.

Note:

Figures in cash terms for pupils aged 11 to 15 (secondary school pupils)—rounded to nearest 10. The figures include the Education SSA plus Grants.

Education Provision (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the pupil/teacher ratios were

for *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in *(i)* Chesham and Amersham and (ii) Buckinghamshire in each year since 1 January 1996. [85126]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools[1]: Pupil:teacher ratios[2]

	Pupil:teacher ratio			
	Chesham and Amersham[3]		*Buckinghamshire LEA*	
Position in January each year	*Primary schools*	*Secondary schools*	*Primary schools*	*Secondary schools*
1996	[4]—	[4]—	[5]23.6	[5]17.1
1997	24.5	17.0	[5]23.9	[5]17.3
1998	24.7	17.1	24.2	17.6
1999	24.6	18.2	23.9	18.1
2000	23.6	18.3	22.8	18.4
2001	22.9	18.2	22.8	18.3
2002	22.2	18.0	22.1	18.1

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[2] The pupil:teacher ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent pupils on roll in schools by the total number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers employed in schools.

[3] Parliamentary constituency.

[4] Not available.

[5] Before local government reorganisation.

Source
Annual Schools' Census

Examinations

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children excluded from school gained *(a)* five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C and *(b)* one or more GCSEs in *(i)* 2001 and (ii) 2002. [85347]

Mr. Miliband: Currently the only readily available source of data on the GCSE attainment of young people excluded from school is the Youth Cohort Study (YCS).

The latest data available from the YCS is for people who took their GCSEs in the summer of 1999. This shows that of those who were excluded from school in years 10 or 11, 17 per cent. gained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C and 90 per cent. reported gaining at least one GCSE.

Figures for more recent years will become available from the National Pupil Database in due course.

Graduate Training Programme

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many trainees commenced the graduate training programme and registered training programme in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in *(i)* September 2001, (ii) January 2002 and (iii) April 2002; and in what subjects. [84568]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The numbers of trainees who commenced the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) and Registered Teacher Programme (RTP) in 2001–02 are presented in the table. Trainees in secondary schools are shown by the subject they trained in.

Table 1: Recruitment to GTP and RTP courses in England, 2001–02

	GTP				*RTP*			
	September 2001	*January 2001*	*April 2002*	*Total*	*September 2001*	*January 2001*	*April 2002*	*Total*
Primary	540	309	364	1,213	61	41	16	118
Secondary								
Mathematics	68	84	66	218	0	4	2	6
English and Drama	135	147	92	374	2	1	1	4
Science	153	128	94	375	1	2	2	5
Modern Foreign Languages	125	77	59	261	0	1	0	1
Total Technology	139	169	112	420	6	6	5	17
History	25	26	19	70	1	0	0	1
Geography	16	15	6	37	1	0	0	1
Physical Education	29	38	21	88	0	0	1	1
Art	14	33	12	59	0	0	0	0
Music	11	21	12	44	0	0	0	0
Religious Education	3	18	4	25	1	0	0	1
Citizenship	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	32	18	10	60	3	5	2	10
Secondary total	750	774	507	2,031	15	19	13	47
Grand total	1,290	1,083	871	3,244	76	60	29	165

Source:
Teacher Training Agency

Ministerial Design Champion

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the meetings undertaken by his Department's Ministerial Design Champion in that capacity. [85188]

Mr. Miliband: My noble Friend, the Baroness Ashton was the Department's Ministerial Design Champion until this month when, due to changes in Ministerial responsibilities, I succeeded her.

In her role as Design Champion, Baroness Ashton accepted an invitation to speak at a conference organised by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) on the theme "Achieving Design Quality in PFI Schools". The conference took place on 22 October 2001, at the Millennium Primary

School in Greenwich. This year there have been two meetings of the Ministerial Design Champions, but unfortunately she was not able to attend either. Instead, the Department was represented at official level.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when his Department's Ministerial Design Champion last met *(a)* the Commission of Architecture and the Built Environment, *(b)* the Royal Institution of British Architects and *(c)* officials from the DfES's Schools Building Design Unit. [85189]

Mr. Miliband: Baroness Ashton last met representatives of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in October 2001, at the conference organised by CABE and referred to in answer to the previous question. A meeting was arranged between her and the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in July this year, but this had to be postponed and a new meeting has yet to be arranged.

Baroness Ashton regularly meets officials from the Department's Schools Building & esign Unit (SBDU) to discuss issues as they arise. The last meeting which focused on design took place in May this year.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times he has visited East Lancashire in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82401]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My predecessor and I have not visited East Lancashire in this capacity since the June 2001 General Election. However I did visit Preston on 27 September 2002 to meet a business group at the University of Central Lancashire. I was also a guest of the Directors of Preston North End Football Club to observe the game against Norwich City on 28 September, which I am glad to report that Norwich won.

Pre-School Education

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional resources will be given to local education authorities to extend free early education to all three-year-olds. [83167]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Over the three financial years 2001–02 to 2003–04, 986 million has been allocated for the creation of new, free early education places for three year olds and for other early years initiatives.

From April 2003 all early education funding will be made available to local authorities in the under 5's sub-block, through Education Formula Spending 2003–04. This sub-block will be increased substantially to £2.6 billion which will provide adequate resources for all local education authorities to achieve universal provision for three year olds.

In addition, £40 million capital funds have been made available over the financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04, for the building of nursery education facilities in disadvantaged areas which will support the achievement of universal provision of three year olds.

Primary Schools

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent consultations he has had with bodies representing pre-school play groups *(a)* in rural areas and *(b)* elsewhere, over proposals that all four-year-olds should attend primary schools. [82051]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

The Secretary of State has no proposals for recommending that all four year olds should attend primary school. Compulsory school age remains the term following the child's fifth birthday.

Some primary schools do operate an early admission policy. Where this is the case, the School Admissions Code of Practice encourages admission authorities to allow parents who have secured a place for their child to defer entry until later in the same academic year if they wish to do so.

Admissions policy has recently been reviewed and following consultation, a new, revised Code has been produced. This is currently before Parliament for consideration. The new Code includes a stronger message on deferred entry making it clear to primary school admission authorities that the Secretary of State expects them to offer parents the option of deferring entry.

Public Building Designs

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on how he intends to implement the recommendations in the joint Office of Government Commerce and Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment guidance, Improving standards of design in the procurement of public building. [85191]

Mr. Miliband: The DfES does not procure educational buildings. In the schools sector, this is the responsibility of local education authorities, school governors and trustees. For this sector, the relevant recommendations of the CABE/OGC report have already been, or will be, taken into account and reflected in updated DfES project design, procurement, funding and asset management plan appraisal guidance.

In the further and higher education sectors, the responsibility for influencing design and sustainability issues rests, respectively, with the LSC and the HEFCE.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what checks were made before the appointment of the new Chief Executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; and if he will make a statement. [83934]

Mr. Miliband: The Qualification and Curriculum Authority appoint their Chief Executive with the approval of the Secretary of State. The QCA in its recruitment process obtained views from leading education practitioners in Australia who had worked with Ken Boston. The judgment of those consulted was that the new Chief Executive was a highly credible candidate with considerable integrity.

Sure Start

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the effects of Sure Start programmes on children's health. [83166]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Sure Start is expected to have a positive impact on children's health in their early years of life and throughout childhood into adulthood.

Sure Start programmes work to improve children's health by working with existing statutory and voluntary agencies to provide a wide range of health related support and advice to parents and parents to be. This includes: diet and nutrition advice; smoking cessation; preparation for parenthood classes; enhanced maternity and health visiting services; child health and development information; identification of and support to mothers with post-natal depression; breastfeeding support; parenting support and advice; early identification of special needs and support to families with children with special needs along with a wide range of practical, social and specialist support to improve parents' social and emotional health.

Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation processes are in place to assess the impact of Sure Start on a wide range of child health outcomes. At present it is too early to assess the impact of Sure Start on such outcomes but information on this will become available over the next 12–18 months.

One of Sure Start's PSA objectives is concerned with improving children's health and progress towards this is reported annually in the DfES Annual Report.

Teacher Training

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many undergraduates started full-time teacher training courses in England in the academic year 2001–02 in each subject. [84569]

Mr. Miliband: The number of undergraduates who started full-time teacher training courses in England in the academic year 2001–02 by subject is shown in the table

Table 1. The number of full-time undergraduate teacher trainees who entered in 2001–02

	Number
Primary	6,368
Secondary	
Mathematics	149
English	128
Science	150
Modern Foreign Languages	16
Total Technology	386
History	0
Geography	11
Physical Education	564
Art	0
Music	29
Religious Education	7
Citizenship	0
Other	0
Secondary total	1,440
Grand total	7,808

Source:
TTA ITT Trainee Number Census 2001—02

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people entered initial teacher training courses for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary subjects through *(i)* undergraduate, (ii) postgraduate and (iii) employment-based routes in the academic years (A) 2001–02 and (B) 2002–03. [84570]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The information is shown in the tables.

Recruitment to courses of initial teacher training and employment based initial teacher training programmes in England in 2001–02

	Postgraduate ITT recruitment	*Undergraduate ITT recruitment*	*Total ITT recruitment*	*GTP recruitment*	*KTP recruitment*	*OTT recruitment*	*Total ITT and EBR recruitment*
Primary	6,749	6,385	13,135	1,213	118	415	14,881
Secondary							
Mathematics	1,409	150	1,559	218	6	85	1,868
English and drama	2,119	128	2,247	374	4	142	2,767
Science	2,464	150	2,614	375	5	94	3,088
Modern foreign languages	1,699	16	1,715	261	1	23	2,000
Total technology	1,774	387	2,161	420	17	57	2,655
History	933	0	933	70	1	15	1,019
Geography	1,024	11	1,035	37	1	11	1,084
Physical education	764	566	1,330	88	1	30	1,499
Art	843	0	843	59	0	5	907
Music	627	29	656	44	0	18	718
Religious education	581	7	588	25	1	6	620
Citizenship	147	0	147	0	0	0	147
Other	231	0	231	60	10	20	321
Secondary total	4,615	1,444	16,059	2,031	47	506	18,643
Grand total	21,364	7,830	29,194	3,244	165	921	33,524

Source:
Teacher training agency

Recruitment to courses of initial teacher training and employment based initial teacher training programmes in England in 2002–03

	Postgraduate ITT recruitment	*Undergraduate ITT recruitment*	*Total ITT recruitment*	*GTP recruitment*	*RTP recruitment*	*OTT recruitment1*	*Total ITT and EBR recruitment*
Primary	7,988	6,488	14,476	684	16	34	15,210
Secondary							
Mathematics	1,545	144	1,689	135	1	11	1,836
English and drama	2,386	109	2,495	233	2	19	2,749
Science	2,537	133	2,670	198	0	19	2,887
Modern foreign languages	1,742	7	1,749	128	1	0	1,878
Total technology	2,055	347	2,402	272	1	7	2,682
History	995	3	998	33	0	3	1,034
Geography	1,025	6	1,031	12	0	2	1,045
Physical education	771	554	1,325	48	0	7	1,380
Art	880	0	880	42	0	0	922
Music	604	7	611	31	0	3	645
Religious education	573	3	576	35	0	0	611
Citizenship	185	0	185	0	0	0	185
Other	174	0	174	53	0	4	231
Secondary total	15,472	1,313	16,785	1,220	5	75	18,085
Grand total	23,460	7,801	31,261	1,904	21	109	33,295

Source:
Teacher training agency
[1] Entrants to date. There will be further intakes in the spring and summer 2003 terms.

TREASURY

Capital Gains Act

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the Inland Revenue's guidance that the words substantial extent in the Capital Gains Tax Act 1992, Schedule A1, paragraph 22A(1) means 20 per cent. or more, to what the 20 per cent. figure refers. [84483]

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what the figure of 80 per cent. used by the Inland Revenue to judge whether a company's activities are primarily trading activities applies. [85069]

Dawn Primarolo: The figure relates to the proportion of a company's activities which are not trading activities. The Inland Revenue will publish guidance in Tax Bulletin 62 (to be issued in December 2002) on how to determine for Capital Gains Tax taper relief purposes whether a company's non-trading activities amount to more than 20 per cent. of its total activities. This guidance, which updates the earlier guidance published in June 2001 in Tax Bulletin 53 by reflecting changes to the legislation which were introduced in Finance Act 2002, is available now on the Revenue website at:

www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/bulletins/tax—bulletin—taper—relief.htm.

A hard copy is being placed in the House of Commons Library.

Double Taxation Convention

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assurances have been received by him from officials in the relevant Government Departments in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the USA that a mutually agreed agenda for ratification of the UK/US Double Taxation Convention has been fixed and is being adhered to. [84446]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to fix a mutually agreed agenda for ratification of the new UK/USA Double Taxation Convention because the UK and USA have ratification procedures that lie outside the control of the Government Departments concerned. However, the ratification process was completed in the UK on 20 November 2002 and we expect the US Senate to consider the Convention early in 2003.

The Convention requires that the instruments of ratification shall be exchanged as soon as possible after each country has ratified the Convention. Both countries are moving as quickly as they can to achieve that.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Governments of the UK and the US expect to complete the process of ratification of the UK/US Double Taxation Convention signed on 24 July 2001. [84447]

Dawn Primarolo: The ratification process for the new UK/USA Double Taxation Convention was completed in the United Kingdom on 20 November 2002. In the US the convention has been transmitted to the Senate, which is expected to consider it early in 2003. Instruments of ratification will be exchanged by the two Governments as soon as possible after the Senate has given its advice and consent to ratification.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Government expect to announce to business and other interested parties *(a)* the date on which the UK/US Double Taxation Convention will come into force and *(b)* the date on which its provisions will take effect. [84448]

Dawn Primarolo: The UK/USA Double Taxation Convention will enter into force on the same day that instruments of ratification are exchanged by the two

governments. When that has taken place, an announcement will be published in the London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes. The Inland Revenue will also publish a News Release announcing the entry into force date and a statement will appear on its website.

The provisions of the Convention will take effect in accordance with the provisions of Article 29 of the Convention, and will flow automatically from the entry into force date.

Human Corpses

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an assessment of the powers of Customs and Excise to prevent the importation of human corpses and body parts for the purpose of artistic or public display; and if he will make a statement. [85345]

John Healey: HM Customs and Excise has no powers to prevent the import of human corpses and body parts whether or not for the purpose of artistic or public display.

Inland Revenue

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies were subjected to penalties by the Large Business Office and Special Business Office in fiscal year 2000–01; what the total levels of penalty were; and if he will make a statement. [82039]

Dawn Primarolo: The Large Business Office and the Special Compliance Office do not at present keep their records in a way that allows this information to be provided, except at disproportionate cost. The Inland Revenue are reviewing their record systems with a view to providing information more easily in future.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases were settled by the Large Business Office and Special Business Office in the last five fiscal years; and if he will make a statement. [82041]

Dawn Primarolo: The figures are as follows:

	Large business office	*Special compliance office*
1997–98	—	983
1998–99	3,366	877
1999–2000	2,757	869
2000–01	2,519	810
2001–02	2,105	738

For the Large Business Office, figures for 1997–98 are not available on a comparable basis with those for other years. The figures for other years are of numbers of adjustments to taxable profits or losses recorded on issues into which the Office has inquired. In each year, several such adjustments may arise on any one case.

The Special Compliance Office has focused on larger and more complex cases in recent years. The Large Business Office, focuses resources on achieving greater voluntary compliance by taxpayers.

Inland Revenue Inspectors

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many fully-trained Inland Revenue inspectors there were in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1990, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* 2001; how many general grade inspectors there were in *(i)* 1985, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1995 and (iv) 2001; how many unfilled general and fully-trained inspector posts there were in each of the above years; and if he will make a statement. [82042]

Dawn Primarolo: Organisational groupings of Inland Revenue staff were significantly changed in 1993. Consequently the fully-trained inspectors fell mostly into a new Band B group, and the general group of inspectors was mainly replaced by a much broader grouping of them and other staff in a new Band C group.

The Inland Revenue estimates that the number of fully-trained Inspectors in Band B at 1 April 1995 and 1 April 2001 stood at 1,900 and 1,800 respectively. The total number of staff in Band C were 7,042 at 1 April 1995 and 8,477 at 1 April 2001. A new personnel records system was introduced in 1997, replacing the database for earlier years. Using other, less reliable data the Inland Revenue estimates there were some 2,500 fully-trained and 4,500 general group inspectors in 1985, and 2,100 fully-trained and 5,100 general group inspectors in 1990.

Records are not kept for the numbers of past staff vacancies.

Mature Students (Child Tax Credit)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether mature students in higher education in England whose spouses are in work will be eligible for child tax credit. [84963]

Dawn Primarolo: Yes, provided that the couple is responsible for at least one child or young person.

Methadone

John Mann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in how many cases methadone appeared on death certificates in each of the last 10 years. [85035]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to John Mann, dated 4 December 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your quesuion asking in how many cases methadone appears on the death certificate in each of the last ten years. I am replying in his absence. (85035)

Figures for deaths related to drug poisoning are currently available for 1993 to 2000 for England and Wales. The information requested is given in the table below:

Deaths where methadone was mentioned on the death certificate[1], persons, England and Wales, 1993–2000[2]

Year	*Number*
1993	232
1994	269
1995	310
1996	368
1997	421

Deaths where methadone was mentioned on the death certificate[1], persons, England and Wales, 1993–2000[2]

Year	Number
1998	364
1999	298
2000	238

[1] Selected using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision:
292 (drug psychoses).
304 (drug dependence).
305.2–305.9 (non-dependent abuse of drugs).
E850-E858 (accidental poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biologicals).
E950.0-E950.5 (suicide and self-inflicted poisoning by solid or liquid substances).
E980.0-E980.5 (poisoning by solid or liquid substances, undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted).
E962.0 (assault by poisoning—drugs and medicaments).
where methadone was also mentioned on the death certificate.
[2] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year.
Source:
Office for National Statistics (2002) Report: Deaths related to drug poisoning: results for England and Wales, 1993–2000. Health Statistics Quarterly 13, 76–82.

Monetary Policy Committee

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice and instructions the Treasury gave during the last six months to *(a)* members of the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee and *(b)* their staff on the relevance of house prices to the setting of interest rates; and what advice he has given since his pre-Budget statement. [85222]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The Chancellor regularly meets with the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss a wide range of issues. The Treasury representative to the MPC and other Treasury officials also regularly discuss economic issues with counterparts in the Bank of England.

The MPC's remit is to meet the target of 2.5 per cent. for RPIX inflation, reconfirmed in the Budget.

Network Rail

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the treatment of Network Rail's financing as Government debt in the national accounts; [85177]

(2) what plans he has to include the total borrowings of Network Rail in the national accounts as Government debt. [85178]

Mr. Boateng: Network Rail is classified as a private sector corporation in national accounts. Its financial transactions, such as borrowing, are recorded in the financial account of the corporations' sector in national accounts. Its borrowing is not therefore included in the Government sector.

Government provide subsidies and investment grants to the rail industry, mainly to train operating companies. These payments are counted as part of Government expenditure and would add to Government debt if not financed by Government revenue.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84928]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: Since 1999, the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his statement of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 326, whether the proportion of an individual's pension fund that is allowed to be taken as a tax free lump sum on retirement will remain the same. [85223]

Ruth Kelly: The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will publish the Government's Green Paper on pensions on 17 December 2002. This will include proposals to simplify the tax treatment of pensions.

As confirmed by the Chancellor in his pre-Budget report statement, the tax-free lump sum payment to retirees will remain.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost to the Treasury of 2 per cent. payments made to appropriate personal pension arrangements was, where contracting out from SERPS commenced between 29 April 1988 and 30 June 1994 and those persons have subsequently been reinstated, as a result of the FSA Review of Personal Pension sales, into an arrangement where the 2 per cent. incentive would not have been payable. [84715]

Ruth Kelly: Individuals who had previously been in a contracted-out occupational scheme for two or more years and were entitled to stay in that scheme but left voluntarily after 5 April 1988 while continuing to work for the same employer would not have qualified for the 2 per cent. incentive when taking up membership of an appropriate personal pension (APP) scheme. If these members were subsequently reinstated into the occupational scheme there could have been no requirement to recover an incentive which had not been paid.

In the other cases, where either the individual had not been in the scheme for two years, or they had never been in the occupational scheme but chose to join the

appropriate personal pension scheme despite being eligible to join the occupational scheme, the 2 per cent. incentive would have been paid.

Two options were used when reinstating individuals into their occupational pension schemes.

One option involved the removal of the APP arrangement from their NI account and the adjustment of their NI contributions from standard A rate to the contracted-out rate. This action triggered the recovery of the minimum contributions from the APP scheme, which would include the 2 per cent. incentive if paid.

The other option was to leave the APP in place and the APP provider to pay a transfer value to the occupational scheme sufficient to reinstate the relevant years into the occupational scheme. In these cases because the APP was not cancelled no recovery of the 2 per cent. incentive was made.

No statistics have been kept in relation to the amount of 2 per cent. incentive recovered in cases where the individual has been reinstated into an arrangement that would not have qualified for the incentive.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the cost to the Treasury of the 2 per cent. incentive payments made to appropriate personal pension arrangements was, where contracting out from SERPS commenced between 29 April 1988 and 30 June 1994; [84717]

(2) what the value of 2 per cent. incentive payments reclaimed by the Treasury was, where they were made to appropriate personal pension arrangements where contracting out from SERPS commenced between 29 April 1988 and 30 June 1994, and where those persons were reinstated, as a result of the FSA Review of Personal Pension sales, into an arrangement where the 2 per cent. incentive would not have been payable. [84716]

Ruth Kelly: The 2 per cent. incentive was payable for tax years 1987–88 to 1992–9. inclusive. If a member of an appropriate personal pension (APP) scheme was entitled to the 2 per cent. incentive it was paid from the tax year their APP arrangement began until 5 April 1993 or the tax year their APP was cancelled if earlier.

Statistics show that the net amount of 2 per cent. incentive paid to APP schemes for this period was £3,180.19 million.

No statistics have been kept in relation to the amount of 2 per cent. incentive recovered in cases where the individual has been reinstated into an arrangement that would not have qualified for the incentive.

Public-Private Finance

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the level of PFI and PPP liabilities over the next 25 years, including contracts to be signed up to the end of financial year 2002–03. [84611]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on 21 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 280W.

Taxation (Non-domicile Rules)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of foreign investment in the UK resulting from the non-domicile tax rules. [85291]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave her on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 743W. Paragraphs 5.81–82 of the pre-Budget report published on 27 November set out the latest position on the review of the residence and domicile rules.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Pipelines

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans her Department has to conduct a social and environmental impact assessment of *(a)* the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and *(b)* the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline. [83729]

Ms Hewitt: Social and environmental impact assessments have been carried out by Environmental Resources Management (ERM) for the three countries that the BTC oil pipeline runs through, and can be found on the BTC website: www.caspiandevelopmentandexport.com. The prospective lenders to BTC Co. are receiving independent advice on environmental and social issues.

ECGD considers relevant impact assessments as part of its due diligence procedures on any application from a UK exporter.

Bank Assets (Holocaust Victims)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the restitution of assets to holocaust victims in respect of bank assets seized in world war two; how many claims have been made; how many outstanding claims have been referred to Lord Archer of Sandwell's panel; and how much compensation has been awarded. [82956]

Ms Hewitt: The Enemy Property Claims Assessment Panel (EPCAP) assesses claims submitted under the Enemy Property Payment Scheme. The Panel of Assessors has nearly completed the assessment of the 1,097 claims received with over 1,050 already settled.

The amount of compensation paid to claimants now totals almost £8.7 million.

Canadian Engine Manufacturers

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the compatiblity with WTO rules of the level of Governmental support to Canadian engine manufacturers in the context of the competition to provide engines for the A400M; and if he will make a statement. [83954]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The airframe manufacturer is currently assessing the merits of the competing bids for the A400M engine contract. The Department has not been provided with any evidence that the Canadian bid is incompatible with WTO rules. In any case, competence for taking action against other governments that may be in contravention of their WTO commitments lies with the European Commission.

Counterfeit Goods

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the music industry, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* other individuals and bodies regarding the sale of illegal and counterfeit music albums. [85310]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The music industry was represented at the meeting I had earlier this year with the industry umbrella group, the Alliance Against Counterfeiting and Piracy, to discuss concerns about intellectual property (IP) crime. The interests of local authorities inthis area are covered by LACORS, the Local Authorities Coordinators of RegulatoryServices, which is one of the bodies participating in the Counterfeiting and PiracyForum. The Forum brings together representatives from both the public and privatesectors to explore collaborative approaches to fighting IP crime. IP crime, which affects many different sectors as well as music, is a topic that comes up in discussions we have with a range of individuals and bodies, and some of these are specifically concerned about counterfeit music recordings.

Departmental Targets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the extent to which her Department achieved its targets in each year since 1997. [84117]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The Department publishes information on progress against a wide range of targets in its annual Expenditure Plans Report. This includes information on Public Service Agreements (PSA) targets as well as on Agency and other operational targets. Copies of these reports are available in the Libraries of the House.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contingency plans are in place to ensure continuation of electricity supply in the event of a generating company or power station falling into administration and becoming unable to continue supply to the National Grid. [82899]

Mr. Wilson: NGC has various statutory duties to help ensure security of supply. However, were the output of a specific station to be essential for security of supply, NGC can seek if necessary to contract with a power station/administrator to maintain supply.

Energy Policy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the UK's total installed electricity generating capacity is; what the maximum daily peak demand for electricity is; and what proportion of this is met by *(a)* nuclear power generation and *(b)* energy from renewable sources. [85106]

Mr. Wilson: Figures published in the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, 2002 and on the DTI Energy Statistics website show that at the end of December 2001 total UK generating capacity in declared net capacity terms (DNC) was 79,553 MW, of which 73,219 MW was owned by major power producers and 6,334 MW by other generators. The simultaneous maximum load met by major power producers in the UK in the winter of 2001–02 was 58,589 MW in January 2002. An analysis of which plant were in use at the time of this maximum demand is not available. However, of the 79,553 MW of UK generating capacity, 16 per cent. was nuclear, 2 per cent. was natural flow hydro and 1 per cent. was renewables other than hydro.

Innovating Businesses

Mr. Yeo: : To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 2000 for achievement in 2001–04, to achieve a significant rise in the proportion of innovating businesses. [83689]

Ms Hewitt: *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The full wording of Public Service Agreement target six was:

Increase the level of exploitation of technological knowledge derived from the science and engineering base, as demonstrated by a significant rise in the proportion of innovating businesses citing such success.

This target is measured through a business innovation survey that takes place four yearly, so that achievement of the target will be assessed in 2005. The benchmark for 2000, that we will seek to better is that the share of innovating businesses citing any Science and Engineering Base source is 38 per cent.

The science and engineering base for this purpose includes universities, government research labs, other public research labs and private research institutes. The citation levels for these individual sources are:

	Percentages
Universities	23
Government Laboratories	16
Other Public Sector	25
Private Public Sector	25
Private Research Institutes	16

Note:
Individual businesses may cite more than one source.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for compensation for respiratory disease were made by ex-miners in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; how many claimants died before receiving final payments, in each year; and how many claims for compensation for respiratory diseases there are. [84313]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The information is as follows:

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
Number of respiratory claims registered each year (live and deceased)	29,447	36,886	44,317
Number of claimants who died during this year before receiving full and final settlement (incl. denied and withdrawn claims)	2,684	2,743	2,230

As of 24 November there are 210,446 claims registered for respiratory disease (inclusive of both live and deceased claims).

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State foı Trade and Industry how many times she has visited east Lancashire in her official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82402]

Ms Hewitt: I had planned a visit to the Ribble area of Lancashire on Wednesday 4 December, but, owing to ill health my visit had to be cancelled. I hope to reinstate a similar visit in the near future.

Net Metering Arrangements

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of homes operating on net metering; and if she will take steps to increase this number. [84729]

Mr Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* No definitive information is available on the number of homes with a net metering arrangement though it is known that a small number of companies have offered net metering tariffs to domestic consumers. It is believed that more than 200 customers may have taken these offers up.

Metering arrangements are a matter for energy suppliers and their customers. The Government, through the Distributed Generation Coordination Group, is working with the industry to encourage the development of suitable metering arrangements for customers with domestic scale generation.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much electricity was returned to the national grid last year as a result of net metering arrangements. [84731]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* No information is available but the amount returned to the grid is likely to have been very small since it is believed that only a small number of households had a net metering tariff.

Norwich Airport

Dr. Ian Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Competition Commission has to investigate the sale of Norwich Airport. [85450]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Under the Fair Trading Act 1973 a merger qualifies for investigation if it creates or enhances a 25 per cent. share of supply in the UK or a substantial part of the UK, or if the gross value of the world-wide assets being taken over is more than 70 million.

In the first instance it is for the Director General of Fair Trading to advise Ministers on whether or not a qualifying merger should be referred to the Competition Commission.

Photovoltaic Major Demonstration Programme

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government intends to make a decision on funding for phase 2 of the Photovoltaic Major Demonstration Programme; and if she will make a statement. [84759]

Mr. Wilson: Funding for further phases of the Photovoltaic Major Demonstration Programme is dependent on the emerging success of the first phase. The Government's Energy White Paper, to be published in the New Year, will be looking at the role of renewables, including PV, as a contributor to meeting the UK's and international carbon reduction targets, now and in the longer terms.

Post Offices

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* post offices and *(b)* sub post offices there were in *(i)* Chesham and Amersham and (ii) Buckinghamshire in (A) 1975, (B) 1980, (C) 1985, (D) 1990, (E) 1995, (F) 2000, (G) 2001 and (H) 2002. [85133]

Mr. Timms: *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that historic data in the form requested are not available as the company does not require this data for operational reasons.

However, in 1999, the Post Office undertook a special exercise to determine the number of post offices in each Parliamentary constituency in response to the then hon. Member for Birmingham Erdington on 29 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 22W. I further understand from Post Office Ltd. that it compiled a list of post offices by Parliamentary constituency as of 20 April 2002 showing their classification as urban or rural offices. A copy of this list is held in the Libraries of the House.

Regional Economic Performance

Mr. Yeo: : To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 2000 for achievement in 2001–04, to improve the economic performance of all regions, as measured by the trend in growth of each region's GDP per capita. [83687]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* It is not possible yet to assess whether there has been an improvement against the baseline for this target. This is because of the long-term nature of the target and the time lags in getting the relevant information to measure the target.

Measurement of trend rates of growth per capita will use a similar methodology to that used by the Treasury to estimate national trend GDP growth i.e. by calculating average growth rates between points when the economy can be identified a being 'on trend'.

Regional Government Offices (Telephone Queries)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidelines are given to regional government offices for answering hon. Members' queries by telephone. [84079]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

No specific guidelines have been sent to government offices on answering telephone inquiries from MPs. However, they act in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Regional Policy

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Mayor of London on the Government's policy on promoting a model of economic growth that would not discourage development in the regions of the UK. [84665]

Alan Johnson: I meet the Mayor of London from time to time to discuss a range of issues in connection with the Mayor's Economic Development Strategy and the work of the London Development Agency.

Renewable Energy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the national base resource scenario for onshore wind targets is with regard to *(a)* minimum average wind speed, *(b)* maximum wind farm density, *(c)* spacing of the centres of the wind farms from each others and *(d)* minimum and maximum wind farm size. [84558]

Mr. Wilson: The UK windspeed database is available on the DTI website at http://www.dti.gov.uk/renewable/windspeed/online.html. The database contains estimates of the annual mean windspeed throughout the UK. The data is intended as a guide as on-site measurements are needed for a proper assessment of any individual site. It does not set scenarios for onshore wind targets.

The British Wind Energy Association estimates that wind turbines start operating at wind speeds of 4 to 5 metres per second (around 10 miles an hour) and reach maximum power output at around 15 meters/second (around 33 miles per hour). At very high wind speeds, i.e. gale force winds, (25 metres/second, 50+ miles/hour) wind turbines shut down.

Project specific matters such as wind farm density, spacing and size are issues for project developers to consider. All onshore wind farms are subject to the relevant planning regime and developers must seek consent to construct and operate wind farms from the relevant planning authorities. Decisions are taken on a case by case basis.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support the Government is providing for community combined heat and power schemes based on renewable energy. [85103]

Mr. Wilson: The Bio-energy Capital Grants Scheme, which is run jointly by DTI and the New Opportunities Fund with input from DEFRA, included funds for combined heat and power derived from biomass, in particular energy crops, in its recent call for proposals (which closed on 31 October).

DEFRA runs the £50 million Community Energy programme which encourages combined heat and power in community heating schemes through grants. Around one quarter of the successful bids to the programme have included the use of alternative or renewable fuels.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's initiatives on educating *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* the public on the objectives of the national drive towards renewable energy generation; and how much funding is being dedicated to these initiatives. [85112]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are currently carrying out a review of future energy policy with a view to issuing a White Paper in the new year. As a part of this review they are considering the role of local authorities and the engagement of communities in the development of renewable energy.

Within the allocation of £2.5 million for renewables planning, Government Offices have included awareness raising events in their bids.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how host communities of renewable energy projects benefit in terms of revenue royalties from such projects; and what plans she has to introduce further royalty-based benefits for host communities of renewable energy projects. [85114]

Mr. Wilson: When the community owns and runs renewable energy installations, they can sell the resulting electricity or excess electricity (where the project provides their own source of electricity) or they can sell the resulting Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs). The Community Renewables Initiative is working on means to enable community schemes to aggregate their electricity generation in order to obtain ROCs and improve their viability.

Additionally, there will be a number of installations under the forthcoming DTI Community and Household Scheme and the joint DTI/New Opportunities Fund Biomass Grant Scheme which will be owned and run by the host community. Such schemes can also benefit through the sale of ROCs.

A number of communities also gain from leasing their land to developers of renewables projects (eg National Wind Power's Windworks scheme and a number of crofting schemes).

The Energy White Paper, due to be published early in the new year, will address a range of issues including the engagement of communities in renewable energy developments.

Solar Photovoltaic Industries

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met representatives of the European and Japanese solar photovoltaic industries. [84754]

Mr. Wilson: I and my ministerial colleagues have regular meetings with representatives of the UK and global PV industry to discuss the UK market and the development of PV manufacturing in this country.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much public funding is available for training and skills development in the solar photovoltaics and solar thermal industries; and if she will make a statement. [84757]

Mr. Wilson: For solar photovoltaics there is no specific funding from central Government for training and skills development. However, funding is available through the Department of Trade and Industry's Renewable Energy Programme and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's Supergen Programme to support research and development projects. In addition, the Faraday INREB (Integration of New and Renewable Energy in Buildings) Partnership has a particular focus on training. A UK company is also involved in an EU ALTENER project to develop a training course for PV installers under City & Guilds, and there are a number of other training courses being developed in response to the DTI's Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme (PV MDP). Finally, the DTI is running an Installer Accreditation scheme under the Management Contract for the PV MDP.

For Solar Thermal, the DTI has funded two projects under its Renewable Energy R&D Programme. One entitled "The Creation of a Training Infrastructure for the Installation of Active Solar Systems" (ETSU Report S/P3/248/REP), and the other under the EU ALTENER Programme, entitled "Training Plumbers to Design and Install Solar Water Heating Systems for Households" (ETSU Report S/P3/272/REP). There is also a network of Solar Clubs around the country, which aim to teach their members the basics of how to install a solar water heating installation for themselves. Finally, it is also the intention that the forthcoming Community and Household Renewables Scheme will also operate an installer accreditation scheme for the installers of small-scale renewable technology installers, including solar water heating systems.

Staff Salaries

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of her Department's and agencies' full-time employees as at 1 June were employed on salaries *(a)* under £20,000, *(b)* between £20,001 and £40,000, *(c)* between £40,001 and £65,000, *(d)* between £65,001 and £115,000 and *(e)* over £115,000; in each group, what percentage were *(i)* female and (ii) from ethnic minorities; and if she will make a statement. [83647]

Ms Hewitt: The table lists the numbers of full-time staff in the DTI and its agencies on 1 June 2002 in the salary bands set out in the question. For each band it gives the percentage that are female and from ethnic minorities, except the highest where the numbers are small enough for individuals to be identified.

		Percentage	
Salary band	*Total staff*	*Female*	*Ethnic minority*
Under £20,000	4,224	56.6	15.9
£20,001 to £40,000	3,373	33.9	10.7
£40,001 to £65,000	885	18.2	3.7
£65,001 to £115,000	131	21.4	3.1
Over £115,000	3	—	—
Total	8,616	43.2	12.4

I am committed to ensuring that the proportions at all levels properly reflect the proportion of women and ethnic minorities in the UK population and have prepared a strategy to identify actions to address this.

Thailand

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent commitments her Department has made to help promote the development and export of poultry meat from Thailand. [81068]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department has made no commitment to help promote the development and export of poultry meat from Thailand.

Torness Power Station

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Torness power station will be generating electricity again. [85108]

Mr. Wilson: This is a matter for British Energy.

However, I understand from the company that both generating units at Torness are now in service.

US Steel Tariff

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact on British industry of the US steel tariff. [83918]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* On 5 March 2001, President Bush announced the imposition of increased duties on imports of a wide range of steel products following a safeguard investigation under Section 201 of the US 1974 Trade Act. Based on 2001 figures, 46 per cent. of UK steel exports equivalent to around 215,000 tonnes were covered by the measures. This equates to approximately 2 per cent. of UK producers' total sales of steel industry products. Subsequently the US Authorities announced exclusions resulting in 70 per cent. of UK steel trade with the US being unaffected by the US safeguard action. The Government will continue to take close interest in the US response to further requests from UK companies for exclusions, and will intervene with the US Authorities if necessary.

Following the US decision, the EU took the precautionary measure of establishing its own safeguard action to protect against a surge of imports into the EU diverted from the US market. In addition, the EU, together with a number of other WTO members (including China, Japan, Korea, Norway and

Switzerland) is challenging the US safeguard measures in the WTO. The Dispute Panel ruling is expected in March 2003.

Wind Farms

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what size onshore wind farm buffer zones are in relation to *(a)* roads, railways and canals and *(b)* airports. [84557]

Mr. Wilson: The information is as follows:

(a) There are no specific buffer zones for onshore wind farms in relation to roads, railways or canals. Each application is assessed on its merits.

Applicants are advised to consult, at an early stage, the Department of Transport for trunk roads and the local highway authority for all other publicly maintained highways.

The Strategic Rail Authority should be consulted in relation to construction works near railway lines.

Each planning application near a canal follows the usual planning procedures and would be decided on the merits of the development, with the British Waterways Board available to provide advice to planning authorities. For applications near rivers, applicants will need to take account of the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Land Drainage bylaws 1981.

(b) Developments within a specified radius of major airports and aerodromes are subject to mandatory consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority or the Ministry of Defence under the Town and Country Planning (Safeguarded Aerodromes, Technical Sites and Military Explosives Storage Areas) Direction 2001. The radius around an airport, within which mandatory consultation is necessary, is detailed for that airport in their particular safeguarding map. The safeguarding map is issued to each local planning authority within the area affected as specified by the legend on the map.

For a proposed development within a radius of 2 km of an aerodrome, which is not safeguarded, the airport management should be consulted by the applicant about the development.

WTO Regime

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure the WTO regime allows countries to limit imports where there are genuine and demonstrable ethical objections to a product or its method of production on *(a)* environmental and *(b)* animal welfare grounds. [80850]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 November 2002]*: The UK has been working with our EU colleagues on these issues for a number of years, as trade is a matter of community competence. Environmental and animal welfare issues have long been included among the EU's WTO negotiating priorities. At Doha, the EU successfully secured negotiations in the current WTO round to clarify the relationship between the trade clauses in Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and WTO law. In the negotiations we are pushing for a presumption of conformity between WTO rules and specific trade obligations in specific MEAs. This would cover trade measures in existing international MEAs on trade in endangered species, ozone-depleting substances, hazardous waste and chemicals. The Doha mandate also ensures that the issue of farm animal welfare will be taken into account as part of the current agreement on agriculture negotiations.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghan Refugees

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the funding implications are of the agreement between UNHCR, the Iranian Government and the Afghan Interim Administration on resettling the 2.2 million Afghan refugees from Iran to Afghanistan; and what Britain's contribution to this funding is. [80717]

Clare Short *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* On 3 April 2002, at the time of signing, the Tripartite agreement with the governments of Iran and Afghanistan, UNHCR estimated that some 1.5 million Afghan refugees were in Iran. In 2002, UNHCR allocated 6 million specifically for assistance to the Afghan refugees in Iran.

Following the signing of this agreement, 400,000 Afghan refugees have voluntarily returned to Afghanistan from Iran. UNHCR estimate a voluntary repatriation of a further 500,000 Afghan refugees from Iran in 2003. In 2003, The UNHCR appeal has earmarked US$198m specifically for Afghan Internally Displaced Persons and Afghan refugees returning from Iran, Pakistan and the five central Asian states.

Since September 2001, the UK has contributed over 5m to UNHCR for their programmes of assistance to Afghan refugees. Of our overall contribution to Afghanistan over 1m has been specifically designated for Afghan refugees in Iran. We are also supporting a number of other humanitarian programmes which will help to create an environment for the sustainable return of both refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the level of funding to UNHCR for support to Afghan refugees in Iran has been in each of the last five years; and what the UK contribution has been. [80718]

Clare Short *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* Since September 2001, the UK has contributed over £5million to UNHCR for their programmes of assistance to Afghan refugees. Of our overall contribution to Afghanistan over £1 million has been specifically designated for Afghan refugees in Iran. We are also supporting a number of other humanitarian programmes which will help create an environment for the sustainable return of both refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.

The level of UNHCR funding to Afghan refugees in Iran over the last five years 1998—2002 inclusive is as follows:

	£
1998	9,556,733
1999	10,660,773
2000	9,238,962
2001	9,089,776
2002	14,736,383

The UK contribution as a whole to displaced persons within Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in Iran, Pakistan and the five central Asian states through UNHCR over the last five years 1998—2002 inclusive is as follows:

	£
1998	1,024,984
1999	0
2000	997,437
2001	2,351,057
2002	5,003,203

Afghanistan

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what new steps she is taking to ensure that the people of Afghanistan will have sufficient supplies and resources to survive the winter. [84145]

Clare Short: In September DFID provided an additional £11 million to be disbursed to address humanitarian needs over the winter months. This money has now been disbursed. The majority has been provided to support the work of major UN agencies, including the World Food Programme, UNHCR, UNICEF and the UN Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC), as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross and is intended to help fill gaps in relief assistance for food, water, health care, clothing and shelter. The funding to the UNJLC is to help the UN clear routes in order to gain access to vulnerable people otherwise cut off by the winter snows and poor roads.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much economic aid was paid to Afghanistan in 2001 and what the projected figure is for 2002; and if she will make a statement. [84195]

Clare Short: During 2001 all assistance given to Afghanistan by the UK was for humanitarian activities. In the current financial year we have allocated £65 million to humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. So far we have disbursed over £52 million, this includes £10 million to the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund and over £12 million to meet repayments of Afghan arrears to the international financial institutions.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had on the subject of the transfer of aid to Afghanistan from humanitarian to reconstruction projects; and if she will make a statement. [84199]

Clare Short: During my recent visit to Afghanistan I had several discussions with Afghan Ministers and UN agencies regarding the transition from humanitarian to reconstruction assistance. This needs to be managed with care because the transitional Administration has very limited capacity to deliver services outside Kabul and humanitarian needs remain considerable not least because the south of Afghanistan

is suffering its fifth year of drought. My Department is providing £10 million to the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund. We are also including a contribution of approximately £12.5 million to help Afghanistan clear its arrears to the international financial institutions so that it can access concessional resources for reconstruction assistance.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what appraisal she has made of the level of aid going to Afghanistan in relation to *(a)* the number of refugees returning and *(b)* the number of school children. [84200]

Clare Short: Since the start of 2002, nearly two million refugees are reported to have returned to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries; in that same period approximately three million children have returned to school. From October 2001 to December 2002, UNHCR have received over $245 million of funding, resulting in their appeal for funds being just under 91 per cent. funded. UNICEF, which is providing, among other things, support to education in Afghanistan, is reporting that their appeal for 2002 has raised just over $137 million, which equates to 72 per cent. of funds requested. In addition to this, funding money is also being directed to education and refugee support via other routes, including bilateral support and through NGOs. In comparison to donor appeals in previous crises the appeals for Afghanistan are in the most part well funded.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if it is her Department's policy to continue to give most aid to non-governmental organisations in Afghanistan. [84286]

Clare Short: Both the UN agencies and the NGOs have done an excellent job in delivering much needed humanitarian assistance quickly to Afghanistan. To date we have directed the majority of our aid through the UN system and NGOs. We have also placed £10 million in the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) to provide the Afghan Transitional Administration with funds to support what it has identified as priorities for development. However, most of these funds are being spent on pay for very small salaries for large numbers of civil servants that provide very limited services to the people of Afghanistan. We hope that as the Transitional Administration continues to build its capacity it will be better placed in the future to channel development assistance direct and focus it on areas of greatest need.

Central African Republic

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to help replenish stocks of anti-tuberculosis drugs in the Central African Republic. [84640]

Clare Short: The Central African Republic has made an emergency application to the Global TB Drug Facility (GDF) for an estimated years supply of TB drugs. Delivery is expected imminently. Connected to this application, the World Health Organisation (WHO) will soon be fielding a mission to determine the Central African Republic's long term tuberculosis drug needs. Future additional supplies of TB drugs will be secured through the formal application process to the GDF and additional technical support provided by Stop TB. DFID is a partner of Stop TB and the GDF.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what evidence has been received by her Department indicating a shortage of medical supplies within hospitals in the Central African Republic. [84641]

Clare Short: My Department is aware of reports from UN agencies indicating that there are shortages of medicines in the Central African Republic, particularly in hospitals and health centres in CAR's northern provinces. According to a report on 28 November, two major health zones remain cut off from a re-supply depot in the capital, Bangui, due to the closure of the main road route on security grounds. The result of this has been a shortage of essential medicines and vaccines (e.g. for tuberculosis, polio and yellow fever) in the regional pharmaceutical depots. UK support to CAR is provided through multilateral agencies such as the European Commission.

Cote d'Ivoire

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she has offered in response to the UN appeal of 21 November for Cote d'Ivoire. [84636]

Clare Short: We are working closely with others to try to help bring about a swift and peaceful resolution to the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire. We have received several appeals for humanitarian assistance from the UN and other organisations and we are considering how to respond to these in the light of the changing circumstances in the country.

Ethiopia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact which availability of seaports is having on the transportation of food aid to Ethiopia. [84947]

Clare Short: Our ambassador to Ethiopia, who also covers Djibouti, visited Djibouti from 20–22 November. During his visit he was informed that the port is working efficiently and is well placed to handle the food aid imports required to deal with the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia, with a throughput of 300,000 metric tonnes per month. The Government of Djibouti indicated that it will do everything it can to help.

Malawi

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development for what reason her Department has no involvement in the water sector in Malawi. [84616]

Clare Short: DFID's programme has more than doubled since 1996 (to £70 million per annum). It is concentrated on health, education, governance and sustainable livelihoods support. One of the important lessons of effective development is that bilateral agencies should not seek to work in all sectors but should co-operate with others in supporting reform efforts in different sectors. Japan, Canada, Norway, UNICEF and the World bank are currently engaged in Malawi's water sector.

Mauritania

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on food security levels in Mauritania. [84643]

Clare Short: Mauritania is a low-income food deficit country which is vulnerable to drought and desertification. Late and erratic rainfall in southern regions this year has aggravated an already poor food situation in the country. The World Food Programme (WFP) has estimated that there are 750,000 people affected by food shortages. We are monitoring the situation closely and have provided assistance through our contributions to WFP and are considering our response to their latest emergency appeal.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the level of malnutrition among children in Mauritania. [84980]

Clare Short: We have no figures for children affected by malnutrition in Mauritania as a whole. However, Oxfam report that a nutritional assessment carried out in September 2002 in the Aftout region by UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP) and international NGOs concluded that 56 per cent. of the children were suffering from malnutrition. The WFP estimates that 750,000 people are affected by food shortages. We have provided assistance through our contributions to WFP and are considering our response to their latest appeal.

Red Crescent Society (Mauritania)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will provide financial assistance for the small scale food security projects proposed by the Red Crescent Society in Mauritania. [84642]

Clare Short: We have no plans to provide financial assistance to the food security projects proposed by the Red Crescent Society in Mauritania.

Rinderpest Disease

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what evidence has been collected by her Department indicating the potential for a resurgence in the Rinderpest livestock disease in Africa. [84633]

Clare Short: The history of Rinderpest outbreaks points to the potential for rinderpest to undergo resurgence wherever the virus persists within a population.

Investigations by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Operation Lifeline Sudan and the Pan-African Programme for the Control of Epizootics (PACE) indicate that eradication campaigns have now been successful in removing persistent foci of Rinderpest virus in Southern Sudan, although definitive confirmation is not yet possible. The main challenge is therefore the South Somali pastoral ecosystem that has shown itself to have the potential to infect populations in both Kenya and Tanzania. Unregulated trade—particularly the 'informal' trade routes—could potentially export the disease further afield.

In addition to the funds that the UK provides to pan-African Programme for the Control of Epizootics (PACE) by way of the EC, DFID also directly funds the Community-based Animal Health and Participatory Epidemiology unit of the African Union's Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources. This unit is developing community-based animal heath delivery and surveillance systems which enable rinderpest vaccination and early warning of potential outbreaks to be carried out in the remote areas where rinderpest has persisted.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what precautionary steps are being taken to ensure the trade of cattle across the Red Sea does not result in the spread of Rinderpest disease. [84634]

Clare Short: The sanitary control of livestock imports remains the responsibility of importing countries. Saudi Arabia has banned the import of cattle from Somalia, but informal trade, which is much less susceptible to regulation, probably persists across the Red Sea. Efforts are therefore needed to identify and control the persistence of Rinderpest virus at source. To this end DFID and the EC have been working in partnership with the African Union's Bureau for Animal Resources, the EC-funded pan-African Programme for the Control of Epizootics (PACE) programme and the Office International des Epizooties (the O.I.E.—the world organisation for Animal Health) to assist African countries in Rinderpest eradication, and subsequently in meeting the requirements of the O.I.E. 'Pathway', which leads to international recognition of Rinderpest freedom for the benefit of importing countries.

In particular, through its DFID-funded Community Based Animal Health and Participatory Epidemiology (CAPE) initiative AU/IBAR has developed service delivery systems that are capable of delivering mass vaccination in marginal areas such as the Somali pastoral eco-system, even in the presence of conflict, and of maintaining disease surveillance and early warning systems that feed into national systems.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the latest levels of Rinderpest disease in *(a)* Southern Somalia and *(b)* Northern Kenya. [84635]

Clare Short: Southern Somalia and Northern Kenya together comprise the Somali "pastoral ecosystem". Following the successes of recent years in eliminating the virus elsewhere, the Somali ecosystem constitutes what is probably the last reservoir of Rinderpest infection in the world.

Through DFID's long-standing involvement in Rinderpest control our understanding of the factors underpinning the disease and its persistence within pastoral ecosystems highlights the importance of several factors. These include:

The periods of drought which affect both Northern Kenya and South Somalia (forcing herders to migrate further with their livestock when they occur);

The ecosystem's remoteness and underdevelopment;

Conflict and civil war, which hamper control and surveillance efforts-particularly in Somalia.

DFID's direct involvement in efforts to eradicate the virus (which comprises financial support to the African Union's Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources and partnerships with EU-funded regional disease control programmes) has therefore been complemented by broader programmes in the fields of sustainable development, of vulnerability management through good governance and of conflict resolution.

The fact that the Somali ecosystem is now believed to contain the last remaining foci of the disease underlines the considerable achievements that have been made in the field of Rinderpest eradication in the last fifteen years. The target for global eradication stands at 2010. The indications are that this target is achievable.

Rwanda

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial aid she has allocated for the assistance of the elections in Rwanda in July 2003. [84639]

Clare Short: We are in close liaison with the Government of Rwanda and other international partners, in discussing provision of support for elections. We have not yet determined the level of support required.

Southern Africa

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to ensure children attending schools in Southern Africa are provided with a nutritional meal during their day's work. [84637]

Clare Short: We are funding food through the World Food programme to vulnerable groups in Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. As part of these food pipelines, WFP is providing special support to school age children in Malawi and Lesotho to help ensure continued school attendance. WFP is also targeting malnourished children in Malawi with a programme of selective supplementary feeding. In Zimbabwe, WFP is planning to provide high-energy biscuits for school children in the worst affected areas. UNICEF is also providing programmes for supplementary and therapeutic feeding in the region, and is helping to target child-headed households and orphans for humanitarian assistance.

In addition, in Zimbabwe, DFID has been funding NGOs to provide supplementary feeding for children since September 2001. In October 2002, NGOs funded by DFID provided one protein-fortified maize meal a day for 570,000 under five and primary school children in Zimbabwe. We plan to increase numbers reached to 800,000 each month by the end of the year.

Trade-related Capacity Building

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to increase aid for trade-related capacity building. [83362]

Clare Short: In November 2001 I announced a further £20 million package of support to trade-related capacity building bringing the total commitment since 1998 to £37.8 million. In 2003–04 DFID will focus our trade-related capacity building on four key objectives:

Developing countries' effective participation in negotiations and rule making

Mainstreaming trade into national development plans and country poverty reduction strategies

Building sustainable country-level capacity to make good pro-poor trade policy and promote the participation and representation of poor people in trade policy dialogue

Developing the supply-side response to take advantage of market access opportunities.

We will focus in particular on DFID's Africa Trade and Poverty Programme and the Integrated Framework.

Uganda

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian requirements in Northern Uganda. [84949]

Clare Short: The circumstances faced by people in Northern Uganda are of grave concern. Humanitarian consequences of the continuing conflict are high, with an estimated 600,000 internally displaced persons and declining levels of food security due to disruption of harvesting and planting seasons. DFID has committed £450,000 so far this year for humanitarian supplies, and we continue to monitor the situation very closely with international partners and the Government of Uganda. We are currently considering additional proposals in the light of recent appeals.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she has taken to assist in rehabilitation efforts in south western Uganda. [84950]

Clare Short: The UK continues to support Uganda's efforts to deal with regional conflicts through dialogue with its neighbours. DFID is also providing assistance for the implementation of the Amnesty Act and the Defence Review, plus support to local civil society to strengthen networking, advocacy and lobbying for peace.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what funding has been allocated for *(a)* World Health Allocation, *(b)* International Organisation for Migration and *(c)* United Nations Development Programme, as part of

the response of her Department to the 2002 United Nations Consolidated Appeal for Uganda; and if she will make a statement; [84952]

(2) what funding her Department has made available for the *(a)* recovery and infrastructure and *(b)* protection and human rights sections of the 2002 United Nations Consolidated Appeal for Uganda. [84951]

Clare Short: DFID is considering the UN Consolidated Appeal as a component of our wider programme of support to Uganda. Resources are allocated to Uganda primarily through Government systems and in support of the Government of Uganda's own Poverty Eradication Action Plan.

UN Consolidated Appeal

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what response she will make to the 2002 consolidated appeal by the United Nations for *(a)* Eritrea, *(b)* Burundi and *(c)* Uganda. [84948]

Clare Short: The UK does not usually intervene directly to address humanitarian crises, but contributes funding to specialist organisations. These contributions are made through responses to the United Nations Consolidated Appeals, to appeals by the International Committee of the Red Cross and from international relief agencies.

We contributed £1,350,000, £850,000, and £611,000 for humanitarian work in Eritrea, Burundi and Uganda respectively, in 2002. The 2003 appeals have now been issued and we are giving consideration to our response. Actual support in 2003 will depend on the level of humanitarian needs.

Additional funding is provided through core support to international organisations including the UN, and through the European Commission. Nearly 20 per cent. of EC funding is paid for by DFID contributions.

UNHCR

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the funding shortfall within UNHCR; and if she will make a statement. [84638]

Clare Short: I discussed funding of UNHCR when the High Commissioner for Refugees visited London in July. Subsequent meetings have taken place between officials in Geneva and London, where funding of the agency was one of the items under discussion. We provided advice to UNHCR on the availability of funds from our regional programmes in response to local need.

We are aware of the immense needs which UNHCR is mandated to address and the financial constraints within which it operates.

Our core unearmarked contribution for 2002 is £14 million. In addition, we respond as appropriate to direct appeals from UNHCR for assistance with specific short-term refugee emergency situations and reintegration programmes. In 2002 this assistance amounts to £3.925 million to date. The UK share of EC Development Assistance, including humanitarian, in 2001 was 18.9 per cent. making the UK one of the EC's largest donors. In 2001 therefore, the UK provided £7.9 million for UNHCR through the EC's overall contribution of £41.8 million.

I have also recently approved an extra £1 million to fund UNHCR's community services activities in Africa. This will help underpin UNHCR's key protection activities: prevention of sexual and gender based violence, HIV awareness, self-reliance, youth education and capacity building of refugee social support networks.

The UK has a strong record of support to UNHCR, both in response to emergency appeals and through longer-term institutional strengthening, focusing on helping the agency improve its management, working partnerships and programming. These partnership principles underpin DFID's Institutional Strategy Paper (ISP) for UNHCR, agreed with the agency in December 2001, and which forms the basis of our funding arrangement.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Speeding

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many motorists were fined owing to being caught speeding by road traffic speed cameras in Lancashire in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available; [84976]

(2) what the total amount of revenue generated by road traffic speed cameras in Lancashire was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available. [84977]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Available information, by calendar year, is given in the table. Data for 2001 will be available in the new year.

Fixed penalty and court proceedings data for speed offences detected by cameras[1,2] in Lancashire police force area 1996, 1997 and 2000

	Fixed penalties		Court proceedings		
Year	Number of tickets[3]	Estimated revenue[4] (£000)	Number of fines	Total amount of fine (£000)	Average fine (£)
1996	4,028	161.1	302	19.9	66
1997	5,620	224.8	477	37.1	78
2000	24,500[5]	1,062.0[5]	926	79.8	86

[1] Automatic cameras until 1998, all camera types from 1999.
[2] Offences under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and Motor Vehicles (Speed Limits on Motorways) Regulations 1973.
[3] Paid ie no further action.
[4] 'Estimate' based on £40 fixed penalty charge for 1996, 1997 and January to October 2000. From November 2000 the penalty was raised to £60.
[5] Provisional.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons originating from countries that are not members of the Commonwealth were granted political asylum in Great Britain in 2001, broken down by their country of origin. [83889]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that information on the number of asylum seekers granted asylum in Great Britain in 2001 is not available—applications are made for asylum in the United Kingdom (UK). Reliable information on the geographical location of applicants at the time of decision outcomes is not available by region. Information on the country of origin of asylum applicants is not available.

The table provides statistics on the outcomes of initial decisions made on applications for asylum in the UK in 2001 relating to principal applicants who were nationals of countries that are not members of the British Commonwealth.

Initial decisions[1,2] on applications for asylum in the UK from non-Commonwealth nationals, excluding dependants, by type, and broken down by nationality, 2001

	Total initial decisions	*Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum*	*Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave*	*Total refused*
Europe				
Albania	1,710	30	160	1,525
Armenia	145	15	—	130
Azerbaijan	125	20	5	100
Belarussia	510	5	5	500
Bosnia-Herzegovina	185	10	20	155
Bulgaria	145	—	10	130
Croatia	390	15	10	360
Czech Republic	895	—	5	890
Estonia	265	—	—	265
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	11,165	340	2,015	8,810
Georgia	205	10	5	190
Hungary	10	—	—	10
Kazakhstan	40	—	5	35
KyrgyzStan	10	—	—	10
Latvia	395	—	5	390
Lithuania	685	—	30	655
Macedonia	625	5	140	480
Moldova	400	5	45	345
Other FSU (n/k)	5	—	—	—
Poland	805	—	10	790
Romania	2,155	—	70	2,080
Russia	870	20	35	815
Slovakia	95	5	—	90
Slovenia	5	—	—	5
Tajikistan	15	—	—	10
Turkey	7,000	195	275	7,190
Turkmenistan	5	—	—	5
Ukraine	1,145	10	25	1,110
Uzbekistan	30	—	—	25
Other Europe	40	—	5	35
Total excluding UK Commonwealth	30,680	685	2,885	27,105
Americas				
Argentina	5	—	—	—
Bolivia	55	—	5	50
Brazil	70	—	5	65
Chile	15	—	—	10
Colombia	750	40	55	660
Cuba	30	—	—	25
Ecuador	510	10	10	490
El Salvador	—	—	—	—
Guatemala	—	—	—	—
Guyana	5	—	—	5
Haiti	5	—	—	5
Honduras	—	—	—	—
Mexico	5	—	—	5
Nicaragua	—	—	—	—
Peru	35	—	10	25
Surinam	5	—	—	—
Uruguay	—	—	—	—
Venezuela	20	—	—	20
Other Americas	25	—	5	20
Total excluding UK Commonwealth	1,510	60	90	1,360

Initial decisions[1,2] on applications for asylum in the UK from non-Commonwealth nationals, excluding dependants, by type, and broken down by nationality, 2001

	Total initial decisions	Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave	Total refused
Middle East and North Africa				
Bahrain	5	—	—	—
Egypt	105	5	5	90
Iran	5,825	555	295	4,975
Iraq	8,880	815	1,855	6,210
Israel	100	—	5	90
Jordan	50	5	5	45
Kuwait	60	5	10	40
Lebanon	455	15	20	420
Libya	385	60	80	225
Morocco	50	—	—	50
Oman	5	—	—	5
Palestine	70	5	—	60
Saudi Arabia	20	—	—	10
Syria	220	20	15	185
Tunisia	45	5	—	40
UAE	5	—	5	—
Yemen	275	25	25	225
Total excluding UK Commonwealth	16,520	1,520	2,325	12,670
Africa				
Algeria	2,665	60	75	2,530
Angola	1,255	100	495	665
Benin	15	—	—	10
Burkina Faso	25	—	—	20
Burundi	1,095	225	250	625
CAR	5	—	—	5
Chad	105	20	5	80
Comoros	—	—	—	—
Congo	885	105	70	690
Democratic Republic of Congo	2,435	310	330	1,795
Djibouti	5	—	—	5
Equatorial Guinea	5	—	—	5
Eritrea	1,300	120	235	945
Ethiopia	1,155	85	235	835
Gabon	5	—	—	5
Guinea	110	25	10	75
Guinea-Bissau	25	—	—	25
Ivory Coast	485	15	20	445
Liberia	190	10	90	90
Madagascar	—	—	—	—
Mali	5	—	—	5
Mauritania	10	—	—	10
Niger	25	—	—	25
Rwanda	965	200	320	445
Senegal	15	—	—	15
Somalia	8,305	2,845	1,960	3,495
Sudan	770	120	50	595
Togo	150	20	15	110
Other Africa	5	—	—	—
Total excluding UK Commonwealth	21,980	4,270	4,165	13,550
Far East				
Afghanistan	12,155	2,280	7,370	2,530
Bhutan	90	15	5	65
Burma (Myanmar)	125	30	5	90
Cambodia	5	—	—	5
China	4,290	15	160	4,110
Hong Kong	15	—	—	15
Indonesia	385	5	—	360
Japan	5	—	—	5
Korea North	15	—	—	15
Korea South	5	—	—	5
Macau	5	—	—	5
Mongolia	180	—	—	180
Nepal	1,000	25	15	960
Philippines	55	—	5	50
Taiwan	5	—	—	5
Thailand	30	—	—	30
Vietnam	390	15	70	300

Initial decisions[1,2] on applications for asylum in the UK from non-Commonwealth nationals, excluding dependants, by type, and broken down by nationality, 2001

	Total initial decisions	*Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum*	*Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave*	*Total refused*
Western Samoa	—	—	—	—
Other Far East	5	—	—	5
Total excluding UK Commonwealth	18,735	2,370	7,635	8,730
Grand Total excluding UK Commonwealth	89,425	8,910	17,100	63,415

[1] Provisional figures rounded to nearest 5, with '—' = 1 or 2 (exce[illegible]centages)
[2] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appe[illegible]ther subsequent decision

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average cost of legal aid for an asylum seeker was in the last 12 months; how much was spent in the last year on legal aid for asylum seekers; and if she will make a statement. [84879]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The Legal Services Commission's systems do not record expenditure in such a way as to separate asylum seekers from immigration and nationality cases generally. Nor does the commission record information on individual cases[1].

The Commission can provide an estimate of the average cost of publicly-funded work for the stages of an immigration and asylum case based upon claims received for work conducted during year 2001–02:

work on an asylum application up to and including the initial decision cost on average £900;

work on an appeal to the Immigration Adjudicator cost on average £1,000.

work on a further appeal to a full hearing at the Immigration Appeals Tribunal cost on average £1,000; and

the average cost of publicly-funded legal representation for immigration and asylum cases was £3,133. This could cover proceedings in the High Court, Court of Appeal, and the House of Lords.

Payments for all immigration and asylum advice, assistance and representation in 2001–02 came to a total of £129.7 million.

[1] The number of publicly-funded asylum cases decreases at each stage. For example, only a small proportion of cases would be taken to the ImmigrationAppeal Tribunal, and even fewer to proceedings in the High Court or Court of Appeal. It is therefore wrong to aggregate the average costs reported in this answer and imply that the sum is the average cost of a typical asylum case.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers awaiting removal from the country his Department has failed to contact; what steps have been taken with regard to these asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [84881]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that the information requested is not available. Asylum applicants do not always inform the Immigration Service (IS) that they are leaving the United Kingdom.

We are making improvements in contact management, as detailed in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, 2002. We will seek to maintain contact with all asylum seekers. Asylum seekers will be informed of their obligations to provide up-to-date address details, and to report as required, during the induction process. Provision of support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is conditional on complying with these requirements. Those not accommodated by NASS will also be required to report. The IS will manage the contact process actively through the eight designated reporting centres, by using police stations and by visiting asylum seekers at their accommodation.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers there were in Somerset in each of the last three years. [85062]

Beverley Hughes: The information is not available in the form requested.

The availability of information on the location of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom is currently linked to the support the asylum seeker receives. Asylum seekers in the United Kingdom either receive support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), local authorities or the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), or are supporting themselves.

Currently, asylum seekers provided accommodation by NASS are not dispersed to Somerset because NASS has no dispersal accommodation there. Some asylum seekers supported by NASS find their own accommodation and receive subsistence-only support from NASS. The following table shows the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) who were receiving subsistence-only support from NASS, and were resident in the South West region (which includes Somerset) at the requested dates:

	Number of asylum seekers (including dependants) receiving subsistence-only support from NASS in the South West region[1]
End of December 2000	145
End of December 2001	350
End of September 2002	540

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest five. These figures exclude cases where support has been ceased.

From the grant claims sent to the Home Office by local authorities, as at the end of September 2002, and the end of September 2001, there were five asylum seekers (excluding dependants) who were being supported by Somerset Local Authority.[1]

No information is held centrally on the numbers of asylum seekers supported by DWP or who support themselves living in Somerset.

Statistics on the number of asylum seekers supported by NASS in each region are available on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

[1] Asylum seekers are not necessarily resident in the Local Authority which supports them due to the voluntary dispersal programme which operated prior to NASS.

Burglary

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the monthly burglary rates in the areas covered by the street crime initiative in the last two years. [83668]

Mr. Denham: General recorded crime figures for the period from April 2002, the period of the street crime initiative, have yet to be collated. Details of domestic burglary figures for three-month periods up to March 2002, for the 10 police force areas involved in the street crime initiative, are given in the table.

Recorded crime: Number of domestic burglary offences recorded from April 2000 to March 2002, by quarter

Street crime initiative forces	April 2000 to June 2000	July 2000 to September 2000	October 2000 to December 2000	January 2001 to March 2001	April 2001 to June 2001	July 2001 to September 2001	October 2000 to December 2001	January 2002 to March 2002
Avon and Somerset	2,823	2,891	3,346	3,336	3,529	3,840	3,693	4,933
Greater Manchester	9,447	9,043	9,878	10,816	9,232	8,940	10,246	10,663
Lancashire	2,285	2,374	2,825	3,159	3,071	3,266	2,990	2,775
Merseyside	2,882	2,997	3,163	3,472	3,499	3,498	3,655	3,695
Metropolitan police	16,651	16,523	18,137	18,858	16,596	18,352	19,599	19,384
Nottinghamshire	3,032	2,801	3,191	3,236	2,923	3,420	3,638	4,352
South Yorkshire	3,827	3,185	3,526	4,150	3,482	3,607	4,326	4,773
Thames Valley	3,106	2,867	3,642	3,607	2,827	3,486	3,254	3,830
West Midlands	7,229	7,231	8,240	8,293	6,934	7,595	8,777	7,913
West Yorkshire	6,371	6,834	8,491	8,510	6,998	7,842	9,387	10,451
England and Wales total	95,204	93,656	105,666	108,457	95,970	104,486	112,875	117,029

National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS)

The Home Office counting rules have again been revised as from April 2002, in order to incorporate the new National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS), which aims to introduce a greater degree of consistency to the ways in which crime is recorded in different police forces and to take a more victim orientated approach to crime recording. The effect will be to increase significantly the number of crimes in the recorded crime count.

Avon and Somerset (from October 2000), Lancashire (from August 2000) and Greater Manchester (from January 2002) introduced the new standard in advance of national implementation, and the recorded crimes in these forces may be significantly affected. West Midlands adopted the Standard in April 1999, and hence the figures given will not be influenced by the Standard.

The other SCI forces adopted the Standard in April 2002.

Crime (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on changes in crime rates in Staffordshire in the last 10 years; [84179]

(2) if he will make a statement on the rates of *(a)* burglary, *(b)* car crime and *(c)* street crime in Staffordshire in the last 10 years. [84180]

Mr. Denham: Details are given in the table. For car crime, total figures for theft of and theft from vehicles have been used. 'Street crime' is not a separate category in general recorded crime figures, which are based on legal definitions. Figures are given for all robbery, and robbery of personal property, the latter being collected separately from 1 April 1998.

Year[1]	*All recorded crime*	*All burglary*	*Theft of and from vehicles*	*Robbery (personal and business property)*	*Robbery of personal property*[2]
Number of recorded crimes in Staffordshire					
1992	97,536	28,830	28,217	391	n/a
1993	98,421	30,091	27,611	414	n/a
1994	93,757	26,736	25,958	416	n/a
1995	91,495	24,838	23,745	500	n/a
1996	92,155	24,511	21,902	503	n/a
1997	89,957	23,518	20,596	498	n/a
1998–99[3]	91,919	20,391	19,464	509	428
1999–2000[4]	98,852	19,155	17,601	697	550
2000–01	104,705	17,106	16,071	796	633
2001–02	117,274	18,801	17,960	964	835
Numbers of recorded crimes per 100,000 population in Staffordshire					
1992	9,291	2,746	2,688	37	n/a
1993	9,357	2,861	2,625	39	n/a
1994	8,899	2,538	2,464	39	n/a
1995	8,677	2,355	2,252	47	n/a
1996	8,723	2,320	2,073	48	n/a
1997	8,521	2,228	1,951	47	n/a
1998–99[3]	8,669	1,923	1,836	48	40

Year[1]	All recorded crime	All burglary	Theft of and from vehicles	Robbery (personal and business property)	Robbery of personal property[2]
1999–2000[4]	9,314	1,805	1,659	66	52
2000–01	9,872	1,613	1,515	75	60
2001–02	11,067	1,774	1,694	91	79

[1] Figures are on a calendar year basis up to 1997, and years ending March thereafter.
[2] Robbery of personal property has been collected separately since 1 April 1998.
[3] There was a change in the counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, and hence figures before and after that date will not be directly comparable. However, apart from the total recorded crime figure, it is thought that the categories given would be relatively little affected by the change.
[4] Staffordshire adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in October 1999, in advance of its national implementation date of April 2002. The 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 figures for the force will be affected by the Standard, although again, apart for the total recorded crime figure, the categories chosen are thought to be relatively little affected by the change

Criminal Justice

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there will be restrictions on the types of previous convictions that could be mentioned during a trial under the new criminal justice reforms. [84399]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Criminal Justice Bill, introduced on 21 November 2002, will reform the law on admitting evidence of a person's bad character, and will enable evidence such as previous convictions to be used where they are relevant to the case. This will, however, be subject to a power for judges and magistrates to exclude this sort of evidence if admitting it would have an adverse effect on the fairness of a trial.

DCS Ellie Baker

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons for the suspension of Detective Chief Superintendent Ellie Baker. [83182]

Mr. Denham: The West Midlands Police (WMP) inform me that the decision to suspend Detective Chief Superintendent Elaine Baker was taken after a member of the public made a complaint, which could result in her facing either a criminal conviction and/or a serious disciplinary sanction.

A full investigation of the allegations will be undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Service under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority. It would therefore not be appropriate for me to make any further comment at this time.

Detection Rates

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on policies to improve crime detection rates. [82092]

Mr. Denham: The Police Standards Unit is currently working with a number of police forces to improve their crime detection rates. This will be achieved through a structured performance enhancement programme, utilising good practice guidance and supported through other existing policies.

Through the further development and structured implementation of the National Intelligence Model (NIM), police activity can be targeted more effectively at both detecting and disrupting crime. This, coupled with the increased provision of analytical support, will provide the crime and disorder partnerships with the ability to detect crime and bring offenders to justice.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR), which is being piloted in nine police forces, will have an impact on detecting crime and denying criminals the use of roads. Figures, after four weeks of the pilots, show 6,580 vehicles stopped; 480 arrests made; 59 stolen vehicles recovered; over £400,000 of stolen goods, vehicles and drugs recovered and £144,000 of vehicle excise duty evasion detected.

ANPR works by scanning vehicle registrations and checking them against information stored in databases to identify vehicles of interest to the police, such as stolen cars or those involved in crimes. When a suspicious vehicle is recognised it can be the focus of targeted interception and inquiries.

The Government have made available £182 million over a four year period to expand the National DNA Database. The Home Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Forensic Science Service are working together to maximise the benefits gained from the expenditure being made in the development and application of DNA and other forensic techniques.

Drugs

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what public funding from central Government sources is given to non-governmental organisations for drug education purposes. [83860]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: For 2002–03 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has provided non-governmental organisations, including the National Children's Bureau, Drug Education Practitioners Group and DrugScope, with £100,150 funding for drug education purposes.

The Government also issued drug education and prevention funding (£5 million in 2001–02 and £9 million 2002–03) to primary care trusts (PCTs). All PCTs and social services departments, in partnership with their local Drug Action Team, will use this funding to commission: *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary prevention activity for all young people identified as at risk.

The DfES has also committed £15 million to local education authorities to support drug education in schools and this will rise to £17 million in 2003–04. This increase will improve the quality and coverage of drug, alcohol and tobacco education programmes in schools. In many areas non-governmental organisations will be commissioned to deliver substance misuse education. However this is a local decision and there is no central monitoring of whether funds are used by local education authorities and PCTs to fund non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions on *(a)* drug charges and *(b)* drug dealing there have been in the West Midlands in each of the past four years. [84823]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The numbers of cautions and convictions for all drug offences and trafficking offences in the West Midlands police force area from 1997–2000 are shown the table.

Number of persons found guilty, cautioned, given a fiscal fine or dealt with by compounding for drug offences in West Midlands police area, 1997–2000

Number of Persons

	All drug offences	*Trafficking offences*
1997	5,292	633
1998	6,353	709
1999	5,725	663
2000	5,837	688

Source:

Home Office Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom, 1997–2000—Area Tables.

The Home Office Statistical Bulletin is available on the Recorded Data Service (RDS) website, http:www.homeoffice.gov.uk.rds.pdfs2.hosb402.pdf, and copies are available in the Library.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conferences on the subject of drugs have been attended by Ministers and senior civil servants since May 1997; who the organisers were of each conference; and what financial support from central Government sources was provided for each occasion. [84222]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Ministers and officials regularly attend conferences within the UK and internationally on the subject of drug misuse. To provide the detail requested would incur disproportionate cost.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent discussions he has had with his Irish counterpart about lessons for the United Kingdom from drugs courts in Ireland; [82990]

(2) what discussions he has had with his Swedish counterpart about lessons for the United Kingdom from drugs courts in Sweden. [82989]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has had no formal contacts with his Irish or Swedish counterpart on this issue, but his officials and those of other Departments monitor the work of other jurisdictions when looking at how the courts in England, Wales and Scotland should respond to those whose offending is linked with a drug habit.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the balance, in terms of Government support, between the harm reduction and harm prevention approaches to drug education. [84221]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Government have a holistic approach to achieving quality standards in the delivery of drug education through the development of a framework of personal, social and health education supported by the National Healthy Schools Standards. This is only one of the many Government initiatives to improve the quantity and effectiveness of drug education.

Substance misuse education mainly involves harm prevention. However with children of secondary school age and particularly those at greater risk, such as school excludees and young offenders, this is balanced with harm reduction messages. These young people are more likely to be experimenting with illegal drugs and so need more detailed information. The Department for Education and Skills are currently reviewing guidance to schools on drug education and new guidance will be issued by the academic year 2003.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what hospitality has been accepted by his officials from organisations lobbying for the liberalisation of the drug laws since 1997. [84220]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: None.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specialist assistance is provided for police forces to tackle the sale of illegal drugs. [82931]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Advice and assistance in tackling the supply aspects of drug abuse are available to police forces from a number of sources including the National Crime Squad, National Criminal Intelligence Service, and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. Advice on best practice is also available from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, the Home Office Drugs Strategy Directorate and the Police Standards Unit. Scientific and technical advice and support is available from the Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch.

Advice on tracing and confiscating the assets of criminals, including drug traffickers, will be available through the new Asset Recovery Agency when established in February 2003. The Asset Recovery Agency will also train and accredit financial investigators working in law enforcement and other agencies.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what co-operation there has been between his Department and the Office of National Drug Control in the United States in the last three years. [82939]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The United States and the United Kingdom, along with our European Union partners, have an affirmed commitment to exchange ideas and experiences in combating drug use and drug dependence. Members of our two Governments meet often, and there is extensive co-operation between the US and the UK at official level in a variety of fora. For example, we are both signatories of the United Nations' Conventions on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, we both participate in meetings of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and we both co-operate through various UN programmes.

Hoax Emergency Calls

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals suspected of hoax calls to the emergency services have *(a)* been arrested and *(b)* had their telephones disconnected since 22 November 2002. [85174]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* I have been told by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) that 12 people have been referred for prosecution and 168 people for disconnection for making a hoax call between 22 and 30 November 2002. Individuals whose phones have been disconnected may still face prosecution, and police are continuing to investigate hoax call cases.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used by the police to determine whether to *(a)* prosecute and *(b)* refer for disconnection those suspected of hoax calls to the emergency services. [85175]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* I have been told by the Association of Chief Police Officers that they have circulated guidance to all police forces on dealing with hoax calls referring to the importance of identifying and prosecuting offenders, and disconnecting their telephones where appropriate.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether letters to hon. Members and signed by officials at the IND Integrated Case Work Unit are cleared by Ministers before they are sent; and what ministerial accountability is accepted for each letter. [84984]

Beverley Hughes: The leaflet 'Information for Members of Parliament about immigration and nationality enquiries', which was published in November 2002, sets out the circumstances where it would not usually be appropriate for Home Office Ministers to intervene in individual immigration cases. It also gave Members information about how to correspond with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND).

Where Members make written representations directly to officials of IND, the replies are prepared in line with appropriate legislation, departmental instructions and current ministerial guidance. Ministers do not clear these replies.

Leg Restraints

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the use of leg restraints on people in the custody of the police. [84659]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* I am told by the Association of Chief Police Officers that they issued guidance to all police forces in the use of limb restraints in July 2001.

Police Stations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police stations have *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in West Sussex this year. [84764]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Chief Constable of Sussex informs me that there are 15 police stations in West Sussex. None has been opened or closed this year. A new police station is planned to be opened in Selsey in April 2003.

Prisons

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on projected prison population figures for the next five years. [82133]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Statistical Bulletin "Projections of Long Term Trends in the Prison Population to 2009" will be published shortly. A copy of which will be placed in the Library.

Psychological Resources (Marc Hodgkiss)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what psychological resources are available in the Ravenswood House Medical Secure Unit to assess and treat Marc Hodgkiss; and if she will make a statement. [82451]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Ravenswood House is resourced to provide services to residents and not non-residents such as Mr. Hodgkiss.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many official inter-ministerial

meetings his Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [83584]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* As far as records show the following meetings have been held between Home Office and Scottish Executive Ministers since May 1999:

Home Office Minister	*Scottish Executive Minister*	*Subject discussed*	*Date*
Bob Ainsworth	Iain Gray (then Deputy Justice Minister)	Drugs policy	18 September 2001
Bob Ainsworth	Richard Simpson (then Deputy Justice Minister)	Drugs policy	26 March 2002
Beverley Hughes	Margaret Curran (Minister for Social Justice)	Various issues relating to asylum seekers in Scotland	11–12 September 2002
Lord Falconer	Colin Boyd (Lord Advocate) and Elish Angiolini (Solicitor General)	Prison population, Effective sentences, persistent offenders, bail and enforcement of warrants and fines	15 November 2002

Security Service Surveillance

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who authorised the *(a)* recruitment and *(b)* use by *(i)* Special Branch and (ii) the security service of a paid agent codenamed Silver Fox in the National Union of Mineworkers during 1984–85; and if he will make a statement; [82593]

(2) who authorised *(a)* Special Branch and *(b)* the security service to place a field agent in the circle of Mr. David Nellist while he was an hon. Member; and if he will make a statement. [82592]

Mr. Blunkett: Operational decisions at the time would have been for the relevant Chief Officer. It has been the longstanding policy of successive governments neither to confirm nor deny reports concerning Security Service operations.

Superintendent Garry Horlacher

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the recent investigation into the conduct of Superintendent Garry Horlacher; [84204]

(2) if he will make a statement on the number of man hours lost as result of the investigation into the conduct of Superintendent Garry Horlacher; [84207]

(3) if he will make a statement on the origin of the regulation regarding staff information on a whiteboard, which led to the investigation into the conduct of Superintendent Garry Horlacher; [84205]

(4) if he will make a statement on the time taken to complete the investigation into the conduct of Superintendent Garry Horlacher; and what assessment he has made of *(a)* the costs of the investigaton and *(b)* the impact upon police morale. [84206]

Mr. Denham: I am informed by Cumbria Constabulary that they received a number of allegations, some of which were of a serious nature, which the force considered breached the principles of honesty and integrity, confidentiality, and politeness and tolerance, contained in the Code of Conduct in the Police Conduct) Regulations 1999. The force considered that the more serious allegations merited an investigation under those regulations.

Cumbria Constabulary advise me that the investigation took three months. It was undertaken by an outside force that has not charged for this work. No officers were suspended, and thus, no time was lost.

The force recognise that morale may have been impacted by the investigation, but they consider that there would have been a more serious impact if no investigation had been undertaken into the serious allegations made against a senior officer.

Police Morale

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the time spent by police officers on paperwork and administrative tasks; and if he will make a statement on police morale. [84208]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to tackling the administrative burdens and inefficient working practices that keep officers off the streets. Sir David O'Dowd's task force was commissioned to give the Government a police service view of what could be done to tackle the administrative burdens and inefficient working practices which keep police officers off the streets. The task force report, published on 17 September, highlighted ways to free up significant amounts of officers' time. A steering group, co-chaired by the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office, is taking the task force recommendations forward. This is a vital opportunity to bring about a real difference to the everyday lives of officers on the front line.

We have turned around the decline in police numbers that started under the last Government. The investment has been made to deliver a record number of police officers and there are now 5,400 more officers than two years ago. We are on course for our targets of 130,000 officers by March 2003 and 132,500 in 2004. We have also reached agreement on a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service that is good for the service, for rank and file officers and for the public. We will ensure that officers know and feel that they are valued.

Thames Valley Police

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian support staff were employed by Thames Valley Police in each year since 1 January 1996. [85134]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The information requested about police strength has been set out in the table. Figures are only available for March and September of each year.

Thames Valley Police

Year as at 31 March	*Police officers*	*Civilian support staff*
1996	3,674	1,738
1997	3,695	1,825
1998	3,776	1,827
1999	3,748	1,799
2000	3,740	1,786
2001	3,703	1,891
2002	3,762	2,061

Source:
Home Office Statistical Bulletins—Police Service Strength—1996–2002.

Under-age Drinkers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to bring forward legislation to allow the police to confiscate sealed alcohol containers from under-age drinkers in public places. [84803]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* We have included a clause in the Licensing Bill, now before Parliament, which will, if enacted, amend the existing legislation to allow the police to confiscate alcohol in sealed containers from young people who are drinking in public places.

Wildlife Legislation

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 243W, how many prosecutions and convictions there have been under the *(a)* Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996, *(b)* Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and *(c)* Protection of Badgers Act 1992 in each year, broken down by region. [84820]

Mr. Denham: The available information is shown in the table for England and Wales, 1998 to 2000.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in due course.

Number of defendants proceeded against at the magistrates courts and convicted at all courts under various Wildlife Acts by region, England and Wales 1998[1]

Region/statute	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*
East		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	3	1
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	—	—
East Midlands		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	—	—
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	2	1
London		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	1	1
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	—	—
North East		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	14	11
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	—	—

Number of defendants proceeded against at the magistrates courts and convicted at all courts under various Wildlife Acts by region, England and Wales 1998[1]

Region/statute	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*
North West		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	10	8
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	—	—
South East		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	11	7
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	1	—
South West		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	3	3
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	12	—
West Midlands		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	2	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	5	4
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	—	—
Yorkshire and the Humber		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	5	3
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	—	—
Wales		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	19	7
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	4	3
England and Wales		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	8	7
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	71	45
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	19	4

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.
[2] Excludes offences under Protection of Badgers Act 1992, Sec 13.

Number of defendants proceeded against at the magistrates courts and convicted at all courts under various Wildlife Acts by region, England and Wales 1999[1]

Region/statute	*Proceeded against*	*Convicted*
East		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	8	7
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	1	—
East Midlands		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	5	4
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	9	2
London		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	96	74
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	—	—
North East		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	7	3
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	—	—
North West		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	21	12
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	4	3

Number of defendants proceeded against at the magistrates courts and convicted at all courts under various Wildlife Acts by region, England and Wales 1999[1]

Region/statute	Proceeded against	Convicted
South East		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	4	3
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	7	2
South West		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	9	6
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	1	—
West Midlands		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	8	5
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	—	—
Yorkshire and the Humber		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	4	4
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	1	1
Wales		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	4	3
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	7	2
England and Wales		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	166	121
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[2]	30	10

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.
[2] Excludes offences under Protection of Badgers Act 1992, Sec 13.

Number of defendants proceeded against at the magistrates courts and convicted at all courts under various Wildlife Acts by region, England and Wales 2000[1,2]

Region/statute	Proceeded against	Convicted
East		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	17	14
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	1	1
East Midlands		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	5	3
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	2	—
London		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	2	2
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	—	—
North East		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	4	4
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	—	—
North West		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	43	42
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	3	1
South East		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	3	1
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	3	—
South West		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	5	2
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	1	1
West Midlands		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	6	3
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	4	1
Yorkshire and the Humber		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	1	1
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	—	—
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	1	—
Wales		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	—	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	12	9
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	6	—
England and Wales		
Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996	5	4
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	97	80
Protection of Badgers Act 1992[3]	21	4

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.
[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.
[3] Excludes offences under Protection of Badgers Act 1992, Sec 13.

Women Prisoners

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated number of women in prison who are drug users is. [82862]

Hilary Benn: The random mandatory drug testing (MDT) programme is the most up-to-date available measure of drug misuse in prisons in England and Wales. The annual average figures of positive tests in women's prisons for the last three years are reproduced in the table.

Year	Random MDT percentage positive
2002–03[1]	7.4
2001–02	8.7
2000–01	9.3

[1] Denotes April 2002 to October 2002 figures

Young Offenders Institutions

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many incidents of self-harm have been recorded at each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000; [83829]

(2) how many self-harm forms F2052SH have been opened at each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000. [83828]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is shown in the tables. Table 1 covers the 675 recorded incidents of self-harm by juveniles between 1 April 2000 and

30 September 2002. Table 2 covers the number of recorded F2052SHs forms opened in the juvenile estate between 1 January 2000 and 30 June 2002.

Table 1. Showing the number of reported self-harm incidents in the juvenile estate by financial year between 1 April 2000 and 30 September 2002

	Financial year		
Establishment	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*[1]
Ashfield	112	128	51
Brinsford	6	6	7
Castington	41	72	16
Feltham	9	14	5
Hindley	0	2	12
Hollesley Bay	4	8	12
Huntercombe	6	6	0
Lancaster Farms	6	7	2
Onley	4	29	25
Pare	11	0	1
Portland	12	8	0
Stoke Heath	11	13	0
Werrington	1	1	1
Wetherby	8	18	0
Total	231	312	132

[1] 2002–03 figures are up to 30 September

Table 2. Showing the number of F2052SHs opened in the juvenile estate between 1 January 2000 and 30 June 2002

	Calendar Year		
Establishment	*2000*[1]	*2001*	*2002*[2]
Ashfield	150	147	91
Brinsford	134	98	32
Castington	75	109	45
Feltham	260	448	227
Hindley	0	15	80
Hollesley Bay	30	136	50
Huntercombe	112	106	117
Lancaster Farms	68	37	21
Onley	108	73	69
Portland	129	101	8
Reading	0	48	0
Stoke Heath	216	150	68
Werrington	57	99	42
Wetherby	193	197	78
Total	1,532	1,763	928

The data is extracted on a six monthly basis, therefore:

[1] The figure for 2000 is for the complete calendar year.

[2] The 2002 figure is for the first six months of the calendar year.

The Prison Service, with the support of the Youth Justice Board, is developing a suicide and self-harm prevention strategy. This is being taken forward through a three-year programme which runs to April 2004. Work is being targeted where the risks are highest—in local prisons, on remand, in the early weeks and months of custody—within a broad preventative approach. An all-round pro-active approach will encourage a supportive culture in prisons based on good staff-prisoner relationships, a constructive regime and a physically safe environment. Six pilot prisons including Feltham young offender institution are testing the full range of new safer custody policies and standards, and the results of the programme will be subject to independent quantitative and qualitative evaluation.

Youth Initiatives (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children aged between 10 and 16 years have benefited from *(a)* Positive Futures and *(b)* similar initiatives in the West Midlands. [84824]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Positive Futures is a partnership managed within the Home Office Drugs Strategy Directorate. There are currently 67 local projects operating in neighbourhoods across England and Wales, all falling within the top 20 per cent. as identified through the multiple deprivation indices. The intended outcomes of the programme are:

reductions in drug use among those participating in the project;

an increase in regular participation in sport and physical activity by those involved;

reductions in youth offending in the locality of the project.

There are currently nine Positive Futures projects in the West Midlands, four began in June 2000 in Birmingham (Kings Norton), Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. A further five began in April 2002 in Birmingham (Handsworth), Coventry, Lichfield, Rugby and Solihull. The numbers of children and young people attending activities on a regular basis between June and October 2002 was approximately 880.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many under-17-year-olds participate in Youth Inclusion Programmes in the West Midlands. [84822]

Mr. Denham: The Youth Inclusion Programme is part of the Government's approach to reducing youth offending by working with young people to prevent them being drawn into crime in the first place. There are at present 70 Youth Inclusion Programme schemes across the country, with nine schemes running in the West Midlands. Each scheme targets the 50 young people, aged 13 to 16, living in the local area who are considered to be at the greatest risk of social exclusion, crime and antisocial behaviour. The schemes in the West Midlands are running in Coventry, Sandwell, Stoke, Walsall and Wolverhampton, with four schemes in Birmingham. Between July and September 2002, 542 young people under 17 participated in these nine schemes.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Onshore Wind Farms

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which types of designated areas within the United Kingdom are protected from future development of onshore wind farms; and what legislation enforces this protection. [84559]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

No areas within the United Kingdom are specifically designated as "no-go" areas for wind farm development. Each case is assessed on its own individual merit.Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 states that in national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, the

broads and stes of special scientific interest, the conservation of the countryside, and its wildlife and cultural heritage, should be given great weight in planning policies and development control decisions. Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 states that very special circumstances are needed to justify development in the green belt.

Audit Commission

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total expenditure of the Audit Commission was in each year since 1997 and its forecast budget for the coming year. [84907]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested on total expenditure by the Audit Commission for each year since 1997 can be found in the following table.

Year ending	*£ million*
31 March 1997[1]	93.4
31 October 1998	105.7
31 October 1999	111.6
31 October 2000	144.1
31 October 2001	178.8
31 October 2002[2]	212
31 October 2003[3]	207

Note:
The Audit Commission's financial year, which in earlier years ran from 1 April to 31 March, was amended to run from 1 November to 31 October with effect from 1 November 1997. The year ending 31 March 1997 was therefore the last complete financial year before the change was made.

The period coincided with the Commission taking on a number of new responsibilities, including those derived from the Local Government Act 1999 on local authority performance. This included the auditing of best value performance plans and the setting up of the best value inspection service. More recently, the Commission has taken the lead role in developing a comprehensive performance assessment process, the results of which are expected shortly. In 2000, the Commission also took on new responsibilities with regard to the National Health Service, involving the review of NHS performance at national as well as local levels.

Building Inspectors

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he proposes to make an order which will allow approved inspectors to check all types of work on all types of dwellings. [85212]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends to consult relevant parties as soon as possible on procedures for designation of new home warranty schemes for the purposes of the rules governing building control by approved inspectors. Once designation procedures have been established and put into practice, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be able to decide on re-approval of professional indemnity insurance schemes for approved inspectors, in terms that would allow them to deal with all types of domestic building work.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister by how much total expenditure would be increased if all parish and town councils in England increased the maximum £3.50 per elector multiplier as specified in section 137(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 up to £5.00 as specified in the draft Local Government Bill; and by how much audit best value and other compliance costs for parish and town councils have increased in each of the last two years. [84421]

Mr. Leslie: The maximum expenditure by English parish and town councils currently permitted under section 137(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 is estimated to be about £45 million per year. It is estimated that this would increase to about £65 million per year as a result of the maximum amount increasing from £3.50 to £5.00 per elector.

Not all parish and town councils make full use of the existing £3.50 amount, but we are increasing it because it has been in place since 1990, and consultation responses to the "Modernising Local Government Finance" green paper have shown that it has been inhibiting expenditure for some councils.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not hold information on the total cost of financial audit for parish and town councils. For parish councils, the Audit Commission's 'lighter touch' regime aims to develop a proportionate audit approach as well as a reduction in audit fees for most councils.

The exact costs of best value are not known. However, the duty of best value should not have added excessive costs when a council is well organised and managed. Any additional costs should have been offset by gains in economy, efficiency and effectiveness and by the new opportunities provided by innovative service delivery through for example by partnership arrangements. Councils would have been free to plough back the savings made into core and other services.

Moreover, the Government announced in the local government white paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" that it will pay a grant of £30,000 per year to Best Value Town and Parish Councils to cover the costs of audit and the corporate costs of carrying out work relating to best value, such as preparation of performance plans and the management of reviews.

No other compliance costs for parish and town councils are believed to have increased in the last two years.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to allow local authorities to charge a punitive level of council tax on long-term voids. [84968]

Mr. Leslie: On 19 November, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) announced we would be giving English local authorities the discretion to reduce or remove the current 50 per cent. council tax discount on long-term empty property. The Office of the Deputy Prime

Minister has included the necessary provision in the Local Government Bill and, subject to parliamentary approval, we aim to implement this change on 1 April 2004.

We have no plans to allow local authorities to charge more than the full council tax.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received about removing council tax exemption to student houses in multi-occupancy; and if he will make a statement. [85029]

Mr. Leslie: Since August 2001, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received 12 representations from members of the public about the council tax exemption for premises occupied by students. Nine of those believed that landlords should be made liable for the council tax in properties occupied only by students, while three suggested that students should be made liable for the council tax.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to change or remove the exemption from council tax of dwellings occupied only by students.

Fire Service

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the Fire Cover Review and its recommendations; and when he intends to give his response. [83437]

Mr. Raynsford: The report on the Fire Cover Review was commissioned by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council and it is for the council to decide whether or not to endorse the report and publish its findings. It was expected that the council would discuss the report at a meeting on 12 November2002, but this was cancelled as a result of the fire service pay dispute. The next meeting is currently scheduled to take place on 12 February 2002. If the Council endorses the report a copy will be placed in the Libraries of the House. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will give a response to the report in the light of the discussion in the Council and after wide consultation.

Green Goddesses (Cinderford)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will reply to two letters from the Chairman of the Gloucestershire County Council requesting further assistance for extra Green Goddesses and crew to man them for Cinderford, Gloucestershire. [85181]

Mr. Raynsford: A senior official from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister responded to the substance of both letters from the Chair of the Fire Authority on 11 November 2002.

Local Government (Discretion)

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent legislation has allowed greater discretion to be exercised by local councils and authorities. [84718]

Mr. Leslie: The Local Government Act 2000 provided considerable additional discretion to local authorities through the introduction of a new power to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of their areas unless prohibited elsewhere in legislation. I also refer the hon. Member to the written statement given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) on 26 November concerning a package of measures to devolve power to local authorities, including recent and proposed changes to legislation.

Local Performance Indicators

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will list the local performance indicators monitoring the activities of specific local authorities in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03, for each local authority with local performance indicators. [84908]

(2) how many best value performance indicators *(a)* monitored in 2001–02 and *(b)* are monitoring in 2002–03 the activities of *(i)* fire and (ii) local authorities. [84906]

Mr. Leslie: Local authorities employ a wide variety of indicators to measure their performance across a range of activities, and no central record is kept of them.Where indicators are prescribed by Government under the Local Government Act 1999, these are published annually following consultation with local government and others. The attached table summarises the number of such indicators in 2001–02 and 2002–03 by type of authority. Full details are contained in SI 2001 No. 724 and SI2002 No 523, copies of which can be found in the library of the House. A similar number of indicators was previously prescribed by the Audit Commission: these were replaced entirely in 2001–02 by those prescribed by Government under the 1999 Act.

	National BVPIs and ACPIs 2000–01	*National BVPIs 2001–02*	*Percentages decrease from 2000–01 to 2001–02*	*National BVPIs 2002–03*	*Percentages decrease from 2000–01 to 2002–03*	*Percentages from 2001–02 to 2002–03*
Unitaries/Met Boroughs	189	123	35	97	49	21
London	189	121	36	94	50	22
County Councils (including fire)	134	105	22.	86	36.	18.
District Councils	91	65	29	51	44	22
Fire	18	18	0	19	N/a	N/a

Note:

BVPIs, ie indicators prescribed by Government under the 1999 Act.

ACPIs, ie. Indicators prescribed by the Auidt Commission under the Local Government Act 1992, consolidated into the Audit Commission Act 1998.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria are applied to give an area neighbourhood renewal status; and where such areas are located, broken down by constituency. [84183]

Mrs. Roche: The information requested is not broken down by constituency but the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is allocated to local authority districts that fall within the 50 most deprived authorities on any of the six district level summary measures of the ward level Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2000). The six measures are:

Income scale—the number of people experiencing income deprivation

Employment scale—the number of people experiencing employment deprivation

Local Concentration—tells us how severe deprivation is in each authorities 'hot spots' of deprivation

Extent—the percentage of each district's population that live in one of the 10 per cent. most deprived wards in England

The 'average scores' and 'average ranks' measures are the average level of deprivation across the entire district.

This brings in a total of 81 authorities. In addition, there are transitional arrangements in place for seven other authorities that were among the 50 most deprived on the previous measure of deprivation, but which do not appear among the 50 most deprived authorities on the IMD 2000.

The following lists the 88 authorities currently receiving NRF funding.

Local authorities in receipt of NRF

Hackney
Hastings
Tower Hamlets
Derwentside
Newham
Hyndburn
Manchester
Stoke-on-Trent
Knowsley
North Tyneside
Easington
Wirral
Liverpool
Rotherham
Middlesbrough
Burnley
Islington
South Tyneside
Hartlepool
Southwark
Halton
Nottingham
Blackburn with Darwen
Doncaster
Kingston upon Hull, City of
Leicester
Sandwell
Walsall
Wear Valley
Barrow-in-Furness
Redcar and Cleveland
Newcastle upon Tyne
Wolverhampton
Sunderland
Salford
Haringey
Barnsley
Pendle
Rochdale
Gateshead
Mansfield
Camden
Great Yarmouth
Wansbeck
Birmingham
St. Helens
Oldham
Stockton-on-Tees
Bolsover
Bradford
Bolton
Blackpool
Sefton
Preston
Greenwich
Sheffield
Kerrier
Coventry
Penwith
Wakefield
Derby
Sedgefield
Leeds
Waltham Forest
Barking and Dagenham
Lewisham
Brent
Lambeth
Ashfield
Allerdale
Bristol, City of
Wigan
Plymouth
Luton
Kirklees
Enfield
Westminster
Hammersmith and Fulham
Kensington and Chelsea
Tameside
Brighton and Hove
Portsmouth
Dudley
Southampton

Ealing
Croydon
Lincoln
Wandsworth

Polling Hours

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to extend the polling hours for local referenda. [85204]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to do so.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consultation is planned prior to referendums on regional assemblies. [85393]

Mr. Leslie: On 2 December, the Government launched a soundings exercise on the level of interest in each English region (outside London) in holding a referendum about establishing an elected regional assembly. We are asking for views, information and evidence from people in each region, including local authorities, MPs, MEPs, regional chambers and others. Responses are requested by 3 March 2003.

This soundings exercise will inform the Secretary of State's consideration of the level of interest in each English region in holding a referendum about establishing an elected regional assembly. Level of interest will be the primary factor in determining which regions will undergo a local government review by the Boundary Committee. Such a review, which must be carried out in a region before a referendum on establishing elected assemblies can be held, will recommend the most appropriate unitary local government structure for those parts of the region that currently have both a county and district council, should an elected assembly be established for the region.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Boundary Review

Mr. Luff: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will make a statement on progress with reviewing *(a)* the boundaries of local authorities in England and *(b)* the boundary between Wychavon and the City of Worcester. [84169]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

No reviews of the boundaries between principal local authorities have taken place recently and we have no plans for such reviews to take place in the immediate future, except as part of any local government review required before a referendum in a region for an elected regional assembly. There is therefore no boundary review taking place between the district of Wychavon and the city of Worcester.

The electoral commission have recently completed electoral reviews of the district of Wychavon and the city of Worcester-these reviews are of the electoral arrangements within the boundaries of the district and the city.

County Court Summonses

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* writs and *(b)* county court summonses were issued in each year since 1997. [84899]

Yvette Cooper: Figures for the number of civil proceedings commenced both in the High Court and county courts since 1997 are provided in the following table.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
High Court Chancery Division	38,360	37,428	37,281	37,333	37,034
High Court Queen's Bench Division	121,446	114,984	72,161	26,876	21,613
County Court	2,208,878	2,245,324	2,000,337	1,871,923	1,739,090

High Court Judges (Appointments)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the high court judges the Lord Chancellor has appointed since 1997. [84900]

Ms Rosie Winterton: High Court Judges are appointed by The Queen on the recommendation of my noble and learned Friend, the Lord Chancellor.

Since the Lord Chancellor took office, on 2 May 1997, 57 High Court Judges have been appointed on his recommendation. Their names, together with the Division of the High Court to which they were assigned, and the date of their appointment are listed as follows:

Name	*Division*	*Appointed*
The hon. Mr. Justice Sullivan	Queen's Bench Division	1 October 1997
The hon. Mr. Justice Hughes	Family Division	1 October 1997
The hon. Mr. Justice Park	Chancery Division	3 November 1997
The hon. Mr. Justice Penry-Davey	Queen's Bench Division	12 November 1997
The hon. Mr. Justice Pumfrey	Chancery Division	24 November 1997
The hon. Mr. Justice Richards	Queen's Bench Division	1 December 1997
The hon. Mr. Justice Charles	Family Division	12 January 1998
The hon. Mr Justice David Steel	Queen's Bench Division	19 January 1998
The hon. Mr. Justice Hart	Chancery Division	24 January 1998
The hon. Mr. Justice Gray	Queen's Bench Division	1 October 1998

Name	Division	Appointed
The hon. Mr. Justice Klevan	Queen's Bench Division	1 October 1998[1]
The hon. Mr. Justice Bratza	Queen's Bench Division	30 October 1998
The hon. Mr. Justice Burton	Queen's Bench Division	23 November 1998
The hon. Mr. Justice Jackson	Queen's Bench Division	12 January 1999
The hon. Mr. Justice Bodey	Family division	12 January 1999
The hon. Mrs. Justice Hallett DBE	Queen's Bench Division	14 April 1999
The hon. Mr. Justice Elias	Queen's Bench Division	4 May 1999
The hon. Mr. Justice Aikens	Queen's Bench Division	6 May 1999
The hon. Mr. Justice Black DBE	Family Division	4 October 1999
The hon. Mr. Justice Silber	Queen's Bench Division	3 December 1999
The hon. Mr. Justice Goldring	Queen's Bench Division	3 December 1999
The hon. Mr. Justice Crane	Queen's Bench Division	11 January 2000
The hon. Mrs. Justice Rafferty DBE	Queen's Bench Division	21 February 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Grigson	Queen's Bench Division	19 April 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Gibbs	Queen's Bench Division	19April 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Henriques	Queen's Bench Division	19 April 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Tomlinson	Queen's Bench Division	2 May 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Munby	Family Division	22 May 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Andrew Smith	Queen's Bench Division	19 July 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Stanley Burnton	Queen's Bench Division	19 July 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Lawrence Collins	Chancery Division	28 September 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Hunt	Queen's Bench Division	28 September 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Pitchford	Queen's Bench Division	28 September 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Coleridge	Family Division	28 September 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Patten	Chancery Division	2 October 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Leveson	Queen's Bench Division	23 October 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Ouseley	Queen's Bench Division	2 November 2000
The hon. Mr. Justice Etherton	Chancery Division	11 January 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice McCombe	Queen's Bench Division	11 January 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Jack	Queen's Bench Division	11 January 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Owen	Queen's Bench Division	15 January 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Mackay	Queen's Bench Division	24 January 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Mitting	Queen's Bench Division	3 April 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Roderick Evans	Queen's Bench Division	23 April 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Davis	Queen's Bench Division	1 October 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Gross	Queen's Bench Division	1 October 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Keith	Queen's Bench Division	2 October 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Cooke	Queen's Bench Division	2 October 2001
The hon. Mr. Justice Field	Queen's Bench Division	15 January 2002
The hon. Mr. Justice Hedley	Family Division	15 January 2002
The hon. Mr. Justice Pitchers	Queen's Bench Division	16 January 2002
The hon. Mr. Justice Peter Smith	Chancery Division	15 April 2002
The hon. Mr. Justice Treacy	Queen's Bench Division	1 October 2002
The hon. Mr. Justice Simon	Queen's Bench Division	1 October 2002
The hon. Mr. Justice Royce	Queen's Bench Division	21 October 2002
The hon Mrs. Justice Cox DBE	Queen's Bench Division	4 November 2002
The hon. Mr. Justice Fulford	Queen's Bench Division	21 November 2002

[1] Died 26 December 2001

Magistrates

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will reimburse actual lost pay of lay magistrates, rather than a sum based on average earnings; and if he will make a statement. [84723]

Yvette Cooper: The Financial Loss Allowance is based on average earnings and is paid from cash limited budgets of the Magistrates' Courts Committees allocated from public funds granted by my Department with the concurrence of Her Majesty's Treasury. This method is considered the most equitable way of striking a balance to cover the differing trades and professions within the magistracy.

Mark Tami: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training and support is given to individuals taking up magistrates posts. [84587]

Yvette Cooper: Training of magistrates is the responsibility of Magistrates Courts Committees (MCCs) who are required to work within a framework approved by the Lord Chancellor. Under the Magistrates National Training Initiative, the Lord Chancellor requires MCCs to follow the training syllabus produced by the Judicial Studies Board.

The JSB syllabus requires newly appointed magistrates to attend a series of training sessions covering the essential aspects of magisterial work including 'The Obligations of the Judicial Oath', 'Bail', 'Mode of Trial', 'Evaluation of Evidence', 'Verdict and Sentencing'. It is also expected that magistrates make at least one visit to a local court and to a penal institution.

A newly appointed magistrate is supported during his or her first two years of sitting by an experienced and trained magistrate acting as a mentor.

Magistrates Courts (Fines)

Mr. Humfrey Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total

level of fines imposed by the Inner London magistrates courts was in each of the last three years; what the average recovery time was; and what amounts were *(a)* written off and *(b)* remitted. [83810]

Yvette Cooper: The Inner London Magistrates' Courts Service (ILMCS) became part of the amalgamated Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority (GLMCA) on 1 April 2001. It is therefore not possible to provide separate data for Inner London from that date, only data for the amalgamated GLMCA. Information on average fine recovery times is not collected.

The information available is set out in the table as follows:

£

Organisation	*Year*	*Imposed*	*Written off*	*Remitted*
GLMCA	2001–02	77,640,695	13,916,583	[1]27,931,066
ILMCS	2000–01	60,240,074	5,742,177	4,812,386
ILMCS	1999–2000	54,160,594	7,564,414	6,817,071

[1] Includes all areas within the GLMCA, not just ILMCS

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what the total expenditure of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84786]

(2) what the total budget of *(a)* the Lord Chancellor's Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84929]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 were published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, 75W). The cost of Ministers visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Royal Peculiars

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will publish his response to the report on the Royal Peculiars. [82077]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The plan to publish our response in October has been delayed pending further research; and consultations with interested parties. Once this is concluded, the Lord Chancellor will submit his recommendations to Her Majesty the Queen. The response will be published as soon as possible thereafter.

West Wiltshire Magistrates Court

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when he will make a decision on the future of West Wiltshire Magistrates Court. [84157]

Yvette Cooper: I shall make my decision as soon as practicable after considering representations made to me on this issue.

HEALTH

Accident and Emergency

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the bed occupancy rate is in the accident and emergency departments of each hospital in the West Midlands. [84826]

Mr. Lammy: Bed occupancy figures are collected for in-patient beds, but patients in accident and emergency departments are not in-patients.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new nurses have been recruited to each accident and emergency department in the West Midlands in each of the last two years. [84827]

Mr. Lammy: Figures for accident and emergency nurses are not available separately. Figures on new nurses in general are also not available because the non-medical workforce census currently measures net changes rather than leavers and joiners.

Advertising Campaigns

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his planned expenditure in 2002–03 on major advertising campaigns broken down by *(a)* campaigns and *(b)* advertising medium. [83020]

Mr. Lammy: Major advertising campaigns planned by the Department for 2000–03 are listed in the table, giving details of advertising media and forecast expenditure.

Campaign	*Advertising media*	*Planned cost 2002–03 (£)*
Appropriately Prescribed Medicine (i.e. antibiotics)	Women's press and TV listings	350,000
Nurse and other staff recruitment	National/regional press and radio	5,062,400
NHS Direct	Women's press, internet advertising	795,000
Organ donation	Radio and six sheet posters, Asian TV and radio	245,000
Smoking cessation	Satellite and terrestrial TV	7,270,000
Flu immunisation	National TV, press, bus interiors, pharmacy bags and online	2,145,000
Sexual health	Radio, men's/women's magazines, washroom posters	1,500,000
Teenage pregnancy	Radio, teen magazines, washroom posters	1,600,000
Child immunisation (i.e. MMR)	TV, radio, press	1,080,000

Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the overspending by the Ashford and St. Peter's hospitals NHS trust. [85224]

Ms Blears: Ashford and St. Peter's hospitals NHS trust is aware of the duty it has to ensure that sound financial management is practiced and also the need to achieve a break-even position at the end of the financial year. The current deficit is the subject of discussion between the trust's commissioning primary care trusts and the strategic health authority.

On the question of the management of the trust's underlying deficit, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 23 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 402W.

Asylum-Seeking Children

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children seeking asylum who have arrived in the UK in the last five years have been placed in *(a)* care, *(b)* foster care, *(c)* adopted care, and *(d)* bed and breakfast accommodation. [82765]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children looked after by local authorities was collected for the first time for the year ending 31 March 2002. The table shows the available information. Data on local children are included for comparison.

The table only covers those unaccompanied children who are looked after by local authorities. It does not cover those who are supported without being looked after. The Children in Need in England survey, published by the Department in October, provides information about numbers of asylum seeking children receiving a service as children in need in a sample week in September/October 2001. However this survey does not distinguish between unaccompanied children and those with their families. Nor does it give details of the type of support, such as bed and breakfast accommodation, provided. The information can be accessed at www.doh.gov.uk/cin/cinlatables.htm.

Number of children looked after by local councils at 31 March 2002 by placement and asylum seeking status—England

	Unaccompanied asylum seeking children		*Local children*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Foster care	1,310	60	37,925	66
Placed for adoption	—	—	3,585	6
Living independently[1]	250	12	865	2
Other placements	620	28	15,145	26
Total	2,185	100	57,525	100

[1] Living independently includes flats, bedsits, lodgings with no formal support and bed and breakfast accommodation.

Note:
All figures have been rounded to the nearest 5; "—" indicates a figure is less than 5 and has been suppressed for reasons of confidentiality.

Breast Cancer

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government expect to receive the findings of the Cancer Research UK study on the possible association between induced abortion and breast cancer. [84753]

Ms Blears: Departmental officials are in touch with the Cancer Research UK study, which is considering the full range of potential risk factors for breast cancer. This is an important and complex international research project. No firm time frame for the publication of results has been set by Cancer Research UK at the present time.

British Medical Association

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next intends to meet the Chairman of the BMA. [84453]

Mr. Lammy: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the "Ministerial Code", the "Civil Service Code" and "Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists". Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Cancer

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of cancer referral target times were being missed in each hospital trust in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2001. [83310]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The two week waiting time target from urgent referral by a general practitioner for patients with suspected cancer, to first out-patient appointment was introduced for urgent cases of suspected breast cancer from April 1999 and was extended to all other urgent cases of suspected cancer during 2000. Performance data against the standard for 2001 and the first quarter of 2002 have been placed in the Library. Data for non-urgent referrals are not collected centrally.

Chernobyl

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what health studies have been carried out in the United Kingdom population on the impact of radiation, following the Chernobyl accident in April 1986. [84257]

Ms Blears: Two large European studies were commissioned in the early 1990s to study the possible health effects of Chernobyl fallout in the European childhood population. The United Kingdom population is included in these studies. The studies are known as the European Childhood Leukaemia-Lymphoma Incidence study (ECUS) and the European Childhood Abnormality Study (EUROCAS). The results produced so far show no health detriment linked to Chernobyl fallout. Results are consistent with current estimates of risk from radiation exposure. However, further work continues and more detailed results are expected in the future. The thyroid cancer research group, which made a valued contribution to the investigation of the increased incidence of thyroid cancer in children in Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation following the Chernobyl accident, is

planning a comparative study of childhood thyroid cancer between Britain, Poland and Belarus. Other much smaller studies have been drawn to our attention but the very small number of cases involved makes these studies very difficult to evaluate.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81840]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Staff who are required to drive vehicles on official business within the charging zone will be reimbursed the charge. All civil servants are responsible for payment of their own every day home to office travel costs.

Correspondence

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the hon. Member for Esher and Walton's letter of 19 June PO ref: 1016938. [83715]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent on 19 November.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the delay in commencing the World Health Organisation's large epidemiological study into thrombo-embolic disease and air travel. [85196]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Insufficient offers of funding were made to allow the full scope of the planned research to go forward (including the large prospective epidemiological study). Following a delay, as details of a new programme and the necessary contractual arrangements were worked out, contracts have now been signed and work is set to start on 1 January 2003.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* acute trusts and *(b)* PCTs have set up pooled budgets with social services departments to tackle delayed discharge. [84589]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* 16 pooled budget schemes have been notified to the Department which explicitly address the reduction of delayed discharge as a target. Of these 13 involve both acute trusts and primary care trusts (PCTs), and three involve only PCTs as partners with local authorities. None involves only acute trusts and local authorities.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health *(a)* how many people and *(b)* how long over 75s experienced delayed discharge, broken down by (i) elective and (ii) emergency admissions in each region in the last quarter of 2002–03. [84598]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Digital Television

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources he intends to devote in 2002–08 to the rollout of digital television to aid the modernisation of the NHS. [83022]

Mr. Lammy: A programme of work is to begin to develop a version of NHS Direct for digital television and to make it available nationwide. This programme will commence in 2003 with national broadcasting by 2004. Expenditure in the first few years will depend on contracts yet to be awarded but is expected to be not less than £5 million a year. Expenditure in the later years of the period will depend on the success of the earlier years and on the range of services that are demonstrated to be attractive to the public, helpful to the national health service and good value for money.

Doctor: Population Ratio

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio of doctors to people is in England. [83288]

Mr. Hutton: Figures produced by the Department currently show figures for national health service doctors only. We are working with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to determine the most reliable way to present data for all doctors, with a view to providing more representative figures for the international comparisons published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The table shows the ratio of NHS doctors to people in England.

NHS doctors: hospital, public health medicine and community health service (HCHS) medical and dental staff and general practitioners in England—at 30 September 2001

	Number
All NHS doctors[1]	100,320
Of which:	
All general medical practitioners[1,2] and	31,840
HCHS medical and dental staff[1,3]	68,480
Population[1]	49,181,340
Doctors per 100,000 population[4]	204

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
[2] All practitioners include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs, restricted principal, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (para 52 SFA), PMS other and GP retainers.
[3] Excludes hospital medical hospital practitioners and clinical assistants most of whom are GPs and will have been included already.
[4] Calculated using unrounded figures.
Note:
Population data are based on ONS 2001 census estimates.
Sources:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics. Office of National Statistics

Drug Addiction Treatment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are receiving treatment for drug addiction in the West Midlands; and how many people were receiving treatment on 30 November *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [84825]

Mr. Lammy: Information is not available in the form requested. The information available for drug users presenting to drug treatment agencies and general practitioners in the West Midlands in the six-month periods from 1 October 1998–31 March 1999 to 1 October 2000–31 March 2001 is given in the table.

Six-month period ending	*Number of users*
31 March 1999	1,741
30 September 1999	2,139
31 March 2000	2,381
30 September 2000	2,572
31 March 2001	2,655

Note:
The data are from the Department of Health series of statistical bulletins, "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases". http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/work_public_health.htm#SDD

A 'census' of drug users in treatment was carried out in 2000 to estimate the number of drug users in England in contact with drug treatment agencies in 2000–01. The number of drug users reported as being in contact with agencies in the West Midlands was 8,843. These data were published in a statistical bulletin, "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on Drug Misusers in Treatment in England, 2000–01", in December 2001. http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0133.htm

Elderly Care (Community Hospitals)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds for the elderly in community hospitals are provided in each *(a)* strategic health authority and *(b)* local authority. [84020]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected for individual hospital sites. The data are collected by national health service trust, which could incorporate more than one hospital.

Information on the number of beds by sector, including geriatric in each NHS trust, is available from the Department of Health's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity and has been placed in the Library.

Flu Immunisation

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to the answer of 25 November 2002, on flu immunisation, (ref. 83320), what the national average take-up by the over-65s of flu vaccinations was; [84897]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 25 November 2002, on flu immunisation, *Official Report*, column 135W, what percentage of over 65s in west Sussex to be immunised against flu were over 85 years old; and what percentage this represented as a whole for the county. [84898]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Nationally, the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) monitor the uptake of flu immunisations in those aged 65 years and over only. The number of those aged 85 and over receiving a flu immunisation is not available. Surrey and Sussex strategic health authority has advised me that information is also only available locally on the same 65 and over basis.

Monitoring figures from the PHLS at the end of October, show that the national average of those aged 65 and over receiving their free flu immunisation was 55 per cent.

Foreign Nurse Recruitment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual cost of running the NHS Overseas Nurses Advice Line was in the last six months. [83329]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The annual cost of the national health service overseas nurses advice line will not be available until March 2003.

Foster Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 136W, regarding recruitment of foster carers, how many people requested information packs; how many people who requested information packs subsequently became foster carers; and whether there is a shortage of foster carers. [84760]

Jacqui Smith: Over 6,000 people contacted the call centre and were sent information packs. Of these, 1,000 were converted into completed expression of interest forms. It is unclear exactly how many foster carers were recruited as a result of the campaign, as local authorities subsequently had their own campaigns, and not all those who applied will have got to final approval. The Department does not collect figures on the number of approved foster carers.

Health and Neighbourhood Renewal Guidance

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of *(a)* writing and *(b)* producing "Health and Neighbourhood Renewal: Guidance from the Department of Health and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit-2002". [84093]

Ms Blears: Development of the guidance document cost £10,000, with a further £10,995 for producing and distributing hard copies. The guidance is also available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/healthinequalities and has been placed in the Library.

Health Care (Tamworth/Sutton Coldfield)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average amount of money allocated to the health care of residents in the *(a)* Tamworth and *(b)* Sutton Coldfield constituencies was in the last 12 months. [84177]

Mr. Lammy: Primary care trusts commission health care for their populations. The primary care trusts for Tamworth and Sutton Coldfield constituencies are respectively Burntwood, Lichfield and Tamworth and North Birmingham.

Health authorities share their recurrent revenue allocations between their primary care trusts in line with guidance issued by the Department. Primary care trust shares of 2002–03 health authority recurrent revenue

allocations per head of population are £718 for Burntwood, Lichfield and Tamworth and £773 for North Birmingham.

Horton Hospital, Epsom

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Government has changed the price at which it is offering to sell land at Horton hospital in Epsom to local housing associations during the past two years. [84273]

Mr. Lammy: Horton hospital is one of five former mental hospitals in the Epsom area.

A proportion of the land from these sites will be for affordable housing. The planning permission provides that sale of the affordable housing to housing associations will be at 40 per cent. of the open market value—as land values change, the sale price for affordable housing will also change.

Hospital Hygiene

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the last hygiene spot check inspection in English hospitals took place; and if he will publish the findings. [83294]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS Plan announced that all hospitals would receive unannounced inspections of cleanliness by independent inspection teams. Since 2000 the patient environment action team (PEAT) programme has been undertaking inspections against a range of environmental criteria, including cleanliness. The PEAT visit is not a hygiene inspection.

This is a continuous programme of inspection, which has seen a massive improvement in the standards seen by patients and visitors alike. A programme of visiting to mental health and learning disabilities sites is currently under way.

The last inspection of acute and community hospitals was undertaken between February and May 2002 and the results of this exercise will be published in due course on the NHS Estates website.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what improvement has been made by hospitals which had previously been put on special measures as a result of their poor hygiene standards. [83295]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS Plan said that hospitals would receive unannounced inspections of cleanliness by independent teams.

Since autumn 2000 these inspections have been undertaken by patient environment action teams (PEATs), who assess hospitals against a range of 18 criteria, including standards of cleanliness at ward level and in common areas.

Since August 2001 PEATs have confirmed that there are no hospitals where overall standards are less than acceptable.

However, there are some hospitals where, although overall acceptable levels have been achieved, we felt that there were grounds for additional support to be provided to ensure that standards are maintained and any shortfalls identified remedied.

Following the most recent PEAT inspections, 52 hospitals were identified where such support has been deemed appropriate. NHS Estates advisers have been working closely with these hospitals, to ensure that remedial action is taken and appropriate systems put in place to ensure that the improved standards achieved are maintained.

To date this action has resulted in 24 of the hospitals being removed from the list of those requiring additional support. We continue to work with the remaining 28 hospitals to ensure that the standards in these hospitals reach and remain at levels which patients expect and have a right to receive.

Hospital Security

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to increase hospital security. [82994]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* It is the responsibility of individual national health service trusts to ensure that an appropriate security strategy is in place to provide a safe and secure environment for patients, staff and visitors in NHS hospitals. The procedures to be put in place are decided at a local level as they depend very much on the design and physical layout of individual hospital sites.

The NHS Security Manual is a practical guide to addressing the full range of security issues within health care organisations. It is currently being re-written.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has allocated funding to hospital trusts to be spent on increased security measures for staff and patients in hospitals. [83297]

Mr. Lammy: It is the responsibility of individual national health service trusts to ensure that an appropriate security strategy is in place to provide a safe and secure environment for patients, staff and visitors in NHS hospitals.

Procedures to be put in place are made at a local level, as they depend very much on the design and physical layout of the individual hospital sites. Additional funding is being made available to the NHS as part of the average annual real terms increase of 7.4 per cent., across England over the years 2003–08. Trust management will decide what funding levels will be needed to meet their security needs.

The NHS Security Manual is a practical guide to addressing the full range of security issues within health care organisations. It is currently being re-written.

Hospital, Pease Pottage

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for assessing the proposal to build a new hospital at Pease Pottage. [84134]

Ms Blears: The appraisal of this option is still continuing. At this time I cannot give the right hon. Member a firm date for completion of this process.

Hospitals (Hotel Charges)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list hospitals which charge for *(a)* television services, *(b)* telephone access and *(c)* internet access. [83345]

Mr. Lammy: Major acute hospitals are introducing bedside television and telephones (Patient Power) under the NHS Plan. The introduction of these services is free to national health service trusts. Patients pay a charge for the services. 61 hospitals now have an operational patient power system and of these seven currently have internet access. The following list shows these hospitals.

Addenbrooke's Hospital
Basildon Hospital
Bishop Auckland General Hospital
Broadgreen Hospital
Broomfield Hospital
Buckland Hospital
Cheltenham General Hospital
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital
Christie Hospital
Churchill Hospital
Cumberland Infirmary
Darlington Memorial Hospital
Eastbourne District General Hospital
Epsom General Hospital
Fairfield General Hospital
Frimley Park Hospital
Good Hope Hospital
Homerton Hospital
Horton General Hospital
Hull Royal Infirmary
John Radcliffe Hospital
Kent and Canterbury Hospital
Kingston Hospital
Leicester Royal Infirmary
Luton and Dunstable Hospital
Mayday University Hospital
Norfolk and Norwich Hospital
North Tyneside General Hospital
Northwick Park Hospital
Poole General Hospital
Princess Anne Hospital
Queen Alexandra Hospital (Redditch)
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother Hospital
Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospital
Rotherham District General Hospital
Royal Bolton Hospital
Royal Bournemouth Hospital
Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital (Wonford)
Royal Free Hospital
Royal Hampshire County Hospital
Royal Liverpool University Hospital
Royal Marsden Hospital (Site 2—Fulham Road)
Royal Surrey County Hospital
Salisbury District Hospital
Southampton General Hospital
Southport and Formby District General Hospital
St. Helier Hospital
St. James University Hospital
Staffordshire General Hospital
The Alexandra Hospital
The City Hospital
The Royal Oldham Hospital
University Hospital Aintree
University Hospital of North Durham (formerly Dryburn Hospital)
Victoria Hospital —Blackpool
Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery
William Harvey Hospital
Worcester Royal Infirmary (Ronkswood)
Wycombe General Hospital
Wythenshawe Hospital

Note:
Hospitals in italic provide internet access.

International Recruitment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which developing countries have offered warm support, as stated by a Department of Health spokesman on 26 November, for the Government's approach to ethical international recruitment. [84891]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The following developing countries have offered their support for the Government's approach to ethical international recruitment:

Barbados
China
Egypt
Georgia
India
Indonesia
Iran
Jamaica
Philippines
South Africa.

Liverpool Blood Centre

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work of the Liverpool Blood Centre. [84032]

Ms Blears: In 1999, the Government made a commitment to develop and expand the Liverpool Blood Centre. A new building to house the Liverpool Blood Centre is currently under construction. The centre at Estuary Commerce Park in Speke, Garston will replace the existing premises adjacent to the Royal Liverpool University Hospital. Completion of the construction phase is expected by mid-October 2003, and occupation is anticipated in summer 2004.

Almost all services currently carried out at the existing premises will transfer to the new centre. Those services that have to be carried out in a hospital environment will remain at the Royal Liverpool Hospital. The new Liverpool Blood Centre will also house, for the first time, the largest National Blood

Service tissue banking facility in the United Kingdom. Research and development facilities at the new centre will support both tissue banking and tissue engineering.

Mental Health

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards implementing NICE guidance on the use of atypical anti-psychotic medicines for schizophrenia; and if he will make a statement. [83807]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, (Tim Loughton) on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 356W.

Mixed Wards (Epsom Hospital)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for the complete phasing out of mixed wards at Epsom Hospital. [84272]

Mr. Hutton: Epsom and St. Helier is working towards the elimination of mixed sex wards in order to provide patients with appropriate levels of privacy and dignity while in hospital. The trust is currently undertaking works to refurbish Nightingale wards for older people, which will provide privacy and peace within a single-sex environment. The trust's programme of works extends until April 2004.

Mumps Vaccines

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is his policy that the Medicines Control Agency should limit the maximum number of authorisations for imports of MMR SepVax (Mumps) doses; what the equivalent is in daily individual doses of the number of authorisations of MMR SepVax (Mumps) vaccines which the MCA is approving; and if he will make a statement on *(a)* the availability of MMR SepVax (Mumps) in relation to demand for vaccination and *(b)* the delays which customers are experiencing in obtaining supplies of MMR SepVax (Mumps) vaccines. [82704]

Ms Blears: Single mumps vaccines being prescribed and administered, as part of single measles, mumps and rubella vaccination programmes such as MMR SepVax, are unlicensed imported medicines. Medicines legislation allows a doctor or dentist to prescribe an unlicensed medicine to meet the special clinical needs of his individual patients, on his direct personal responsibility. Importers of all unlicensed medicines, who are licensed by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA), must notify the agency on each occasion they intend importing an unlicensed medicine and there is a legal restriction on the maximum quantity they may import per notification. The MCA can object to importation if it has safety concerns or if an equivalent licensed medicine is available. This applies to all imported unlicensed medicines; there is no policy of specifically restricting unlicensed single measles and mumps vaccines.

The average numbers of notifications per month received by the MCA to import all brands of single mumps vaccine during the last three years were as follows.

Year	*Doses*
2000	69
2001	1,483
2002	3,014

These are the numbers of doses notified to the MCA for importation and do not necessarily relate to the number of doses actually imported.

The current shortage of unlicensed single mumps vaccine and delays in their reaching patients are believed to be due to:

An international shortage of single mumps vaccine, resulting from the halting of production by a major supplier, combined with;

Safety concerns about vaccines containing the Urabe and Leningrad-Zagreb strains of mumps virus;

Efficacy concerns about vaccines containing the Rubini strain of mumps virus;

The recent need to obtain further information on the safety and efficacy of another unlicensed single vaccine claiming to contain a Jeryl Lynn strain of mumps virus.

NHS Clinical Compliance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to monitor NHS clinical compliance with NICE recommendations. [82922]

Mr. Lammy: It is not feasible to monitor centrally every clinical decision for consistency with National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance. Clinicians have to make independent clinical judgments, taking due account of NICE'S advice and the strength of evidence which lies behind it. They may depart from the advice if in their view the circumstances of the individual patient justify doing so, but they will be held accountable (through clinical governance arrangements) for their clinical decisions.

NHS Dentists

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio was of NHS general dental practitioners to population; and how many NHS general dental practitioners there were in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in each year since 1 January 1996. [85135]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The number of general dental service (GDS) practitioners in Buckinghamshire health authority (HA) area at 30 September and the ratio of GDS practitioners per 100,000 population is shown in the table for the years 1996 to 2001.

The number of GDS dentists and ratio of dentists per population in Chesham and Amersham are not centrally available.

The total number of GDS dentists covers principals on a HA list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

General dental services: Number[1] of GDS dentists at 30 September and ratio of GDS practitioners per 100,000 population[2], 1996 to 2001—Buckinghamshire health authority

	Number of dentists	
Year	*At 30 September*	*Per 100,000 population*
1996	238	35.4
1997	265	39.1
1998	260	38.1
1999	281	40.8
2000	272	39.3
2001	294	42.8

[1] Dentists are principals on a HA list, assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

[2] ONS 1996 to 2000 mid year population estimates based on the 1991 census. ONS 2001 mid year population estimate is based on 2001 census; using a population estimate based on 1991 census would change the 2001 dentists per 100,000 population figure to 42.0.

NHS Estate

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the aggregated results of the Estate Return Information Collection annual condition survey for 2000–01 and 2001–02; for what reason publication has been delayed; and if he will publish results of future ERIC surveys within six months of the survey's completion. [83800]

Mr. Lammy: Since 2000, estate return information collection (ERIC) data can be entered on line, which provides trusts with 'real time' calculations of their performance indicator information together with comparative benchmarking data from trusts of the same type.

A detailed analysis of performance data extracted from the ERIC is currently being undertaken with the view to publishing a hard copy report next year that will cover the three year period, 1999–2000 to 2001–02.

NHS Land

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the value of land with development potential held by the NHS, broken down *(a)* by NHS trust and *(b)* by strategic health authority region. [82971]

Mr. Lammy: No such assessment has been centrally made.

National health service trusts are responsible for the management and disposal of their estate. In preparing their estate strategies, NHS trusts will have regard to the current and future operational needs and will consider potential value for alternative uses.

The spending review identifies the following receipts by NHS trusts from the sale of surplus land and buildings.

£ million

Year	*Receipts*
2002–03	55
2003–04	158

NHS Special Trustees

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what requirement there is on the special trustees of each of the London teaching hospitals to consider the health needs of *(a)* London as a whole and *(b)* the area of London the hospital services, when making decisions as to the use of assets and income under their control; [83130]

(2) if he will introduce an equalisation scheme for the use of assets and income held by NHS special trustees; [83129]

(3) if he will reform the system of special trustees operating in NHS hospitals to increase accountability for decisions on spending; and if he will make a statement; [83128]

(4) if he will list the special trustees for each of the London *(a)* non-teaching NHS acute trusts and *(b)* teaching hospitals; how they are accountable for decisions; how they are appointed; what total value of *(i)* capital investments, (ii) other capital assets, and (iii) income they supervise; what projects over £100,000 they have financed in each of the last three years; what projects they intend to fund over £100,000 in the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [83127]

Mr. Lammy: Special trustees hold and administer charity funds in accordance with trust and charity law, which requires them to comply with the trusts on which they are held. They are regulated in England and Wales by the Charity Commission and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health quite properly does not have powers to amend these trusts. Decisions about how funds are to be applied rest with the trustees, who are accountable to the Charity Commission. Special trustees are only able to hold funds mainly or wholly for the hospitals for which they are appointed.

NHS Trusts (Deficits)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts ran financial deficits; and what the aggregate amount of the deficits was, in financial year 2001–02. [84591]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* 50 national health services trusts reported an income and expenditure account deficit in their 2001–02 annual accounts. These 50 deficits aggregate to £69,328,000.

NICE

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what criteria members of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence's Citizens' Council are selected; and how many members of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence's Citizens' Council are over *(a)* 60, *(b)* 70 and *(c)* 75 years. [83716]

Mr. Lammy: The recruitment to the citizens' council was carried out by an independent specialist company. This company advertised for applicants, then used a combination of random selection and telephone interviews, while also ensuring that the final council is

representative of all age groups, social circumstances, ethnic backgrounds, regional differences and abilities in order to provide a cross section of opinion.

Six members of the citizens council are aged over 60 years, one is aged over 70 years and one is over 75 years.

Operating Theatres

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which was the first primary care based accredited operating theatre in the country. [83566]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not held or collected centrally.

Organ Donation

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to promote voluntary organ donations and the carrying of donor cards. [84173]

Mr. Lammy: We are taking specific action to increase the number of donors available by investing in initiatives to raise public awareness and the benefits of organ transplantation, particularly in the ethnic populations where there may be a greater need for transplantation, implementing measures to ensure that potential donors are identified and that we increase the use of both living and non-heartbeating donation.

Nearly £4 million is being invested in the national health service through UK Transplant to boost the number of life-saving organ transplants. This is funding 35 donor liaison schemes to improve procedures for identifying possible organ donors and the steps to take, so that relatives are approached and given the opportunity to decide about donation. It is also supporting 25 living donation programmes, 10 additional transplant coordinators and six non-heartbeating donor programmes.

Overseas Nurses Advice Line

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dedicated teams of staff with health careers expertise are working on the NHS overseas nurses advice line. [84896]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* There is a dedicated team of staff with health careers expertise who are able to offer advice on supervised practice and national health service careers to nurses who ring the NHS overseas nurses advice line.

Oviedo Convention

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on signing the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Biomedicine (Oviedo Convention). [84612]

Ms Blears: The Convention covers a wide range of complex ethical and legal issues, many of which have been, and remain, actively under debate in the United Kingdom over recent years. The Government wish to consider the conclusions of these debates before reaching a final view on signature and ratification of the Convention.

Pain Management

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent measures he has taken to ensure that local prescribing guidelines are in place governing the prescription of powerful pain relieving and sedative medicines throughout the NHS. [80115]

Mr. Lammy: Following the devolution of power to locally-run services, it is the role of primary care trusts (PCTs) to develop such local prescribing guidelines to suit their needs in conjunction with appropriate local clinicians. Local treatment guidelines, including those for powerful pain relieving and sedative medicines, should be in place and overseen by local drug and therapeutics committees.

We are supporting good local prescribing in a number of ways. The systems for clinical and cost effective use of medicines are covered by the Department's medicines management performance management framework. This framework focuses on secondary care and has been developed recently to strengthen working links with PCTs. We have also commissioned the National Prescribing Centre to produce guidance on good practice in managing controlled drug issues in primary care in the national health service. It is hoped to publish the guide in spring 2003. In addition, we are developing a guide, for use by PCTs and out-of-hours primary care providers, which will contain a minimum list of drugs that patients should be able to access from all such providers during evenings, weekends and bank holidays.

Perioperative Deaths

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the finding by the National Confidential Inquiry into Perioperative Deaths on the impact on patient care in the NHS the availability and maintenance of medical records; and what measures he plans to take to address this issue. [83454]

Mr. Lammy: The Department is aware of problems with paper based medical records including their lack of availability, legibility, difficulty in finding particular items of information, limited life-span and general lack of structure in them.

The answer to these problems and others concerning the use of this type of record is to replace them with electronic ones.

The delivery of electronic records is now being taken forward as part of the integrated care record service (ICRS), in implementing the national strategic programme, "Delivering 21st Century IT Support for the NHS".

Prescriptions (Anti-malarial Drugs)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued for anti-malarial drugs in the UK in 2001; and how many were NHS prescriptions. [85154]

Mr. Lammy: In 2001, 2,419,400 national health service prescriptions for anti-malarial drugs were dispensed in the community in England. We do not hold information on hospital or private prescriptions, or for the other United Kingdom administrations.

Public Health Laboratories

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of how the outputs of Public Health Laboratory Service Groups of laboratories will be sustained from April 2003. [84252]

Ms Blears: I expect the outputs of those public health laboratory service laboratories that are transferring to national health service trusts to be sustained at the present level. They are being transferred with the resources necessary to maintain their outputs and the new posts of regional public health microbiologists will be positioned to facilitate their public health output.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what cost-benefit analysis has been carried out by his Department into laboratory transfers from the *(a)* Public Health Laboratory Service, *(b)* National Radiological Protection Board, *(c)* Centre for Applied Microbiology Research and *(d)* National Focus for Chemical Incidents to a Health Protection Agency. [84251]

Ms Blears: The bodies listed are all to be subsumed into the proposed Health Protection Agency in their entirety, after the public health laboratory service (PHLS) has transferred to national health service trusts some 30 of its laboratories that carry out general clinical diagnostic microbiology. These are the only laboratory transfers involved in creating the proposed Health Protection Agency.

The benefits of transferring laboratories of the PHLS to NHS trusts include:

They are essential to create a comprehensive, coherent surveillance system, as described in the Chief Medical Officer's strategy "Getting Ahead of the Curve".

They will broaden the number of clinical staff required to report the occurrence of infectious diseases.

They will place a duty of care on all microbiology laboratories to report for public health surveillance purposes.

Generally, the transfers will bring public health activities within the mainstream of the NHS.

The creation of the Health Protection Agency is to be carried out at no overall cost.

Readmissions

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients have been re-admitted to hospital within two months of their discharge, in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [84232]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Restaurant Menus

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received requesting legislation to require restaurants to list the calorie content of food and drink on the menus. [84181]

Ms Blears: None, and neither the Government nor the Food Standards Agency has any plans to introduce legislation requiring the calorie content of food and drink to be given on menus.

Social Service Care

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* children, *(b)* older people, *(c)* people aged 16–59 years with learning difficulties and *(d)* others, received social service care in (i) Northumberland, (ii) North Yorkshire, (iii) Cumbria, (iv) Herefordshire, *(v)* Shropshire, (vi) Rutland, (vii) Devon, (viii) Lincolnshire, (ix) East Riding of Yorkshire, *(x)* Wiltshire, (xi) Wandsworth, (xii) Southwark, (xiii) Camden, (xiv) Tower Hamlets, (xv) Hackney, (xvi) Lambeth, (xvii) Hammersmith and Fulham, (xviii) Westminster, (xix) Islington and (xx) Kensington and Chelsea, in 2001–02. [84160]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The latest data for children can be found in the table B of the publication Children in Need in England: Results of a survey of activity and expenditure as reported by Local Authority Social Services' Children and Families Teams for a survey week in September/October 2001: Local Authority Tables', a copy of which will be placed in the Library. This publication is available on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/cin/cin2001.htm.

Local authority information for adults is available by client group for the age groups 18–64 and 65 or over from table P1.1 of the "Community Care Statistics 2000–01: Referrals, Assessments and Packages of Care (RAP) for adults". This publication is available on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/comcare2001/ccstats2001.htm. This omits authorities which did not provide information for the 2000–01 RAP census. National data for 2001–02 will be published in 2003.

Suicide

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths from suicide were recorded of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [84971]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Evan Harris, dated 4 December 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many deaths were recorded of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses, in each of the last ten years for which figures are available. (84971)

Figures requested for each year from 1992 to 2001 are given in the table below. Occupations are coded by ONS using the Standard Occupational Classification. For deaths to 2000, the version first published in 1990 (SOC 90) was used. A revised and updated classification, SOC 2000, was used to code deaths for 2001 and is in current use. Figures for 2001 are therefore not comparable with those for earlier years.

Number of deaths from suicide and injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted[1], for doctors and nurses[2], England and Wales, 1992 to 2001[3]

Year	Doctors	Nurses
1992	18	56
1993	18	52
1994	25	64
1995	13	61
1996	13	54
1997	16	55
1998	17	56
1999	17	56
2000	22	74
2001	21	37

[1] Cause of death defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes E950-E959 and E980-E989 excluding E988.8 for the years 1992 to 2000, and, for the year 2001, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes X60-X84 and Y10-Y34 excluding Y33.9 where the Coroner's verdict was pending.

[2] Last gainful occupation of the deceased for persons aged 16 to 74. For years 1992 to 2000 occupations defined using SOC 90 classification codes 220 (medical practitioners) and 340 (nurses). For 2001 occupations defined using SOC 2000 classification codes 2211 (medical practitioners) and 3211 (nurses).

[3] Figures are for deaths registered in 1992 and for deaths occurring in each calendar year from 1993 to 2001.

Sustainable Development

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and if he will make a statement on how it has changed since the world Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [83501]

Mr. Lammy: The Department contributes fully to the Government's sustainable development strategy and its policies are an integral part of, and fully compatible with, the aims of sustainable development.

The Department's stated overall purpose is to contribute to the Government's objectives of building a fair, inclusive and economically thriving society which includes improving and protecting the health and social well being of the people of England.

We are currently reviewing our existing sustainable development strategy and will be consulting the sustainable development commission as part of this process. In revising our strategy we will have regard to the discussions at the world summit on sustainable development (WSSD). We have recently published a new Department of Health sustainable development web page, which refers to the important outcomes of WSSD, at www.doh.qov.uk/sustainabledevelopment/index.htm.

Voluntary Organisations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which voluntary organisations and charities he and his departmental Ministers expect to meet during December, and what issues they expect to discuss. [84038]

Mr. Lammy: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis. As with previous Administrations, it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Walsgrave Hospital

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were on waiting lists at Walsgrave Hospital in each month over the last three years. [84828]

Mr. Lammy: The information on in-patient day case waiting lists at the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust is shown in the table.

In-patient/day case waiting list at month end

	Number
1999–2000	
April 1999	6,988
May 1999	7,155
June 1999	7,535
July 1999	7,533
August 1999	7,600
September 1999	7,685
October 1999	7,609
November 1999	7,363
December 1999	7,405
January 2000	7,343
February 2000	6,470
March 2000	6,099
2000–01	
April 2000	5,834
May 2000	5,969
June 2000	6,100
July 2000	6,030
August 2000	5,729
September 2000	5,648
October 2000	5,676
November 2000	5,956
December 2000	6,070
January 2001	6,442
February 2001	6,287
March 2001	5,943
2001–02	
April 2001	6,358
May 2001	6,525
June 2001	6,651
July 2001	6,374
August 2001	6,498
September 2001	6,414
October 2001	6,533
November 2001	6,700
December 2001	6,729
January 2002	7,261
February 2002	7,242
March 2002	7,067

In-patient/day case waiting list at month end

	Number
2002–03	
April 2002	7,150
May 2002	7,357
June 2002	7,408
July 2002	7,623
August 2002	7,775
September 2002	7,846
October 2002	9,114

Source:

Trust KH07ms Monthly Waiting List Returns

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of operations were cancelled shortly before they were due to be performed in the Walsgrave Hospital in the last year for which figures are available; and how many of these cancellations were due to a lack of beds. [84829]

Mr. Lammy: The number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons at the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire National Health Service Trust in the quarter to June 2002 was 133. As a proportion of activity, finished first consultant episodes, this was 1.5 per cent.

Information on the reasons for these non-clinical cancellations is not available.

Source:

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants were employed at Walsgrave Hospital in each of the last three years. [84830]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is shown in the table.

Consultants in University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, 1999–2002

	Consultants
1999	162
2000	168
2001	185
2002	195

Note:

Data as at 30 September each year.

Source:

Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the consultants at Walsgrave Hospital have in the last 12 months been appointed. [84946]

Mr. Lammy: Since 1 April 2002, nine consultants have been appointed to the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire National Health Service Trust—six as replacements and three in newly created posts.

Source:

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust

CABINET OFFICE

E-Envoy

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many consultants were used and employed by the e-Envoy in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and what they cost in each year. [85067]

Mr. Alexander: The Office of the e-Envoy's expenditure on consultancy projects was £5,046,618 in 1999–2000, £3,543,147 in 2000–01 and £4,602,142 in 2001–02. No information is available on the number of staff employed by the consulting firms in delivering these projects.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Take-up

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the report of the National Audit Office on the failure of pensioners to claim their entitled benefits. [83663]

Mr. McCartney: The National Audit Office report entitled "Tackling pensioner poverty: Encouraging take-up of entitlements", recognises the good progress the Department has made in helping pensioners to take up their entitlements. The Government are committed to tackling pensioner poverty.

We have already made substantial progress in taking forward the NAO recommendations, and welcome the contribution the NAO have made to informing the on-going development of take-up strategies and the Pension Service more generally. Our strategies focus on overcoming the barriers to take up and one of our key mechanisms for driving take up is the Pension Service, a new customer focused organisation dedicated to the needs of pensioners. This provides a major opportunity to further enhance the quality of our customer service by actively promoting take up. In addition to processing pension entitlements, staff will be trained to identify possible entitlement to other benefits such as housing benefit and attendance allowance. Local service staff in particular will have a significant role in encouraging take up in local communities, and work in partnership with organisations that deal with older people, as the NAO proposes.

We have introduced a range of initiatives designed to encourage take up activity among pensioners: for the minimum income guarantee (MIG) we have undertaken a national advertising campaign, which resulted in almost an additional 140,000 claims with an average gain of £20 per week; reduced the claim form from 40 to 10 pages; introduced a MIG specific leaflet, and we are identifying potential beneficiaries through key events, such as claiming retirement pension.

A key priority, for both Government and the Pension Service is the successful take up of the new pension credit which will enhance and replace the MIG. It has been specifically designed to be easy for pensioners to claim and to be less intrusive. The weekly means test will be abolished for the over 65s and be replaced by a

statement of their circumstances every five years. Capital rules will be relaxed and the upper capital limit abolished.

In addition we have taken this opportunity to align the eligibility rules for housing benefit and council tax benefit with pension credit. DWP staff can now verify information on behalf of the local authority and we will be introducing legislation shortly that will enable local authority staff to do the same for DWP. This means pensioners will in time only need to report their changes in circumstances to one organisation (unless tenancy or dependant related). We are also removing the need for pensioners to re-claim housing benefit every 12 months. We will cut out duplicate claim forms so from April 2003, it will be necessary to complete just one housing and council tax benefit form. These changes are a significant step to simplifying the process and we are examining the scope for introducing further simplifications over the next few years.

Our take up plan for pension credit is extensive and makes use of a range of channels. We will transfer existing MIG recipients to pension credit, ready for payments to be made from October 2003; write to all pensioners not already receiving MIG by June 2004 to alert them to possible pension credit entitlement, supported by a national publicity campaign; work with local partners to help support the communications to pensioners, and tailor marketing and communications activity accordingly. We are setting a demanding PSA target to be paying pension credit to at least 3 million pensioner households by 2006.

With attendance allowance and disability living allowance (AA/DLA), we are trialling new claim forms to significantly improve the way claims are made. Both claim forms were reduced from 44 pages to 34 in 2001 and we are currently trialling a shorter attendance allowance 16 page form. We are also developing a new claiming process for DLA for working age customers. First tests of the new claim pack started on 26 November. The claim form will be personalised and be the minimum size necessary for that individual's needs. If successful this approach will be extended to pensioners.

We have accepted the NAO's recommendations for making further progress. This demonstrates the importance that the Department attaches to tackling pensioner poverty.

Adult Disadvantage

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will re-calculate the figures in the table in the answer of 27 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1050W, assuming *(a)* that the fund remains in equities until the annuity is purchased and including also figures assuming retirement on 31 December 2001 and 30 September 2002, *(b)* retirement on (i) 31 December 2001 and (ii) 30 September 2002 and *(c)* that the fund remains in equities until five years before the annuity is purchased when half is satisfied into gilts and the remainder remains in equities until retirement, including figures assuming retirement on 31 December 2001 and 30 September 2002. [83135]

Mr. McCartney: The available information, is in the tables. Table 2, includes the data underlying the graph on page 19 of 'Modernising Annuities' published by Inland Revenue and the Department for Work and Pensions in February 2001.

It is not possible to provide information, where the date of retirement is after December 2001. This is due to data and model restrictions.

Although a stylised model, it is the data in the second table that we believe best characterises the investment strategy of many pension funds.

Investors will also be interested in expected pension income throughout their retirement and not just the income in the first year. The information does not give an indication of how this first figure may have increased for successive cohorts of pensioners due to increased life expectancy.

The following assumptions have been made.

A person contributes to a pension fund for 31 years;

Contributions are made at 10 per cent. of gross earnings;

Earnings in each year are £20,000 in 2000 earnings terms. The earnings growth index was supplied by the Office for National Statistics;

50 per cent. of each year's contributions are made at the start of each year and 50 per cent. at the end of each year;

The return on equities is in line with the FTSE 30. The same figures were used as PQ61084 to enable consistency with that answer;

The return on gilts is in line with the Barclays Capital Total Return Index. The same figures were used as PQ61084 to enable consistency with that answer;

A 1 per cent. fee is deducted at the end of each year

Upon retirement on 31 December of the given year, an annuity is purchased at the prevailing rate in that year, and as indicated in the tables. The source of this Annuity Direct.

Table 1—pension entitlement assuming the fund remains in equities in all years

Year started contributing	*Retire at end of year*	*Years of contribution*	*Lump sum built up (cash terms) (£)*	*Lump sum in 2000 earnings terms (£)*	*Annuity rate in last year of contribution (percentage)*	*Pension at retirement (nominal terms, weekly) (£)*	*Pension at retirement (2001 earnings terms, weekly) (£)*
1956	1986	31	17,681	38,694	14.1	48	105
1957	1987	31	21,066	42,786	14.0	57	115
1958	1988	31	23,845	44,503	13.7	63	117
1959	1989	31	25,578	43,792	14.0	69	118
1960	1990	31	27,866	43,460	15.2	82	127
1961	1991	31	34,243	49,608	14.6	96	139
1962	1992	31	41,169	56,297	13.2	105	143
1963	1993	31	53,666	71,268	11.7	121	161
1964	1994	31	47,497	60,865	11.6	106	135
1965	1995	31	57,034	70,893	11.3	124	154
1966	1996	31	60,718	72,850	11.0	129	154

Table 1—pension entitlement assuming the fund remains in equities in all years

Year started contributing	Retire at end of year	Years of contribution	Lump sum built up (cash terms) (£)	Lump sum in 2000 earnings terms (£)	Annuity rate in last year of contribution (percentage)	Pension at retirement (nominal terms, weekly) (£)	Pension at retirement (2001 earnings terms, weekly) (£)
1967	1997	31	71,040	81,762	10.4	141	163
1968	1998	31	85,598	93,743	9.4	155	169
1969	1999	31	80,168	83,738	8.9	138	144
1970	2000	31	85,438	85,438	9.1	149	149
1971	2001	31	83,928	80,340	8.9	143	137

Table 2—pension entitlement assuming the fund switches from equities to gilts over the last 10years of growth. An extra 10 per cent. is invested in gilts in each successive year

Year started contributing	Retire at end of year	Years of contribution	Lump sum built up (cash terms) (£)	Lump sum in 2000 earnings terms (£)	Annuity rate in last year of contribution (percentage)	Pension at retirement (nominal terms, weekly) (£)	Pension at retirement (2001 earnings terms, weekly) (£)
1956	1986	31	19,209	42,037	14.1	52	114
1957	1987	31	20,987	42,625	14.0	56	115
1958	1988	31	21,803	40,693	13.7	57	107
1959	1989	31	26,910	46,074	14.0	72	124
1960	1990	31	28,666	44,707	15.2	84	131
1961	1991	31	35,404	51,291	14.6	99	144
1962	1992	31	40,730	55,695	13.2	104	142
1963	1993	31	46,840	62,203	11.7	106	140
1964	1994	31	49,102	62,921	11.6	109	140
1965	1995	31	53,289	66,238	11.3	116	144
1966	1996	31	56,810	68,161	11.0	120	145
1967	1997	31	61,245	70,488	10.4	122	140
1968	1998	31	71,329	78,116	9.4	129	141
1969	1999	31	79,658	83,206	8.9	137	143
1970	2000	31	75,946	75,946	9.1	133	133
1971	2001	31	72,927	69,810	8.9	124	119

Table 3—pension entitlement assuming that 50 per cent. of the fund is invested in gilts in each of the last five years of growth

Year started contributing	Retire at end of year	Years of contribution	Lump sum built up (cash terms) (£)	Lump sum in 2000 earnings terms (£)	Annuity rate in last year of contribution (percentage)	Pension at retirement (nominal terms, weekly) (£)	Pension at retirement (2001 earnings terms, weekly) (£)
1956	1986	31	20,109	44,007	14.1	54	119
1957	1987	31	25,475	51,741	14.0	68	139
1958	1988	31	23,487	43,835	13.7	62	116
1959	1989	31	29,432	50,391	14.0	79	136
1960	1990	31	29,460	45,946	15.2	86	135
1961	1991	31	33,095	47,946	14.6	93	135
1962	1992	31	34,374	47,005	13.2	87	120
1963	1993	31	41,056	54,521	11.7	92	123
1964	1994	31	44,523	57,054	11.6	99	127
1965	1995	31	46,351	57,614	11.3	101	126
1966	1996	31	52,045	62,444	11.0	110	132
1967	1997	31	57,518	66,199	10.4	114	132
1968	1998	31	67,337	73,745	9.4	122	133
1969	1999	31	74,250	77,556	8.9	128	133
1970	2000	31	69,928	69,928	9.1	122	122
1971	2001	31	61,342	58,720	8.9	105	100

Belgium (Employment)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of impediments to employment faced by British workers in Belgium. [84575]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* We are not aware of any specific impediments which face British workers in Belgium. The UK embassy produces information materials for UK nationals working in Belgium.

Employers' Liability Insurance

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will hold an inquiry into the operation of employers' liability insurance; and if he will make a statement. [82829]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his statement on the pre-Budget report on 27 November that, in response to concerns about rising insurance costs, the Department

for Work and Pensions will lead a formal review of the operation of employers' liability insurance.

Switzerland (Employment)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of the freedom of establishment treaty between Switzerland and the EU on employment opportunities for British workers in Switzerland; [84577]

(2) what assessment he has made of the barriers to employment faced by UK workers in Switzerland. [84578]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The freedom of movement and employment of UK workers in Switzerland is governed by an agreement between the European Community and its member states, and the Swiss Confederation which came into force on 1 June 2002, with final implementation in 2007.

The agreement accords UK workers a right of entry, residence and access to work as employed persons or the right to establish themselves on a self-employed basis.

Given the short period of time since it came into force, no assessment has been made of the effect of the agreement.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 5 December 2002

CABINET OFFICE

Advisory Committees

Keith Vaz: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office who is on the *(a)* advisory committees on justices of the peace in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside, *(b)* Better Regulation Task Force and *(c)* Civil Service Appeals Board. [85055]

Mr. Alexander: Including sub-committees, there are 17 advisory Committees on justices of the peace in total in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside. Copies of membership have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Details of the current membership of the Better Regulation Task Force (BRTF) is listed:

David Arculus (Chair)
Michael Gibbons
Kevin Hawkins
Sukhvinder Stubbs
Tim Sweeney
Rex Symons CBE
Barbara Thomas
Matti Alderson
Stephen Falder
Teresa Graham OBE
Deirdre Hutton CBE
Simon Petch
Dr. Ian Peters
Dr. Penelope Rowlatt
Janet Russell
Simon Ward

Details of the membership of the Civil Service Appeals Board (CSAB) as at 31 March this year are set out as follows and can be found in the CSAB's Annual Report.

The members of the Civil Service Appeals Board (CSAB) are:

Chairman
J. H. Davies
Deputies
M. E. G Fogden CB (ES) (OS)
J. Sheldon (PCS) (SS)
Official Side Members
G. Bertram CB (DSS)
Ms S. Brown (DTI)
J. F. Carling (IR)
P. S. Draper CB (PSA)
E. McGivern CB (IR)
D. W. Rayson (HMT)
G. L. Reid CB (DfEE)
A. Turner CBE (MOD)
J. Turner CB (ES)
I. Ward (Prison Service)
Trade Union Side Members
Mrs. C. Alderson (PCS)
A. J. Audley (IPMS)
Mrs. L. J. Clare (FDA)
Mrs. P. Cryer (PTC)
D. Evans (POA)
Mrs. D. Hall (NUCPS)
P. J. Kelly (PCS)
T. Thomson (PCS)
F. Winrow (IRSF)

Departmental Budgets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the total budgets are of *(a)* the Social Inclusion Unit, *(b)* the Charter Mark and Beacon Unit, *(c)* Office of Public Services Reform, *(d)* Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, *(e)* Public Service Team, *(f)* Performance and Innovation Unit, *(g)* Centre for Performance and Management Studies, *(h)* No. 10 Policy Directorate, *(i)* Government Information and Communication Service, *(j)* Economic and Domestic Secretariat, *(k)* Intelligence and Security Secretariat, *(l)* Civil Contingencies Secretariat, *(m)* Ceremonial Secretariat, *(n)* Central Secretariat, *(o)* Chief Scientific Adviser, *(p)* European Secretariat, *(q)* Defence and Overseas Secretariat, *(r)* Regulatory Impact Unit, *(s)* Central Policy Group, *(t)* Communication Group, *(u)* Corporate Services, *(v)* Women and Equality Unit and *(w)* Equality Secretariat, for (i) 2002–03, (ii) 2003–04 and (iii) 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [84150]

Mr. Alexander: 2002–03 Resource Budgets for the units shown above are as follows:

Unit	*Resource budget (£ million)*
Office of Public Services Reform (including the Charter Mark and Beacon Scheme)	5.2
Prime Minister's Delivery Unit	3.8
Strategy Unit (formerly the Performance and Innovation Unit)	6.5
No. 10 Policy Directorate	2.0
Government Information and Communication Service	4.0
Economic and Domestic Secretariat	1.3
Intelligence and Security Secretariat	6.0
Civil Contingencies Secretariat	6.8
Ceremonial Secretariat	0.4
Central Secretariat	3.4
Defence and Overseas Secretariat	2.1
Regulatory Impact Unit	3.1
Communication Group	2.3
Corporate Services Group	47.8
Centre for Management and Policy Studies	2.3

Notes:

1. The Social Exclusion Unit, Central Policy Group, Women and Equality Unit and Equality Secretariat are now part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

2. The Public Service Team and Chief Scientific Adviser are not part of the Cabinet Office.

3. Budgets for 2003–04 and 2004–05 will be finalised following completion of the Cabinet Office's business planning round which is being carried out between now and March 2003.

E-Envoy

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the *(a)* remuneration package and *(b)* grade is of (i) the e-Envoy and (ii) his deputy. [85064]

Mr. Alexander: The e-Envoy, Mr. Andrew Pinder, is employed in SCS Pay Band 3, for which the current salary range is £87,125 to £184,500; he is eligible to receive non-consolidated bonus awards based on performance throughout the year. He is also a member of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme to which the employer and employee both contribute.

His deputy, the Chief Operating Officer of the Office of the e-Envoy, Mr. Christopher Parker, is employed in SCS Pay Band 2, for which the current salary range is £70,725 to £148,625; he is eligible to receive non-consolidated bonus awards based on performance throughout the year. He is also a member of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme to which the employer and employee both contribute.

Sir David Omand

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office to whom Sir David Omand reports. [85422]

Mr. Alexander: Sir David Omand reports to the Prime Minister through the Secretary of the Cabinet. As Security and Intelligence Co-Ordinator he is the senior official responsible for the co-ordination of activity across Government in relation to counter-terrorism and civil contingency preparations on which he directly supports the Home Secretary as chair of the relevant Cabinet Committees. As Accounting Officer for the Cabinet Office, Sir David supports the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many officials, and at what levels and for what proportion of their time are working to Sir David Omand. [85423]

Mr. Alexander: As at 2 December 2002, there were 37 Senior Civil Servants and 724 other staff working in Cabinet Office units that report directly to Sir David Omand. All figures are rounded to full time equivalents.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Museums, Libraries and Archives

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the performance of the national strategic body for museums, libraries and archives; and if she will make a statement. [83759]

Dr. Howells: Since its establishment in April 2000, Resource, The Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives has developed closer links between each of the sectors through the creation of regional agencies, and has published a vision for regional museums which has attracted £70 million central Government funding. It has managed the implementation of the People's Network ICT infrastructure in public libraries, which attracted £120 million Lottery funding. It has worked closely with my Department to develop a strategy for the public library service to be published soon and has set up an archives task force.

DEFENCE

Accident Inquiries

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 1W, on accident inquiries, how many *(a)* boards of inquiry, *(b)* unit inquiries, *(c)* ship inquiries and *(d)* station inquiries have been convened in relation to accidents that have resulted in significant damage to buildings or equipment, or affected operational capability, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [85366]

Dr. Moonie: The number of RAF inquiries into accidents involving property or equipment between 1998 and 2002 is detailed in the table:

Year	*Board of inquiry (air accident)*	*Boards of inquiry (equipment)*	*Boards of inquiry (property)*	*Boards of inquiry (opps efficiency)*	*Unit inquiry (equipment)*	*Unit inquiry (property)*	*Unit inquiry (opp eff)*
1998	6	2	0	0	0	0	0
1999	12	1	0	0	2	0	0
2000	3	1	0	0	3	3	1
2001	5	0	0	1	14	3	3
2002	5	0	0	1	7	1	0
Total	31	4	0	2	26	7	4
Total boards of inquiry			37		Total unit inquiry		37

Information concerning numbers of inquiries into accidents involving Royal Navy, Army and DLO property or equipment is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Challenger 2 Tanks

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Army's *(a)* requirement, *(b)* total number and *(c)* actual operating number is of (i) Challenger 2 tanks, (ii) AS90 and (iii) Lynx helicopters; and if he will make a statement. [85354]

Mr. Ingram: The requirement for the Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank is for six armoured regiments, each with a war establishment of 58 tanks, giving a total of 348 tanks. Further tanks are required for training and to maintain repair loops. The total number of

Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks is 386, with holdings split between units, the British Army Training Unit Suffield, the Army Training and Recruiting Agency, trials and development, in-depth repair and storage. Units do not normally hold all 58 tanks for which they are established on a day to day basis. More typically the six armoured regiments would hold 44 tanks each.

The requirement for AS90 is for six regiments, giving a total of 126 guns. Further guns are required for training and to maintain repair loops. The total number of AS90 guns is 179, with holdings split between units, the British Army Training Unit Suffield, the Army Training and Recruiting Agency, trials and development, in-depth repair and storage. Typical unit holdings are either 24 or 18 guns, but, for operations, holdings would be reorganised to allow regiments of 32 guns to be deployed.

The requirement for Lynx helicopters is for 117, of which 17 will be undergoing maintenance at any one time, giving an operating fleet of 100 helicopters deployed across the United Kingdom and overseas.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the modifications that have been made to Challenger 2 tanks and how much these modifications cost, *(b)* the modifications are being made to Challenger 2 tanks and how much these modifications will cost, *(c)* further modifications to Challenger 2 tanks that his Department plans to make and how much he estimates these will cost and *(d)* when he expects modifications to be complete; and if he will make a statement. [85362]

Mr. Hoon: In line with the practice for all major items of equipment, Post Design Service enabling arrangements have been placed with the Design Authority (DA) (now Alvis Vickers Ltd.) since Challenger 2 entered service. In addition to maintaining the design standard, these agreements allow modifications, ranging from minor adjustments of detailed build standard to significant changes to operational capability, to be considered. This enables specific contracts to be placed to undertake any necessary modification work. In line with this approach, a number of contracts have been placed recently in respect of modifications to Challenger 2 to improve its operation in desert conditions.

I am withholding the specific details, cost and timescale of the modification work under Exemption 1 (Defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Civilian Ships

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contingency plans his Department has in place for taking control of civilian ships should they be required in a war effort; and if he will make a statement. [85352]

Mr. Ingram: In order to meet our shipping needs in any future emergency, we would plan to charter civil shipping on the world-wide market to augment the capacity that our own ships give us. Where this is not possible, we would seek to use, where appropriate, either alternative types of ships or transport resources of allied or friendly nations or, as a last resort and in specific circumstances, we would requisition British shipping. Our assessment now is that there are currently enough military-useful British flagged merchant ships and United Kingdom seafarers to meet our defence needs. In concert with the Department of Transport, we continue to keep the situation under close scrutiny.

Communications Systems

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Bowman communications system will be replaced; and if he will make a statement on the Personal Role Radio. [84851]

Dr. Moonie: Bowman will provide a tactical, secure, voice and data communications system for all three Services in support of land and littoral operations from 2004, in place of the Clansman family of radios. Bowman is expected to continue in service for over 20 years.

The Personal Role Radio was formally accepted into service in January 2002, two months earlier than forecast and within planned cost. This is a good example of Smart Acquisition and, as reported by the National Audit Office, the Royal Marines who used it on Exercise Saif Sareea II were delighted with its performance. It has also been used successfully in Afghanistan.

Dyn Corp

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the employment policies of Dyn Corp in relation to its tendering for an MOD contract. [84625]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not routinely scrutinise the employment practices of companies tendering for MOD contracts, unless the transfer of public sector, or ex-public sector, employees out of the public sector under the Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) Regulations is likely to be involved. In these cases, the MOD will consider contractors' track records on previous TUPE transfers and employment relations issues as part of the general evaluation of proposals for managing staff issues, and within the framework of existing EU regulations.

Eurofighter

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the forecast in-service date for the Eurofighter was on 1 December *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000, *(d)* 2001 and *(e)* 2002; and if he will make a statement. [84832]

Dr. Moonie: The forecast in-service dates for the Eurofighter (now Typhoon), as published in the National Audit Office's report on the MOD's Major Projects, were as follows:

(a) June 2002; *(b)* June 2002; *(c)* June 2002; *(d)* June 2002. The forecast in-service date on 1 December 2002 was June 2003.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the forecast total cost of the Eurofighter project was on 1st December *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000, *(d)* 2001 and *(e)* 2002; and if he will make a statement. [84833]

Dr. Moonie: The forecast total cost of the Eurofighter (now Typhoon), as published in the National Audit Office's report on the Ministry of Defence's Major Projects, is as follows:

	£ million
(a)	14,649
(b)	14,727
(c)	18,832
(d)	18,896
(e)	18,663

These figures exclude support costs and reflect, from 2000, the conversion of the Department's accounts from a cash to a resource basis, introducing new cost elements such as interest on capital and depreciation.

Harrier

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what air defences the Royal Navy will have when the RN Sea Harrier is withdrawn from service; [84840]

(2) how much it will cost to upgrade the RAF Harrier to take over the role of the Sea Harrier when it is withdrawn from service; and what the capability shortfall is. [84839]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave on 21 May 2002 *Official Report*, columns 164–65W and 26 September 2002, *Official Report*, column 328W. In addition, I can confirm that the upgraded Sea King airborne early warning aircraft has now entered service with the Royal Navy.

Hercules

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what it would cost to move the Hercules C13J simulators from Lyneham to Brize Norton. [85287]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholding the information requested in accordance with Exemption 7 of the Code of Access to Government Information. The information is commercially sensitive.

Legal Services

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 6W, on legal services, on how many occasions in each of the past 10 years the Ministry of Defence has paid for the defence of an individual charged with a criminal offence when the offence arose as a result of actions undertaken in the course of employment; and if he will make a statement. [85368]

Mr. Ingram: There has been no reason to collect these data therefore the information requested is not available.

Merlin Helicopters

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Government is on target to deliver the remainder of the 44 Royal Navy Merlin helicopters that are due for delivery by December 2002; what the in-service date is of those remaining aircraft; if he will outline the overall cost of the Merlin Helicopter Programme; and if he will make a statement. [85358]

Dr. Moonie: All 44 of the Royal Navy Merlin Mkl helicopters have been delivered. The final aircraft was delivered on 2 December 2002.

The overall cost of the Merlin Mkl Helicopter programme is £4.183 billion.

Military Bases (Legal Officers)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of UK military bases have an independent legal officer on site; and if he will make a statement. [85367]

Dr. Moonie: Independent legal officers are not provided on military sites. Personnel may make use of a range of welfare and support services separate from the chain of command or they may raise complaints, to the Defence Council if necessary. They may also obtain legal advice privately if they wish.

Naval Operating Fleet

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by ship type, the Royal Navy's *(a)* required operating fleet, *(b)* total departmental fleet and *(c)* actual operating fleet, of ships owned or leased by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [85353]

Mr. Ingram: As of 4 December 2002, the details of Royal Navy ships, including ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, are as follows:

Type	Required operating fleet	Total dept. fleet	Actual operating fleet
Aircraft Carriers	3	3	1
Destroyers/Frigates	31	31	26
AMPHIBIOUS	3	[1]1	[2]0
Submarines (Trident)	4	4	3
Submarine (Fleet)	12	12	6
RFA	21	21	20
Minehunters	22	22	17
PATROL VESSELS	5	[3]4	5
Patrol Craft	16	16	16
ANTARCTIC PATROL SHIP	1	1	1
SURVEY VESSELS	4	2	2

[1] Two in build.
[2] HMS Ocean is expected to return to Fleet Time in mid December.
[3] One in build.

Naval Vessels

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Royal Navy vessels that are unfit for active duty; and if he will make a statement. [85357]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr. Lewis) on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 334–35W. This provides a list of the Royal Navy vessels currently in refit or undergoing repairs, and which are thus unavailable for active duty. In addition, HMS Nottingham will shortly arrive in the

United Kingdom for repair and HMS Talent is along side awaiting the start of a planned refit in 1st quarter 2003.

Overseas Deployments

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many troops are deployed overseas; and how many were overseas on 25 December in each of the last three years. [83468]

Mr. Ingram: The figures for the average number of personnel from each Service deployed on Military Tasks overseas for the quarter ending 30 September 2002, the most recent figures available, are shown in the following table. Please note that the figures do not include personnel either preparing for or recovering from deployments on Military Tasks.

Second quarter 2002–03 (July to September 2002)

	Number	*Percentages of trained strength*
Navy (including Royal Marines)	3,888	10.4
Army	8,783	8.6
Air Force	3,841	7.9

The figures for personnel deployed overseas on 25 December in each of the last three years is not available in the required timescale. I will write to the hon.Member with the requested information and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Aircraft

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Tornado GR1/GR1A/GR1B/GR4/GR4A/F3, *(b)* Harrier GR7/T10, *(c)* Jaguar G1B/GR3/T2A, *(d)* Sentry, *(e)* Canberra, *(f)* Nimrod MR2/R1, *(g)* C-17A Globemaster, *(h)* Hercules C1/C3/C4/C5, *(i)* Tristar C2/K1/KC1, *(j)* Chinook HC2, *(k)* Puma, *(l)* Merlin, *(m)* Sea King, and *(n)* Wessex aircraft were (i) allocated to front-line units, (ii) fully serviceable, (iii) unserviceable 1st line, (iv) unserviceable 2nd line, (v) unserviceable 3rd or 4th line, (vi) on trials, (vii) held in reserve use and (viii) undergoing upgrade on 25th November; what percentage of the fleet size this represents for each category; and if he will make a statement. [84834]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and will take some time to gather, collate and verify. I will write to the hon .Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RGSR Respirator

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progess is being made in the production of the RGSR respirator for the Army; when it will be in service; what advantages it offers over other respirators; and if he will make a statement. [84852]

Dr. Moonie: A decision on the award of the Assessment Phase contract for the Replacement General Service Respirator (RGSR) programme is planned for early 2003. On current plans, the equipment will enter service in the latter half of the decade. The RGSR will deliver enhanced protection levels, offer a reduced physiological burden for the user and afford improved integration with existing and future weapon systems.

Russia

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on NATO's future relations with Russia. [85052]

Mr. Hoon: NATO and Russia have for some time sought to enhance their relationship, in recognition of their mutual security interests. The establishment of the NATO-Russia Council at the Rome Summit on 28 May 2002 saw an historic transformation of that relationship, with the 19 NATO allies now working closely together with Russia as equal partners in 20 areas of common interest, such as combating terrorism, civil emergency planning and defence reform. Encouraging progress has already been made in its first six months and it is hoped that NATO and Russia can improve and expand this level of co-operation in 2003.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the Russian Minister of Defence. [85053]

Mr. Hoon: I last met Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, on 16 July in St. Petersburg.

Sea King

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the ASW Sea King Mk6 when it is taken out of service; and if he will make a statement. [85359]

Mr. Ingram: The Sea King Mark 6 Anti-Submarine Warfare aircraft are being replaced progressively by the Westland/Agusta EH101 Merlin Mkl aircraft. Of the original fleet of 48 Sea King Mk 6, 13 are still in active service with the Royal Navy and as yet no decision has been made about their future, 22 have been re-designated as Ground Instructional Aircraft, six are undergoing conversion to MK6c to supplement the Sea King Helicopter Commando Mk4 fleet and seven are awaiting disposal.

Sonar 2087

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal advice has been given *(a)* in each environmental impact assessment prepared in relation to the Sonar 2087 project and *(b)* in the independent legal review conducted into the global environmental impact assessment prepared in relation to the Sonar 2087 project; and if he will make a statement. [85355]

Dr. Moonie: The global Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) conducted in 2000 was the first EIA of Sonar 2087. It was carried out as part of the Assessment Phase of that project. It took account of legal advice provided by a lawyer who is an internationally recognised authority on the Law of the Sea. We also commissioned an independent review of the EIA, the legal aspects of which were conducted by a second distinguished independent legal authority. Both processes concluded that the intended operation of S2087 will comply with the relevant legislation at national, European and international level.

To date, as part of the demonstration work, a single sea trial of S2087 using prototype equipment has taken place in the Bay of Biscay. The EIA for this trial recommended procedures specific to the area and concluded that these would meet the duties and obligations highlighted in the applicable environmental laws and policies.

In accordance with Ministry of Defence policy we plan to keep legal and environmental aspects of the programme under review.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the Sonar 2087 project; and if he will make a statement. [85356]

Dr. Moonie: Some £100 million has been spent on this project up to the end of November, covering the Assessment Phase and the Demonstration, Manufacture and Support Phase to that date.

Strategic Sealift Programme

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the quarterly cost of the strategic sealift programme is; and if he will make a statement. [83469]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of strategic sealift varies according to the operational, overseas maintenance and exercise cornmitments of the Ministry of Defence. In the last full financial year 2001–02, the quarterly costs were approximately: £5.5 million, £10.8 million, £11.6 million and £6.2 million.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what services have been provided under the strategic sealift (Ro-Ro) programme; what compensation arrangements exist for breaches in the PFI contract; and if he will make a statement. [83470]

Dr. Moonie: The purpose of the strategic sealift programme is to provide the Ministry of Defence with roll-on roll-off (Ro-Ro) ferries for the transportation of military equipment. The PFI contract is with AWSR Shipping Ltd. The first ship, M.V. Hurst Point, has been delivered to AWSR and came into use in August.

In the event of a breach, the PFI contract provides for MOD to be compensated by way of reduced payments or liquidated damages. Were there to be fundamental default, other arrangements would apply up to and including contract termination.

Thermobaric Weapons

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what thermobaric weapons the British Army uses; what assessment has been made of their capability; and if he will make a statement on the extension of the technology. [84849]

Dr. Moonie: There are no thermobaric weapons in service with the British Army and we have no plans to procure any. However, in view of the threat such weapons pose to our own forces (particularly when fighting in built-up areas or in caves), we are examining with industry the scope for technological advances in the area of enhanced blast explosives.

An Anti Structures Munition programme, based on enhanced blast explosives technology, has been established, which seeks to offer a precision capability designed to minimise casualties, and will be fully in accordance with our obligations under international humanitarian law. Such a weapon is consistent with the conclusions reached in the SDR New Chapter White Paper, which called for increased emphasis on the need for precision in the face of force.

Warships

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the warship building industry in the UK; and what is being done to encourage competition. [84837]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is undertaking the largest programme of new warship building for many years. This programme will create or secure several thousand jobs in United Kingdom shipyards and ancillary industries throughout the country. The MOD recognises the considerable challenge for UK shipbuilders to maintain capacity and develop the skills required for the future warship building programme, against the background of a short term dip in the volume of work and an ageing workforce. The MOD will continue to work closely with the industry but it is primarily for the shipbuilders themselves to manage any short term workload gap. The MOD order book alone cannot be expected to sustain the industry.

Competition remains the bedrock of the MOD's procurement policy and has been the keystone of our strategy for warship procurement. The present competition for the future aircraft carrier is an example of this. Maintaining acompetitive environment should also be helped by the decision to share work on the Type 45 destroyer between BAE Systems Marine and Vosper Thorny croft, which has the advantage of keeping both shipbuilders involved in the Type 45 programme and potentially available to compete for future MOD and export programmes.

The MOD, together with industry, will continue to review ways of making UK warship building more competitive and innovative, with the aim of enabling the shipbuilders to widen their customer base and identify other opportunities, for warship export orders in particular.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the location is of *(a)* HMS Ark Royal, *(b)* HMS Illustrious, *(c)* HMS Invincible and *(d)* HMS Ocean; and if he will make a statement. [85360]

Mr. Ingram: The information is as follows:

HMS Ark Royal is the current Fleet Flagship and is alongside in Portsmouth undergoing routine maintenance prior to her next deployment in February 2003.

HMS Illustrious is in Rosyth undertaking a refit which is due to complete in early 2005.

HMS Invincible is in Rosyth undertaking a refit which is due to complete in late spring 2003.

HMS Ocean is in Devonport undertaking repairs following her Docking period in Portsmouth. She is expected to return to Fleet time this month.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Affordable Housing

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans to alter the affordability rules to enable authorities in areas of high housing costs to build more affordable homes. [84428]

Mr. McNulty: There are no specific rules that apply to the costs of new affordable homes built by local authorities. Where an authority decides to fund additional affordable housing it will generally provide better value for money to do this through a housing association.

Council Tax

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the maximum amount is that the abolition of 50 per cent. discount council tax on *(a)* second and *(b)* empty homes will raise; what proportion (i) billing and (ii) precepting authorities will be able to retain; how a distinction between empty and abandoned homes will be made; and what the estimated compliance costs are of these changes. [844141]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) announced on 19 November 2002 that the Government intend to allow English local authorities discretion to reduce council tax discounts on second homes from 50 per cent. to a minimum of 10 per cent. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has decided not to remove the discount completely because owners need an incentive to inform the local authority that properties are second homes. Without such information, it would not be possible to identify the extra revenue which could be raised from changing the discount. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister also announced that we intend to allow English local authorities to reduce or remove completely the current 50 per cent. council tax discounts on long-term empty dwellings. In either case, the billing authority may determine to change the discount in all or part of its area.

Authorities where the second homes discount has been reduced will benefit from any additional council tax raised: we do not propose to reduce their revenue support grant to take account of their greater tax raising ability. If all authorities reduced the second home discounts to 10 per cent., this could potentially raise around £65 million. If all authorities removed the empty home discounts completely, this could raise a further £160 million.

The benefit of the additional revenue resulting from a reduction in the second homes discount would be shared with the major precepting authorities. The proportions which would go to billing authorities and to major precepting authorities will vary from location to location, depending on the proportion of the council tax bill in an area which goes to major precepting authorities, and different authorities' decisions about how the discount should be applied. The compliance costs will depend on how individual billing authorities decide to change the discounts.

Devolution

Mr. Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much the Government spent on start-up costs for the *(a)* National Assembly for Wales and *(b)* Scottish Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [83792]

Mr. Leslie: Expenditure by the former Welsh Office on preparations for the National Assembly for Wales was £2.7 million. This includes the costs of the current interim Assembly building, the new building and the costs of staff directly attributed to the preparations for the Assembly. There were additional staff costs across the Welsh Office associated with the preparations for the Assembly but these are not separately identifiable.

Expenditure by the former Scottish Office on preparations for the Scottish Parliament was £13.4 million. These figures relate to costs for the current interim Parliament building, the new building (including purchase of the site) and those staff costs that can be directly attributed to preparations for the Scottish Parliament. There were other staff costs associated with preparations for the Parliament or on devolution generally involving staff working across most areas of the Scottish Office, but this expenditure was not recorded separately.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Helen Jackson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the projected expenditure is for each of the next five years on disabled facilities grants; and what has been spent to date in this financial year in disabled facilities grants; [84565]

(2) what plans he has for legislation to simplify the way in which grant aid for disabled adaptations are managed; [84566]

(3) what has been spent on disabled facilities grants in each of the last 10 years; [84564]

(4) what the average waiting time between assessment and completion in each local authority has been in 2001–02 for householders requesting disabled adaptations in their homes; [84563]

(5) how many households are waiting for adaptation grants to meet their disability needs in each local authority. [84562]

Mr. McNulty: The Government meets 60 per cent. of the total cost of local authority expenditure on Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), with the remaining 40 per cent. being met from elsewhere in local authorities budgets. The Government has, as of 15 November 2002, paid local housing authorities £66.5 million in the financial year 2002–03 in respect of their expenditure on DFGs. My right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister, is currently considering the allocation of funding for the three years to 2005–06, and the Government's contribution towards projected local authority expenditure on DFGs will be announced at the turn of the year.

The Government has no plans to further amend the legislation on the provision of housing adaptations for the disabled. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 came into force on 18 July 2002, and provides English and Welsh

local housing authorities with wide discretionary powers to provide assistance for the repair, improvement or adaptations of housing. This power can be used to provide additional financial help to a disabled person over and above any mandatory entitlement to a DFG.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department of Health are jointly preparing comprehensive guidance to local authorities on best practice in the organisation and delivery of a housing adaptations service for disabled people. This guidance will be issued in draft for consultation very shortly.

Total Disabled Facilities Grants payments made by English local authorities over the last 10 years are:

Year	*£ million*
1992–93	64.96
1993–94	74.91
1994–95	90.53
1995–96	97.53
1996–97	99.75
1997–98	100.41
1998–99	107.10
1999–2000	116.42
2000–01	130.70
2001–02	145.10

The Government does not collect data either on the average waiting time for DFG, or the number of households waiting for such a grant.

Empty Properties

Adam Price: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many unoccupied domestic properties there are in the UK; and how many are in the ownership of local authorities. [82725]

Mr. McNulty: The total number of vacant dwellings in England at 1 April 2001 (latest available data) was 755,100. Of those vacant dwellings, 80,300 were in the ownership of local authorities.

Many of these vacant dwellings are transitional vacants (eg they may be in the process of being bought or sold). The breakdown below shows numbers of vacant dwellings by tenure and the number of dwellings that have been vacant for more than six months at 1 April 2001.

	Total dwellings vacant at 1 April 2001	*of which: vacant for more than six months*
Local authority	80,300	31,500
Registered Social Landlord	41,300	14,900
'Other' public sector	10,900	[1]—
'Other' private sector	622,600	310,200
Total	755,100	[1]—

[1] Not collected.

Note:

All figures rounded to the nearest 100.

Sources:

All data from ODPM Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns except for data on RSLs obtained from the Housing Corporation's 2001 Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR)

For information about other parts of the UK I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friends the Members for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), for Neath (Peter Hain) and for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell).

Homes (Key Workers)

Mr. Horam: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* teachers and *(b)* further education college lecturers have benefited from the starter home initiative for key workers; and if he will make a statement on policy towards further education lecturers. [85428]

Mr. McNulty: The funding available to assist teachers into home ownership under the Starter Home Initiative is targeted at teachers in schools ie the Secondary School sector. To date over 700 teachers have purchased homes under the Initiative that they would otherwise have been unable to afford.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recognises that other key workers, including further education lecturers, need to be able to find affordable homes within a reasonable distance of their work place. Our wider housing policies to increase the supply of affordable homes in areas where demand is high will benefit other groups of key workers. In addition the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be looking at ways to extend our existing programmes for affordable housing through greater partnership with employers and with public and private sector landlords.

Early in the new year my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will set out in his Communities Plan a long term programme of action for housing and sustainable communities. This will address affordable housing issues, including key worker housing.

Homes for Life

Helen Jackson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for designing bathrooms with level access showers as part of the Homes for Life programme. [84561]

Mr. Leslie: Part M of the Building Regulations was amended in 1999 to require reasonable provision for access for disabled people to visit friends and family in new homes. All new homes built in England and Wales on the basis of building control applications submitted after 25 October 1999 have had to comply with the new requirements. Currently, these do not require the installation of showers with level access. The various Parts of the Building Regulations are however kept under review.

Some social housing funding authorities require, in addition, compliance with the Lifetime Homes standards promoted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which is a charitable organisation. The Lifetime Homes programme aims to produce homes that are suitable for fully independent living by disabled people, and principally by wheelchair users. The Lifetime Homes Standard however only calls for drainage provision to enable a shower to be fitted in the future.

Index of Multiple Deprivation

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to publish his Department's review of the Index of Multiple Deprivation; and if he will make a statement. [85680]

Mrs. Roche: The project to update the Indices of Deprivation 2000 is being conducted in three stages. The Stage One Consultation Report has recently been published. Stage Two will result in a blueprint setting out detailed proposals for updating the indicators and domains while Stage Three will result in the updated Index. It is expected that the final updated index would be published in summer 2003.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Webb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the amount of spending per head by each all-purpose local authority in the current financial year. [85624]

Mr. Leslie: The spending per head for each all-purpose local authority in the year 2002–03 has been set out in a table and placed in the Library of the House.

New Towns

Mr. Colin Pickthall: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what research has been undertaken to examine the effects of clawback on the sale of assets in the new towns; [85243]

(2) what research has been undertaken to examine the extra costs of housing renewal and regeneration in new towns subject to simultaneous ageing; [85242]

(3) what research has been undertaken to ascertain the extra costs falling upon local authorities from new towns designed on the Radburn principle. [85241]

Mr. McNulty: In its response to the recent Select Committee report on New Towns, the Government undertook that, subject to Office of the Deputy Prime Minister funding, a review would be undertaken. This would examine a number of aspects of the New Towns, which would include all the issues mentioned by my hon. Friend. The review would involve consultation with the relevant local authorities.

Planning

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many planning appeals for developments with densities greater than the local planning authority considered reasonable have been allowed in each of the last three years. [84465]

Mr. McNulty: Information on planning appeals in the form requested is not available. The table sets out for the last three years the number of allowed appeals for residential development where 'over-development' was recorded as an issue. Over-development encompasses a number of amenity concerns arising from the proposed layout.

Period	*Number decided*	*Number allowed*	*Number allowed where over development was an issue*
1999–2000	4,134	1,197	82
2000–01	4,715	1,419	113
2001–02	4,803	1,429	102

Planning System Documents

Ms Shipley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) whether he requires the documents By Design and By Design: Better Places to Live to be material considerations in the planning system; [85187]

(2) what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the guidance in *(a)* By Design and *(b)* By Design: Better Places to Live is reflected in local authority plan-making. [85192]

Mr. McNulty: By Design and By Design: Better Places to Live are guides to better practice supporting Government policy on urban design and housing set out in Planning Policy Guidance Notes 1 and 3. They should be taken into account in preparing development plans and planning applications and may also be material to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals. My right. hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister is a statutory consultee in the preparation of development plans and can make objections when there are conflicts with national guidance which do not appear to be justified by local circumstances. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister also has powers of intervention to direct that plan proposals should be modified before adoption.

Special Advisers

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many special advisers were employed in his Department in *(a)* May and *(b)* November. [83419]

Mr. Leslie: At the end of May 2002 when the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created, the Office employed three full-time equivalent special advisers. In November 2002 the Office employed 2.8 full-time equivalent special advisers.

Standard Spending Assessment Grant

Mr. Reed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been paid to Charnwood borough council in SSA grant to compensate for student houses in multi-occupancy in the present financial year. [85027]

Mr. Raynsford: The present SSA formula for Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services contains three housing deprivation indicators but none relates specifically to students. In addition, local authorities are compensated through revenue support grant for council tax income lost from properties that are exempt from council tax because they are occupied only by students.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Beacon Schools

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of Beacon schools in raising school standards; what guidance he gives on the circumstances in which it is appropriate to close a beacon school and whom the authorities should consult; and how many beacon schools have been closed. [85551]

Mr. Miliband: By building partnerships, Beacon schools have been supporting other schools to raise overall standards of pupil attainment and to close the gap between the best and lower performing schools. Independent evaluation has shown benefits of Beacon activity in terms of improved practice and raised standards through professional development. In the case of Beacon schools, as with all schools, the Department takes the view that closure is a matter for local public consultation and decision-making. The Department does not have a role in this process. So far, three Beacon schools have been closed as a result of local reorganisations.

Disabled Students

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to provide assistance to schools to help them ensure that their course materials are accessible to disabled students in the next year. [84294]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Schools and local education authorities are required to plan strategically to increase progressively over time the accessibility of schools to disabled pupils. This includes increasing access to schools premises and facilities, to the curriculum and to written information in alternative formats—including Braille and audio-tape. The first accessibility plans must be in place by April 2003 and will run for a period of three years.

Funding is available to local education authorities through the Schools Access Initiative to make schools more accessible to children with disabilities and special educational needs. £70 million is available this year. This will increase to £100 million a year for the next financial years 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Improving access to schools for disabled pupils is an integral part of local education authority planning and asset management and funds for improving school access are part of a much larger block of funds for capital expenditure of some £8.5 billion, which we are making available over the period 2001–02 to 2003–04.

Free School Meals

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the schools in the top 10 per cent. of those with the greatest number of children who receive free school meals. [84567]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The information requested cannot be provided as it is the Department's current policy not to publish figures about individual schools without their prior agreement.

Mixed-age Teaching

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research he has done on the effects of mixed-age teaching in primary schools. [85556]

Mr. Miliband: The Department is not currently undertaking research on this subject. Previous research has shown that there are a number of positive benefits for primary school pupils in mixed-age classes. These include the opportunity to form wider friendships and for younger pupils to learn from their contemporaries, more individualised teaching, and the opportunity for pupils with differing ability to provide intellectual stimulation for each other. The research does not find positive effects for attainment. However, there appears to be no negative impact on pupil attainment of what is known as vertical grouping. Teachers tend to be more negative about mixed-age classes, believing them to create more work and complicate classroom management.

NVQs

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students have received free tuition to study national vocational qualifications in *(a)* plumbing, *(b)* bricklaying, *(c)* bridge to construction (or intermediate construction award), *(d)* painting and decorating and *(e)* wood occupations, in each year since the establishment of the courses. [83766]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The question asks about free tuition on NVQ courses. The information available does not discriminate between those who get full and partial fee remission. The following figures therefore include both.

In 2000–01 in further education sector colleges in England, tuition fees were waived (fully or partially) for:

(a) 1,704 learners on NVQs in plumbing.

(b) 1,155 learners on NVQs in bricklaying.

(c) there are no qualifications entitled "bridge to construction" or "intermediate construction" in the NVQ framework.

(d) 690 learners on NVQs in painting and decorating.

(e) 3,168 learners on NVQs in wood related occupations.

In 1999–2000 in further education sector colleges in England, tuition fees were waived (fully or partially) for:

(a) 1,376 learners on NVQs in plumbing.

(b) 989 learners on NVQs in bricklaying.

(c) there are no qualifications entitled "bridge to construction" or "intermediate construction" in the NVQ framework.

(d) 602 learners on NVQs in painting and decorating.

(e) 2,414 learners on NVQs in wood related occupations.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many tutors were employed in further education colleges teaching national vocational qualifications in *(a)* plumbing, *(b)* bricklaying, *(c)* bridge to construction (or intermediate construction award), *(d)* painting and decorating and *(e)* wood occupations, in each year since the establishment of the courses; [83767]

(2) how many tutors were recruited to teach national vocational qualifications in *(a)* plumbing, *(b)* bricklaying, *(c)* bridge to construction (or

intermediate construction award), *(d)* painting and decorating and *(e)* wood occupations, in each year since the establishment of the courses; how many tutors in each category left their posts; and what average length of time served by further education tutors in each category was, in each year. [83769]

Margaret Hodge: Information on tutors in FE teaching national vocational qualifications is available only for broad subject levels.

In 2000–01 there were 3,623 tutors teaching construction in FE colleges in England.

Information on the recruitment of tutors in FE, their retention and average length of time in employment is not available.

Prison Education Courses

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how much was available in each prison for education courses in each year since 1995 at current prices; and what the percentage increase was in each year; [84554]

(2) what percentage of the prison population were engaged in education courses in each prison in each year since 1995; and how much funding has been provided per head of population of each prison for education courses in each year since 1995. [84555]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The information available has been provided in the form of a table, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries.

School Closures

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received concerning the closure of schools in South Shields; and if he will place these in the Library. [85553]

Mr. Miliband: The Secretary of State and his Department have received 16 letters from Headteachers, School Governors, parents and members of the public about South Tyneside local education authority's proposals for the reorganisation of primary education.

Truancy

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children who truanted from school in 2001–02 gained one or more GCSEs. [85348]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The only available source of data on the GCSE attainment of young people who truanted from school is the Youth Cohort Study (YCS).

The latest data available from the YCS are for people who took their GCSEs in the summer of 1999. This shows that of those who occasionally truanted during year 11, 95 per cent. reported gaining at least one GCSE, of those who persistently truanted during year 11, 79 per cent. reported gaining at least one GCSE.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Furazolidone

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the nitrofuran antibiotic furazolidone is banned for use in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [85005]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Furazolidone is included in Annex IV of Council Directive 2377/90EC, so its administration to food-producing animals is banned, both in the UK, and in the European Community. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) run two surveillance schemes for residues of veterinary medicines and banned substances in UK-produced and imported produce. These are overseen by the independent Veterinary Residues Committee (VRC).

In 2001, the VMD analysed 453 samples of bovine, pig and sheep kidney; and 58 samples of eggs for furazolidone under their statutory surveillance programme for UK produce. A further 86 samples of animal feed were analysed for nitrofurans. All samples were free of detectable residues of these compounds.

Auction Marts

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the role of auction marts in increased bio-security. [84167]

Mr. Morley: Livestock auction markets have an important role in the marketing of farm animals between the various stages of production. However, markets do pose a risk of disease spread through mixing and dispersal of animals during market operations. The Department has sought to mitigate this risk through rules on bio-security at markets, and controls over the movement of animals to and from market premises.

Bovine TB

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evaluation is being relied upon by her Department in respect of the possible link between badgers and the spread of bovine tuberculosis; and if she will make a statement. [84239]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* A badger culling field trial is being carried out as part of DEFRA's extensive bovine tuberculosis (TB) research programme. The trial was designed by the Independent Scientific Group for Cattle TB (ISG) to evaluate what role, if any, badgers play in the transmission of bovine TB to cattle and whether badger culling is an effective or sustainable bovine TB control mechanism. It will provide epidemiological data on the occurrence and prevalence of TB in badgers, its relationship to population density and social group size and the spatial relationship between TB-infected badgers and TB breakdowns in cattle herds.

The ISG advise that it is too early for a full analysis of results. It is a basic rule for scientific trials that results are not published prematurely. It has however been

possible to complete a preliminary analysis of the risk factors associated with cattle TB, and this is set out in the ISG's Third Report, available in the House Library.

Climate Change

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has held with her EU counterparts on proposals to introduce legislation concerning climate change; and if she will make a statement. [84646]

Mr. Meacher: I have regular discussions with my EU counterparts on climate change issues.

Last year we agreed Council conclusions on the European Commission's communication on the European Climate Change Programme. More recently we have discussed the European Commission's proposal for a Directive to establish a Community greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme. I will be discussing this again at the Environment Council on 9 and 10 December.

We are also discussing with the commission the preparation of legislation on reducing emissions of fluorinated gases (hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride) that also fall under the Kyoto Protocol.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* schemes and *(b)* bodies her Department contributes funding to which are concerned with climate change. [85484]

Mr. Meacher: The main schemes for which my Department provides funding are the UK Emissions Trading Scheme the New Home Energy Efficiency scheme (or Warm Front) and the Community Energy Programme. The main bodies for which my Department provides funding are the Carbon Trust, the Energy Saving Trust, the Hadley Centre, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (core budget and trust funds), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Greentie and the OECD Annex 1 expert group.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which of the sector associations party to a Climate Change Levy umbrella agreement have supplied her with information specified in Schedule 3 of those agreements; what the dates were of each supply; and which of those sector associations have supplied her with information specified in Part 2 of Schedule 3 of those agreements. [82871]

Mr. Meacher: Under clause 6.5 of the umbrella agreements, sector associations are not required to submit information specified in either Part 1 or Part 2 of Schedule 3 for the first target period until 31 January 2003, extended by agreement to 17 February. No such information has yet been supplied by sector associations, though data has been received for the single company agreement under paragraph 47 of Schedule 6 to the Finance Act 2000.

Coffee Market

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to support the working of the international market in coffee. [83627]

Mr. Morley: The UK is a member, through the EU, of the International Coffee Organisation (ICO), a United Nations body established to, among other things, "achieve a reasonable balance between world supply and demand on a basis which will assure adequate supplies of coffee at fair prices to consumers and markets for coffee at remunerative prices to producers ... to facilitate the expansion and transparency of international trade in coffee".

A major plank of the organisation's current activity is a Coffee Quality Improvement Programme. Introduced on 1 October 2002, it requires exports of unprocessed coffee from member countries to comply with minimum quality standards. This should have a positive effect upon supply and demand and, in turn, producer prices. Discussions are also under way within the organisation about how exports of processed coffee should be dealt with.

The Government are also helping coffee growers to diversify, through our development programme, and promoting foreign investment and good regulatory frameworks in coffee-growing countries.

In a wider context, on the WTO front, we are committed to further liberalisation of markets, including significant improvements in market access and special and differential treatment for developing countries. This should also benefit coffee growers.

We are seeking to expand the trade opportunities of commodity-dependent countries through, for example, cutting import tariffs to reduce the negative impact of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Energy Efficiency

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what corrections to energy efficiency targets resulting from correction to baseline data she has discussed with sector associations; if she will specify the provisions of the umbrella agreements and underlying agreements under which such corrections are permitted; and what discussions or correspondence she has had with such associations concerning failure to meet such targets. [82869]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State has discussed several variations to energy efficiency targets resulting from corrections to baseline data with sector associations. Further to my answer of 7 November, the agreements are to be varied to provide for corrections to targets resulting from corrections to baseline data. The text of the variation has not yet been agreed. The Secretary of State has yet to receive information from the sector associations about the performance of the facilities covered by the agreements during the first target period. Accordingly the Secretary of State is not yet in a position to ascertain whether there has been any failure to meet such targets.

Enriched Laying Cages

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the cost to egg producers of a ban on the use of enriched laying cages in England; what plans she has to provide financial assistance to egg producers in the event of such a ban; and if she will make a statement. [84513]

Mr. Morley: A partial regulatory impact assessment was included in the public consultation about a possible ban on enriched cages and is being considered again in the light of responses received. The CAP regime for this sector is a light one and no grants are currently available.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on a proposed ban on the use of enriched egg laying cages in England. [84508]

Mr. Morley: The Department has received over 1,000 responses to the public consultation from the general public, industry and animal welfare organisations.

Farm Holdings

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average size of farm is, broken down by *(a)* category and *(b)* region. [81146]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The information given is shown in the table:

Average farm size in hectares by region and farm type—England 2001

Region	*Farm type Cereals*	*General cropping*	*Horticulture*	*Specialist pigs*	*Specialist poultry*
North East	154.8	217.7	8.5	14.5	45.2
North West	101.6	75.7	5.7	10.2	22.0
Merseyside	63.4	86.0	6.7	9.0	1.2
Yorkshire and Humberside	103.0	159.9	6.7	21.0	11.9
East Midlands	138.1	150.8	7.6	12.9	8.0
West Midlands	103.0	140.0	12.4	13.4	11.3
East of England	129.8	153.1	8.8	14.2	9.5
Greater London	99.9	81.2	5.5	24.4	13.8
South East	174.5	152.1	16.7	25.2	11.1
South West	135.5	100.1	9.2	15.4	11.9
England	131.9	145.3	10.5	16.6	13.2

Region	*Mixed pigs and poultry*	*Dairy—LFA*	*Dairy—Lowland*	*Specialist sheep—SDA*	*Specialist beef—SDA*
North East	20.6	70.1	81.9	213.3	67.4
North West	12.2	82.7	76.6	108.2	37.7
Merseyside	0.0	0.0	105.1	0.0	0.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	22.6	84.1	72.0	115.2	35.4
East Midlands	37.8	77.4	79.5	126.8	45.4
West Midlands	3.7	57.0	78.5	39.7	33.6
East of England	15.4	0.0	75.6	0.0	0.0
Greater London	0.0	0.0	117.5	0.0	0.0
South East	3.5	0.0	109.0	0.0	0.0
South West	8.1	75.2	88.9	60.1	60.2
England	15.2	77.0	84.4	116.7	44.1

Region	*Mixed cattle and sheep—SDA*	*Cattle and sheep—DA*	*Cattle and sheep (Lowland)*	*Mixed*	*Other types*
North East	198.1	74.5	56.2	165.7	17.5
North West	109.1	40.5	28.3	55.7	18.0
Merseyside	0.0	0.0	40.1	57.7	8.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	109.9	50.3	24.7	83.4	9.7
East Midlands	72.8	42.9	28.4	109.9	6.5
West Midlands	86.7	26.1	28.2	98.0	7.4
East of England	0.0	0.0	26.6	102.0	8.8
Greater London	0.0	0.0	30.5	81.1	13.6
South East	0.0	0.0	33.4	140.7	11.4
South West	120.2	43.9	33.2	101.9	8.5
England	125.6	42.1	31.0	105.1	10.3

Notes:

1. The "other types" category includes some holdings which are not currently undertaking any agricultural activity.

2. Farm type is designated by the predominant activity on the holding. This is calculated using the Standard Gross Margin (SGM). The total SGM for each farm is calculated by multiplying its crop areas and livestock numbers by the appropriate SGM coefficients and then summing the result for all enterprises on the farm. For example, if more than two thirds of a holding's total SGM is derived from cereals and other crops generally found in cereal rotations (eg oilseeds, peas and beans harvested dry and land set-aside) the holding will be put in the cereals farm type category.

Source:

June Agricultural and Horticultural Census

Fisheries

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what United Kingdom legislation will restrict the number of days at sea for fishing vessels capturing and landing cod from 1 January 2003; whether amendments to legislation are necessary to achieve Government objectives; and if she will make a statement. [85508]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* No decision has been made as to the means by which any limit on days at sea required by EU legislation would be implemented in the UK.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many qualified valuers were paid *(a)* per day and *(b)* per valuation during the foot and mouth outbreak. [84165]

Mr. Morley: During the foot and mouth outbreak, qualified valuers were paid on a per day basis, not on a per valuation basis. Therefore, the Department does not have a record of the number of valuers broken down into these two categories. There are a number of legal disputes with valuers who are claiming on a per valuation basis.

Herbal Medicines

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government are doing to control the sale of endangered animal parts for eastern herbal medicines. [85386]

Mr. Morley: The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which regulates trade in endangered species of animals and plants, is strictly implemented in the UK under both European and National legislation. Medicines derived from species listed in the Appendices to the Convention need an import permit issued by my Department before they can enter the country. Permits will not normally be issued for products containing the most endangered species, which are listed on the Convention's Appendix I. As a result any products that are derived from, or even claim to be derived from, Appendix I specimens taken from the wild will not normally be allowed on sale in the UK.

CITES is actively enforced in the UK by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the Police who work together with my Department, other Government Departments and certain non-governmental organisations in the Government's Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime. My Department produces general guidance on the Convention and maintains a dedicated website on CITES implementation in the UK. We have also worked with the enforcement agencies to produce specialist material including leaflets, posters and videos aimed directly at Britain's Chinese speaking community. We are also currently funding, with the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), research into the use of alternatives to replace certain endangered species contained in traditional medicines.

Horticulture Research International

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will end the moratorium imposed on Horticulture Research International regarding scientific staff; and if she will make a statement. [84136]

Mr. Morley: Horticulture Research International (HRI) is in a loss-making situation. Following discussions with Defra, HRI agreed to introduce a moratorium on staff recruitment to help contain its operating costs. HRI will fill vacant posts by external recruitment only where such posts are essential to its business and where it has been unable to fill them through internal redeployment.

The Department considers that this is a financially responsible course of action. The moratorium will be reviewed in due course in the light of HRI's financial situation and the decisions which the Department expects to take shortly about the future of the organisation.

Livestock Sales

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her assessment is of the relative number of *(a)* beef, *(b)* dairy and *(c)* sheep sales being concluded *(i)* through a registered auction mart and (ii) by private farm-to-farm sale in each of the last three years. [84166]

Mr. Morley: The available data are shown in the table. Livestock markets were disrupted by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001, and the last three years for which data are available are 1998–2000. They include livestock sold for slaughter and farm-to-farm sales through markets. No data are available within my Department for Northern Ireland, for the split between beef and dairy cattle, or for private farm-to-farm sales.

Throughput through livestock auction markets in Great Britain

	1998	*1999*	*2000*
Cattle (including dairy)	2,455	2,483	2,422
Calves	523	454	436
Sheep	17,060	17,564	17,596
Total	20,038	20,501	20,454

Source:
The Livestock Auctioneers' Association.

Meat Imports (South Africa)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs why the Government did not ban meat imports from South Africa between September 2000 and January 2001. [83895]

Mr. Morley: On 21 September 2000 the European Commission was notified of limited outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in sixteen provinces of Kwa-Zulu Natal. The South African authorities took effective action by imposing their own export ban on meat from the infected areas. At the time the Government was content with this situation as meat from the area could not be exported.

On 17 November the Commission amended Community legislation to formally prohibit the import of fresh meat from the affected areas. This reflected the

self-imposed South African ban. Prior to this the Commission had not taken any action. Records show that after 21 September 2000 there were no imports of meat from South Africa into the United Kingdom.

On 20 December 2000 the Commission reported that there had been no change in the disease situation. In view of this we reviewed our action and issued a Declaration under Regulation 35 of the Products of Animal Origin (Importer and Export) Regulations 1996 on 5 January 2001 prohibiting all fresh meat of FMD susceptible species from the whole of South Africa unless it was produced before 15 September 2000. A note explaining the situation was sent to trade interests on 8 January, as was a letter to all Border Inspection Posts at ports and airports. Scotland and Northern Ireland took similar action shortly afterwards.

Since then the Government has followed a policy of issuing such a Declaration whenever a suspension of imports is necessary, even in advance of Community action.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total expenditure of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84800]

Alun Michael: Since 1999 the Government has published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government has also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002 *Official Report* 1374 75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Parrett Catchment Project

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total remuneration is of the Chairman of the Parrett Catchment Project. [84648]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett Catchment Project is an independent body. As advised in my reply to the Member's previous question, no salary is paid by the project to the Chairman. I understand that he is currently entitled to a fee of £150 per day for his work on the project.

Up to June 2001, I am advised that the Chairman received no fees or expenses from the Project.

From June 2001 to the end of June 2002, I understand that he was paid £3,000 in fees, a £1,000 honorarium for extra-contractual work on the successful Intereg 3 bid for EU funds, and £724 in expenses.

He has received no payments for fees or expenses since the 1 of July 2002.

Pigswill

Mr Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment she has made of the impact upon business of the ban on pigswill; and what compensation her Department is providing to pigswill producers to compensate them for losses brought about by the ban. [5082]

Mr. Morley: In March 2001 during the Foot and Mouth outbreak, the proposal to ban swill feeding was the subject of a full public consultation and Regulatory Impact Assessment. A copy of the Regulatory Impact Assessment which accompanied the Animal By Products (Amendment) Order 2002 (S.I. 2001 No. 1704) is available in the Library of the House.

The Government does not intend to compensate pig farmers for changes to the feed material available for their livestock following the introduction of the ban on swill feeding. However the Government is providing free business advice to those affected by the ban.

Animal Movement Restrictions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning the application of the 20-day standstill period where the designated 20 days are exceeded relating to farm to farm sales; and if she will make a statement. [84510]

Mr. Morley: We receive many varied representations about different aspects of the 20-day standstill rule. The current movement rules, including the standstill, apply to animals sold from farm to farm as well as to other types of movements.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning the practicality of the exemption to the 20-day standstill rule granted to farmers in the form of a DEFRA licence for specialised calf rearing units; and if she will make a statement. [84509]

Mr. Morley: We receive many varied representations on all aspects of the 20-day standstill rule. The movement of calves under 30-days-old with full passports does not trigger a 20-day standstill on specialist calf rearing units which have been approved by the Divisional Veterinary Manager. Specialist calf rearing units do not require a licence.

Veterinary Practices

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 21 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 300W, what measures she is taking to *(a)* identify veterinary practices and surgeries operating without being registered by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and *(b)* ensure that (i) non-registered veterinary practices and surgeons and (ii) others are not involved in working with animals. [84821]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is obliged under the Veterinary Surgeons and Veterinary Practitioners Registration Regulations to maintain and publish a register of all veterinary surgeons eligible to practise in the UK. However, under the Regulations, the RCVS only have jurisdiction over individual registered veterinary surgeons. Should the RCVS be informed of, or identify, individuals practising while unregistered it is a matter for the police or local trading standards agencies to prosecute under Section 19 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966.

The regulations do not require or give the RCVS powers to compel members to provide practice details, although many do so on a voluntary basis. This information is maintained on a database and is published on the RCVS website under 'Find-a-Vet'. This is annually printed as a publication, "the Directory of Veterinary Practices" and is available to the public. The Directory and 'Find-a-Vet' link individual veterinary surgeons to practices and provide comprehensive information on the species they treat and any specialist services they offer.

The RCVS continually monitors various advertising and other information media to identify practices not listed in the Directory. Once identified they are contacted and asked if they wish to be listed.

It is the responsibility of practices to check that prospective employees possess relevant qualifications and in the case of veterinarians that they are registered with the RCVS.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Africa

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards the formulation of a universal set of standards for use by the African Union for the peer review mechanism of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. [84629]

Mr. Rammell: The NEPAD Steering Committee has tasked its Secretariat to develop detailed criteria and indicators for measuring performance on political and economic governance. These will be considered at the next meeting of the NEPAD Implementation Committee in February 2003. We understand that the process of the peer review mechanism will draw on expertise from both UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union, but the NEPAD Secretariat will have the key role in making sure the process gets started.

Pending the ultimate integration of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) with the African Union, the Implementation Committee has recommended that the specialist commission, units or organs of the AU responsible for democracy, political and human rights, be tasked to conduct technical assessments for the APRM.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether G8 funding for the New Partnership for Africa's Development is conditional on the inclusion of the peer review mechanism. [84630]

Mr. Rammell: The G8 response to the NEPAD initiative is set out in the G8 Action Plan for Africa, which was placed in the House Libraries on 1 July this year.

As NEPAD is a political agreement between African leaders, not a funding mechanism, G8 countries will not be funding NEPAD directly. The G8 is committed to establishing enhanced partnerships with African countries whose performance reflects the NEPAD commitments. The peer review mechanism will inform our considerations of eligibility for enhanced partnerships. Each G8 member will make their own assessments. The bulk of UK bilateral assistance to Africa will flow to enhanced partnership countries, providing sustained and predictable levels of support to those countries best able to use it. Poor performers and those in conflict, will not be neglected, but the nature of the engagement will differ.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the status of the peer review mechanism within the New Partnership for Africa's Development. [84644]

Mr. Rammell: There has been welcome progress on NEPAD's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), an African-owned and led initiative. At the 3 November NEPAD Implementation Committee meeting in Abuja, African leaders developed an agreement on a comprehensive, voluntary, peer review mechanism covering political, economic and corporate governance. We welcome the decision of 12 members of the Implementation Committee plus Uganda to sign a Declaration of Intent to submit to the peer review process.

The NEPAD Secretariat has been tasked with finalising the accession process (by January) and developing the indicators for measuring performance in time for the next Implementation Committee meeting in February. Review of the first countries should start in April 2003.

Avient Air

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 44–50W, whether discussions have taken place in the last two years between British Government officials and *(a)* Andrew Smith and *(b)* other representatives of Avient Air in Zimbabwe on matters other than the sale of military equipment. [82998]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 25 November 2002]*: Further investigation has revealed that there have been a number of discussions in the last two years between Andrew Smith and British Government officials in London and Freetown concerning Mr. Smith's interest in a civil aviation contract in Sierra Leone. Mr. Smith has also made representations to officials following the publication of the UN Panel Report on the DRC.

In addition, further investigation has revealed that the previous Political Counsellor at the British High Commission in Harare met Mr. Smith on a number of occasions in the last two years, and that our Defence Attaché in Zimbabwe had a meeting with Mr. Smith in October 2001. The Defence Attaché also met him informally at several social events in that year.

I have instructed officials to continue investigations into contacts between Mr. Smith and Government officials and I will write if I have any further information.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions took place in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000 between British Government officials and (i) Mr. Andrew Smith and (ii) other representatives of Avient Air in (A) Zimbabwe and (B) the UK with regard to (1) sales of military equipment, (2) military operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo and (3) other matters. [83034]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* British High Commission officials in Zimbabwe had contact with Mr. Smith on a number of occasions between 1998 and 2000, including at social events. British officials did not at any time encourage, support or promote Mr. Smith's activities in the DRC.

I have instructed officials to continue investigations into contacts between Mr. Smith and Government officials and I will write if I have any further information.

Bonn Conference (Afghanistan)

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the Bonn conference he attended on 2 December with regard to progress in Afghanistan, with particular reference to *(a)* extending the ISAF effort outside of Kabul and *(b)* the progress of the restoration of women's rights; and if he will make a statement. [85623]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The participants at the Bonn conference reviewed the achievements of the past year; agreed on the text of a communiqué highlighting areas where further progress is needed; welcomed the intention of Afghanistan and neighbouring states to meet in Kabul on 22 December to decide on a declaration of good neighbourly relations; and welcomed the signing, by President Karzai, of a decree on principles governing the establishment of the Afghan National Army (ANA). The participants discussed the importance of pressing ahead with ANA reform and demobilisation in accordance with the agreed principles in order to improve the security situation throughout the country.

The participants agreed that the strengthening of the national independent Human Rights Commission's capacity for the monitoring of human rights implementation and investigations into human rights violations was fundamental. The participants also noted the importance of the development of a new constitution and the preparation for free and fair elections to select a broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative government. The UK will continue to work closely with the Afghan Transitional Administration and the rest of the international community to ensure women's full and active participation in civil, political, economic, social and cultural life throughout Afghanistan.

Child Protection

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with European colleagues on financial assistance to states to assist them in implementing programmes to protect minors against cruelty and exploitation. [83241]

Mr. MacShane: The issue arises frequently in discussions among European colleagues.

The EU has been actively engaged in the development of a comprehensive policy to fight violence against and the sexual exploitation of children, including child pornography and child sex tourism. The EU Daphne Programme, now with a budget of €20 million, has allowed for the implementation of around 100 projects dealing with the protection of children from all forms of violence: trafficking, child pornography and the internet, commercial sexual exploitation, and missing children.

The STOP II Programme was adopted in 2001 giving special attention to efforts to assist victims and to prevent trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children. This programme focuses on candidate countries and also provides for co-operation with third countries and international organisations.

Diamonds

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the impact which the EC regulations implementing the Kimberley Process of diamond certification will have on conflict diamond trading in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [84631]

Mr. Rammell: The DRC is a participant in the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. When that scheme comes into effect in January 2003, all exports of rough diamonds from the DRC will have to be accompanied by the appropriate Kimberley Process certificate. The EU regulation prohibits imports into the Community of rough diamonds not accompanied by a certificate.

Our expectation is that the implementation of this scheme will curb the circulation of so-called 'conflict diamonds' in legitimate markets.

The Government of the DRC is making positive steps to put in place legislative and administrative procedures to implement the scheme. The EU and some of the other participants in the Kimberley Process are prepared to assist the DRC with their implementation plans.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* sunset and *(b)* territoriality provisions are contained within the EC regulations implementing the Kimberley Process of diamond certification. [84632]

Mr. Rammell: The draft EC regulation on implementing the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme contains a review clause requiring the

Commission to report to the Council on the implementation of the regulation and on its possible repeal in the event that the Kimberley Process Scheme comes to an end.

The scope of the regulation covers Community territory, including airspace and aircraft,and vessels under a member state's jurisdiction. Outside the Community territory, it also applies to any national of a member state and to any legal person, entity or body, which is incorporated or constituted under the law of a member state.

Ethiopia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's decision to increase military assistance to Ethiopia. [84981]

Mr. Rammell: The Ethiopian Government has asked the United Kingdom to provide training for the police and security forces to assist in the democratisation process and in promoting respect for human rights. There will be a UK joint Ministry of Defence/DFID/ Foreign and Commonwealth Office scoping mission to Ethiopia in early 2003 to examine with the Government the best ways we can provide support and address human rights violations through effective training of the police and security forces.

Global Conflict Prevention Pool

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what military equipment has been purchased with funds from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool in each year since the programme's inception, indicating in each case the amount spent and the end uses. [82241]

Mr. Rammell: The Global Conflict Prevention Pool began operating in FY 2001–02. Its purpose is to improve the effectiveness of the UK's contribution to conflict prevention in areas other than sub-Saharan Africa, which is covered by the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool. The Global Pool covers the direct conflict prevention activities of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development and Ministry of Defence, where a joint approach adds value.

Its programme budget for FY 2001–02 was £60 million and for FY 2002–03 it was £100 million.

Details of military equipment purchased with Global Pool programme funding since its inception are as follows:

Recipient	*Financial year*	*Cost (£)*	*Description*
Afghanistan	FY 2002–03	1.412 million	Hard and soft top jeeps, trucks, communication equipment, security equipment including spotlights, radio, metal detectors
Afghan National Army, and ISAF/Afghan Police and Military controls at Kabul entry points	(to date)		
Nepal	FY 2001–02	285,818	Land Rovers spares and maintenance training, communications equipment
Royal Nepalese Army	FY 2002–03	3,099,347	Communications equipment, binoculars, compasses, Swiftscopes, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) equipment, two transport helicopters
Belize	FY 2001–02	169,555	Aircraft parts and freight costs, Land Rovers and spares, radio equipment
Belize Defence Force	FY 2002–03	127,259	Uniforms, mess kits, tents, hammocks, radio equipment
Macedonia	FY 2001–02	282,500	EOD equipment, body armour, global positioning system, mine detector sets, flares
Macedonian authorities		75,000	Four fork-lift trucks
Uruguay	FY 2001–02	27,014	Three NERA satellite phones and airtime

Ian Stillman

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Indian authorities on the case of Ian Stillman. [85169]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has raised Mr. Stillman's case with the Government of India on six occasions this year. Recently he raised it with the Indian Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, on 21 August 2002 and the Indian Foreign Minister on 31 October 2002. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, and the Deputy Prime Minister, and I, have also raised Mr. Stillman's case with the Indian Government. Most recently the Prime Minister wrote to Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee on 4 November expressing the hope that Mr. Stillman would be released soon.

The Indian Government have offered to consider a clemency plea from Mr. Stillman sympathetically. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met members of Mr. Stillman's family to discuss next steps in the case on 19 November 2002.

India

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to open the visa centre in Jallander, Punjab, India. [84901]

Mr. Rammell: We hope to open a visa application centre in Jallander early in 2003. We also hope to open a network of such centres across India to bring UK visa services nearer to our customers.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Ministers have visited India since 1 January 2001; and which Department they were from. [84902]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The following Ministers have visited India since 1 January 2001:

January 2001—Right hon. Baroness Blackstone, Minister of State for Education and Employment, Department for Education and Skills;

January 2001—Right hon. Stephen Byers, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Department of Trade and Industry;

January 2001—Right hon. Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development, Department for International Development;

February 2001—Right hon. Baroness Symons, Minister for Defence Procurement, Ministry of Defence;

July 2001—Right hon. John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister;

October 2001—Right hon. Tony Blair, Prime Minister;

October/November 2001—Douglas Alexander, Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, Department of Trade and Industry;

November 2001—Right hon. Geoff Hoon, Defence Secretary, Ministry of Defence;

January 2002—Right hon. Tony Blair, Prime Minister;

February 2002—Nigel Griffiths, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Business, Department of Trade and Industry;

February 2002—Right hon. Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs;

February 2002—Ben Bradshaw, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office;

February 2002—Right hon. Jack Straw, Foreign Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office;

May 2002—Right hon. Geoffery Hoon, Defence Secretary, Ministry of Defence;

May 2002—Right hon. Jack Straw, Foreign Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office;

July 2002—Right hon. Jack Straw, Foreign Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office;

September 2002—Right hon. John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister;

October/November 2002—Right hon. Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs;

October 2002—Right hon. Michael Meacher, Minister of State (Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs;

October 2002—Mike O'Brien, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office;

October 2002—Stephen Timms, Minister of State for School Standards, Department for Education and Skills;

November 2002—Right hon. Paul Boateng, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Her Majesty's Treasury;

December 2002—Right hon. Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development, Department for International Development.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received concerning the Anfal campaigns in Iraq in 1987–88. [85626]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Anfal campaigns have been well documented by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Tens of thousands of Kurds disappeared and hundreds of Kurdish villages were destroyed. The campaign included the use of chemical weapons where a single attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja killed up to 5,000 civilians and injured some 10,000 more.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the evidential basis is for his statement on page 7 of the unnumbered document Saddam Hussein: Crimes and Human Rights Abuses of the allegation relating to caning of members of the national football team on the feet. [85560]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In our document "Saddam Hussein: crimes and human rights abuses" we report the allegation that Udayy Hussein ordered the national football team to be caned on the soles of their feet after losing a World Cup qualifying match. The Foreign Office has had direct confirmation from Abbas al-Janabi, Press Secretary to Udayy Hussein at the time of the atrocity, that the incident occurred. An Iraqi national footballer, Sharar Haydar Mohamad al Hadithi, not involved in this match, is reported as saying that the caning did take place. Al Hadithi is also reported to have said that he was repeatedly caned on the soles of the feet, dragged through a pit of gravel and ordered to jump into a sewage pit to ensure the wounds were infected after having lost a match in 1994. These incidents conform with other stories suggesting a pattern of abusive behaviour by Udayy towards Iraqi sports people, for example the account of an Iraqi wrestler, Amra Haliff, in a Channel Four Despatches programme, broadcast on 17 November.

In 1997 FIFA sent officials to Iraq to investigate these allegations. Although Iraq was cleared, individuals who later fled Iraq, such as those mentioned above, confirmed that the allegations were true.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his statement on page 5 of his document, Saddam Hussein: Crimes and Human Rights Abuse, if he will name those who have had their ears cut off in Iraq. [85627]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The decree in 1994 called for the amputation of the outer part of the ear for those deserting the army of failing to join military service. The Iraqi regime itself acknowledges that it has pursued a policy of amputating ears. The Justice Minister, Shabib al-Maliki, said in an interview with Reuters on 18 January 1996 that a few criminals had had their ears amputated. The law was repealed at about that time. We do not have specific names. I will write to my hon. Friend further on this issue.

Kashmir

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the incidence of cross-border incursions and terrorist attacks across the Line of Control in India. [84863]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are some differences of view in India on the extent of any reduction on terrorist activity but on 27 November, India Defence Minister George Fernandes said "Some of the terrorist organisations in Pakistan were closed, some terrorist camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir were closed, their accounts frozen and leaders arrested. Moreover, the infiltration this year has come down considerably compared to the figures of the corresponding period of the previous year". Despite this, terrorist attacks continue in Jammu and Kashmir, most recently the

attack on the Raghunath Hindu Temple on 24 November which left over 50 injured. We unreservedly condemn such attacks. The Pakistan Government have assured us that President Musharraf's pledge that there will be no movement across the Line of Control stands, and that the Pakistani Army is doing all it can to stop infiltration. A permanent end to cross-border infiltration and terrorism in Kashmir is critical to a sustained and substantive dialogue leading towards a lasting settlement of the Kashmir issue.

Liberia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the compliance of the Guinean Government with the UN arms embargo on Liberia. [84986]

Mr. Rammell: Guinea has supported maintenance of the arms embargo on Liberia, including as a member of the Security Council.

President Charles Taylor of Liberia alleges that Guinea is supplying the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) in breach of the arms embargo. The UN Security Council reaffirmed in a statement on 26 November, that the arms embargo applies to any recipient in Liberia, including non-state actors.

The UN Panel of Experts Report on Liberia of 7 October 2002 states that ammunition captured from LURD rebels in Liberia had been part of a shipment from the United Arab Emirates to Guinea. This shipment was reported to have been destroyed by fire. It is unclear how the ammunition could have come into the possession of the LURD.

We call on all countries, without exception, to respect the arms embargo on Liberia.

Prisons (Tanzania)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence has been received by his Department on the adherence to basic human rights within prisons in Tanzania. [84992]

Mr. Rammell: We have no evidence of systematic violation of human rights within prisons in Tanzania. However, lack of institutional, financial and physical capacity in the prison service results in chronic overcrowding in Tanzania's prisons. This means that observance of international standards is not always achieved.

Visas

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visas were issued at *(a)* New Delhi, *(b)* Mumbai, *(c)* Calcutta, *(d)* Dhaka, *(e)* Sylhet, *(f)* Islamabad, *(g)* Karachi, *(h)* Washington and *(i)* New York in 2001. [84904]

Mr. Rammell: UK visas changed to collecting statistics on a financial year basis from the beginning of financial year 2001–02. The Joint Management Board supervising the operations of UK visas requested this change to bring statistical data into line with other data collected by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office.

The total number of visas issued in New Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Dhaka, Islamabad, Karachi, Washington and New York from April 2001 to March 2002 was as follows:

New Delhi—64,343
Mumbai—66,108
Kolkuta (Calcutta)—9,907
Dhaka—19,896
Islamabad—56,182
Karachi—28,634
Washington—11,414
New York—31,779

Sylhet is not a visa issuing post, applications are taken in and sent to Dhaka for processing.

HEALTH

Botox Injections

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the risk from Botox injections. [83849]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 November 2002]*: Botox was subject to stringent testing for safety, quality and effectiveness before a marketing authorisation for medicinal use was granted. As with all authorised medicines, the safety of Botox is continually monitored by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the Committee on Safety of Medicines, an expert advisory committee. The MCA monitors the safety of drugs using all available sources and reviews any in light of any new evidence which emerges.

CBRN Incidents

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made to deal with the disposal of corpses contaminated by a CBRN attack. [82584]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 25 November 2002]*: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 366W.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the costs to local authorities of the proposed fines for delayed discharge; [83851]

(2) what formula he will use to distribute the £100 million from the NHS to social services to recompense for delayed discharge; [85235]

(3) which organisations he consulted on the policy of the extra £100 million for social services budgets for tackling delayed discharge that will come from within the NHS budget; [85233]

(4) how he arrived at the figure of £100 million for the annual cost to social services departments in England for delayed discharge; and if he will publish the calculations and data used to arrive at his estimate. [85230]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answers 28 November and 4 December 2002]:* The maximum cost that social services would face in payments to hospitals under the Community Care (Delayed Discharges, etc) Bill would be £100 million in any one year. That is on the assumption that councils make no progress at all beyond the targets they have already set themselves to reduce the levels of delayed discharges from hospitals by March 2003. It pre-supposes that social services do not use the annual increase in resources to put in place new services to help reduce delayed discharges from hospitals still further and that none of the £1 billion—most of which is earmarked—for elderly care services actually gets spent on building up capacity in elderly care services. Given these assumptions, the Government does not believe that social services will have to pay £100 million to the health service.

Nevertheless, for each of the next three full years, an extra £100 million—on top of the resources already made available—will be transferred from the national health service budget to social services for each full year in which the scheme operates. This will provide a positive incentive to make the system work. This will enable individual councils to gain from the system, provided that they make available the community services needed to reduce delayed discharges from hospitals. The fundamental objection to the Bill, particularly from local government interests during consultation, was that social services were being given a new responsibility without adequate resources. These resources address that.

The formula for allocating this to councils is still being considered.

EU Directives (Food Supplements)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he is making to the European Commission about the proposed directives on nutritional supplements and herbal remedies; and what changes to the directives he is proposing; [83840]

(2) what his policy is on support for each of the amendments passed by the European Parliament to the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive when next the Council of Ministers considers the Directive. [84212]

Ms Blears: Directive 2002/46/EC on Food Supplements came into force on 12 July 2002. The Food Standards Agency is not proposing any amendments to the Directive.

In the ongoing negotiations on the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products our priorities will be to press for greater scope to take account of valid evidence of traditional use from outside the European Union, for national flexibility to extend simplified registration to at least some categories of non herbal traditional medicines and for the Directive to cover traditional herbal remedies with added nutrients. The latter point might be covered by either specific amendment or through reasonable interpretation of the current text.

We support the principle of amendments which would: reduce the required period of usage within the European Union, permit the inclusion of nutrients with traditional herbal remedies; strengthen the role of the proposed Committee on Herbal Medicinal Products; set a deadline of three years after the Directive coming into force for the completion of the proposed review of the Directive.

We intend to oppose the principle of automatic recognition of registrations or authorisations previously granted to a product in other member states since we believe this could serve to reduce flexibility available to member states; also, historical differences in the way member states have regulated similar products would be likely to create difficulties for a member state seeking to follow a consistent interpretation of the distinction between well established use, for the purposes of a marketing authorisation, and traditional use. We will oppose, on public health grounds, the principle of allowing new combinations of active medicinal ingredients without evidence of traditional use of that combination, although we will continue to look for ways during negotiations of maximising the possibilities for demonstrating traditional use of herbal combinations.

We will oppose the principle of restricting the Directive to ingredients for which there is well documented experimental and clinical evidence of efficacy, as this would run counter to the principle of accepting evidence of traditional usage in place of the normal requirement to demonstrate the efficacy of medicines and could erect an additional regulatory hurdle.

We will consider further the specific proposal to amend the definition of herbal medicinal product in relation to the extent of pharmacological activity. As drafted this could rule out a number of products from achieving registration, in particular where medicines are regarded as medicinal by virtue of their presentation. Also we have doubts about the advisability of amending the definition of a medicinal product in relation to herbal medicines only, when issues relating to levels of pharmacological activity also affect other categories of medicine. However, this regulatory area is a complex one and we will continue to be open to dialogue on this issue, whether in domestic discussions with the herbal sector or European negotiations.

We will consider further the principle of removing the labelling and advertising requirement to indicate that efficacy of traditional use product is not clinically proven. The potential advantages of a more positive presentation of products registered under the proposed traditional use scheme need to be weighed against the possible risk of weakening the incentive for companies to research the efficacy of herbal medicines.

Frictional Discharge

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his definition is of frictional discharge; and what the level of frictional discharge was in the last 12 months. [84805]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: The system of financial incentives that the Community Care (Delayed Discharges, etc) Bill will put in place means that there is no longer a need for a national level of "frictional" delays. These will vary from locality to locality and the financial incentives will ensure that the level of delayed transfers of care is at a minimal level by 2006.

Furazolidone

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to label turkeys imported from Brazil that have been treated with nitrofuran antibiotic furazolidone drug. [85004]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: Following the discovery of illegal residues of nitrofuran drugs in poultry by the United Kingdom and other member states, the European Union Commission has put in place measures to protect consumer safety. All imports of Brazilian poultry, including turkeys, are held by border inspection posts and released into the food supply only if these illegal residues are not detected. This action offers greater consumer protection than a labelling initiative.

Hepatitis C

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will initiate a large scale screening programme for hepatitis C. [85040]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 December 2002]*: Our consultation paper, "Hepatitis C Strategy for England", which was published on 14 August 2002, proposes that individuals at increased risk of infection or with otherwise unexplained liver disease should be offered testing for hepatitis C.

We will be issuing guidance to the national health service on hepatitis C testing as part of implementation of the strategy.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of new infections of hepatitis C there will be in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2004. [85041]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 December 2002]*: New cases of hepatitis C infection usually occur without causing symptoms. Therefore it is not possible to identify new infections or make reliable estimates of future trends.

The Public Health Laboratory Service receives reports of laboratory diagnoses of antibody to hepatitis C. These diagnoses are not able to distinguish between new and previous infections and most often identify individuals with chronic hepatitis C infection. As proposed in our consultation paper, "Hepatitis C Strategy for England", it is expected that there will be an increase in the diagnosis of chronic hepatitis C infection over the next few years, as individuals who have carried the virus for some time are identified through wider testing of groups who have been at risk.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the proportion of moderate to severe sufferers of hepatitis C who receive the mandated treatment specified by NICE. [85044]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 December 2002]*: The Department of Health does not hold information centrally about the number of patients receiving treatment for hepatitis C.

Herbal Medicines

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the suitability of the Medicines Control Agency as the regulatory body for herbal remedies. [84182]

Ms Blears: Many medicines contain plant ingredients or have been derived from plant sources. The Medicines Control Agency and its predecessor within the Department has regulated plant based medicines for many years. The MCA is internationally recognised for its regulatory expertise and we are satisfied that the Agency should continue to regulate herbal medicines. We also take the view that regulatory efficiency and effectiveness would be impaired if responsibility for the regulation of medicines were to be split between different regulatory bodies, depending on whether or not a medicine was plant based.

Medical Devices Agency

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to speed clinical implementation of recommendations by the Medical Devices Agency. [82923]

Ms Blears: The Medical Devices Agency (MDA) has instituted a system in acute trusts for monitoring the advice contained in device hazard notices and device alerts to ensure timely distribution and implementation.

The MDA is also working closely with the National Patient Safety Agency and colleagues in the Department to introduce a new system to record and monitor the implementation of all safety warnings and to see that these are embedded within each trust's risk management and controls assurance processes.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the costs arising to manufacturers from *(a)* Medicines Control Agency fees, *(b)* the costs of document preparation, *(c)* the storage of batches for testing, *(d)* analysis cost and *(e)* annual licence fees for (i) a simple herbal product with one ingredient and (ii) a complex herbal product containing several ingredients, in connection with the submission of applications for registration under the provisions of the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive. [84210]

Ms Blears: The proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products is under negotiation and at this stage it is not yet possible to identify detailed costs. However, under the current proposals it should not be necessary for companies to demonstrate the efficacy of the product and where products comply with the proposed European positive list, it will not be necessary to provide evidence of safety or traditional use either. We would expect that to be reflected in the fee levels for a traditional use registration. Any proposed fee levels

will need to be agreed by Ministers and will be the subject of public consultation before they are put before Parliament.

We welcome the stated intention of the herbal forum, a group which represents all the United Kingdom manufacturing trade associations operating in the herbal sector, to have constructive discussions with the Medicines Control Agency on a wide range of detailed practical issues relating to negotiations on the Directive and its implementation should the Directive be agreed. A key aim of these discussions will be to identify ways to contain regulatory impact, consistent with protecting public health.

Mental Health (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the specialist mental health posts in Leeds, West; and indicate which are filled. [81493]

Jacqui Smith: The 'three-month vacancy' and staff in post figures as at March 2002 for the former Leeds Community and Mental Health Services National Health Service Trust can be found in the table.

Total Psychiatry Group	
3-month vacancy rate (percentage)	11.6
3-month vacancy rate (number)	10
Staff in post (wte)	40
Staff in post (head count)	40
General Psychiatry	
3-month vacancy rate (percentage)	4.7
3-month vacancy rate (number)	0
Staff in post (wte)	20
Staff in post (head count)	20

Notes:

1. 3-month vacancy information as at 31 March 2002.
2. 3-month vacancies are vacancies which NHS trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for 3 months or more (wte).
3. 3-month vacancy rates are 3-month vacancies expressed as a percentage of 3-month vacancies plus staff in post.
4. 3-month vacancy rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey and the Consultant Census, March 2002.
5. Staff in post data is from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2001 and the Mini Consultant Census, March 2002.
6. Staff in post data excludes staff employed by the health authorities.
7. Medical and dental figures exclude staff in training.
8. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.
9. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
10. Strategic health authority figures are based on NHS trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of health care.
11. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.

Sources:

1. Vacancy numbers and rates: DoH Vacancies Survey March 2002 and Consultant Census Health.
2. Medical and dental staff in post: DoH Consultant Census March 2002.

Information is not available for the specialities of child and adolescent psychiatry, forensic psychiatry, old age psychiatry, psychiatry of learning disability and psychotherapy as the sum of staff in post and vacancies is less than 10.

Norwalk Viruses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of outbreaks of Norwalk-like viruses in NHS hospitals; [84146]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost of hospital outbreaks of Norwalk-like viruses to the NHS. [84147]

Ms Blears: The public health laboratory service (PHLS) has a voluntary reporting system for outbreaks of gastroenteritis, including those caused by norovirus, previously known as Norwalk-like virus. These data are known to be incomplete but in 2001, 80 hospital outbreaks[1] were reported and to date in 2002 there have been 183 reports. We believe that this increase reflects both improved reporting and the fact that the usual decline in norovirus infections over the summer months did not occur this year. As part of a separate initiative, the PHLS has approached specialist laboratories and identified a further 275 outbreaks that had not been reported.

We do not have data on the costs to the NHS of outbreaks of gastroenteritis caused by norovirus.

[1] Outbreaks in England and Wales proven or suspected of being associated with norovirus.

Opioid Substitution Treatments

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake a study of the comparative advantages of using buprenorphine over methadone in opioid substitution treatments. [85039]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The Department's guidelines document—"Drug misuse and dependence—guidelines on clinical management" (1999) describes the principles required for safe and effective clinical practice. The guidelines also describe the use of buprenorphine with reference to the evidence base (including its advantages and disadvantages) both for substitution for detoxification and substitution for maintenance prescribing.

The national treatment agency for substance misuse (NTA) has a key role in considering and developing the research base for treatment and in disseminating evidence into practice. It has convened an on-going working group—the 'expert prescribing group' that meets regularly to consider treatment issues. Hence mechanisms are in place which allow the research agenda and evidence base to be kept under constant review.

Buprenorphine has a long history of use in the United Kingdom, but more recently, with increasing experience of use, as a substitute maintenance and detoxification treatment. The NTA is currently reviewing its research priorities and will continue to consider treatment issues as they develop.

Orthopaedic Care (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the length of time it takes to get *(a)* an appointment and *(b)* treatment in the orthopaedic departments in Leeds Health Trust. [81494]

Jacqui Smith: The Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust meets all NHS Plan targets with regard to referrals for out-patient appointments in orthopaedics. In September 2001, there were a total of 1,640 people who had waited longer than 21 weeks for an out-patient appointment in orthopaedics. In September 2002, there was nobody who had waited longer than 21 weeks. That represents a significant improvement.

The trust also meets the NHS plan target to operate on all orthopaedic patients within a maximum of 12 months.

Seroxat

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the use of the drug Seroxat; and what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effects of the drug. [83518]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 2 December 2002]*: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) has received a range of representations including parliamentary questions, letters from hon. and right hon. Members, patients and health care professionals about the safety of Seroxat.

Seroxat (paroxetine) is a member of a group of drugs known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Before a product is granted a licence for use in the United Kingdom, satisfactory evidence of safety, quality and efficacy is required. After licensing, the safety of all medicines including SSRIs is continually monitored by the MCA and the independent expert advisory body, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) and any new evidence which emerges is carefully reviewed.

The MCA and the CSM carried out a major review of all side effects associated with SSRIs, which was completed in 2000 and resulted in product information for all SSRIs including Seroxat being updated and harmonised to reflect the common safety profiles of these medicines. An article in Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance in 2000 informed prescribers about this review and reminded them about the risk of withdrawal reactions.

Withdrawal reactions are an important and well-recognised side effect of Seroxat and also occur with the other SSRIs. The MCA/CSM warned prescribers about the possibility of withdrawal reactions associated with Seroxat via an article in the bulletin Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance in 1993. The CSM re-reviewed the issue of withdrawal reactions and possible dependence with Seroxat and the other SSRIs in 1998–99. From detailed review of all available data, which included spontaneous reports, published literature, clinical trials and usage data, the CSM concluded that all SSRIs may be associated with withdrawal reactions on stopping but on current evidence they are not associated with dependence. As a result of this review product information for all SSRIs was updated in relation to withdrawal reactions. This issue was also reviewed at a European level by the Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP) which reached similar conclusions.

The product information for Seroxat which includes the summary of product characteristics for prescribers and the patient information leaflet contains details of side effects and warnings about withdrawal reactions. Doctors are advised to consider gradual tapering of dose when Seroxat is discontinued rather than abruptly stopping to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

The MCA/CSM is currently undertaking an intensive review of the safety of SSRIs, and in particular withdrawal reactions with Seroxat. When this is complete, any new advice will be communicated to prescribers and patients.

Specialised Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2002, on specialised services, *Official Report*, ref 82780, if he will list the groups that attended the meeting on 10 September. [85391]

Mr. Hutton: The following organisations attended the national review group meeting on 10 September, considering commissioning arrangements for specialised services:

The Academy of Royal Medical Colleges
The Joint Consultants' Committee
Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales
The Patients' Association
The National Health Service Confederation
One strategic health authority
Four primary care trusts
Five national health service trusts
Chairs of regional specialised commissioning groups
National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group
Department of Health
Observers from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Royal College of Nursing were invited, but were unable to attend.

Sporadic CJD

Mr. John Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government are doing to investigate sporadic CJD. [85388]

Ms Blears: One of the Department of Health-funded National Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Surveillance Unit's tasks is to identify and to investigate all cases of CJD, including sporadic CJD, in the United Kingdom by clinical examination, clinical investigations, neuropathological examination, genetic analysis, molecular biological studies, collecting basic epidemiological data and carrying out a case-control study. In addition, the UK is a member of the European and Allied Countries Collaborative Study Group, which is investigating the disease within and across European countries.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Accommodation Centres

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the Independent Monitor of Accommodation Centres will be able to consider

whether the location of a centre prevents a need of its residents from being met only once it has been built; [85015]

(2) if it is the responsibility of the Independent Monitor of Accommodation Centres to monitor the operation of the whole of Part 2 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002; [85016]

(3) if the views of the Independent Monitor of Accommodation Centres will be taken into account by the Secretary of State in his evaluation of sites for further accommodation centres; [85017]

(4) if he will take into account views expressed by the Independent Monitor of Accommodation Centres as to whether a place as a location for the provision of premises to accommodate asylum seekers and their dependants prevents a need of its residents from being met. [85014]

Beverley Hughes: Whether the location of an accommodation centre prevents a need of its residents from being met is a matter that can only be considered and assessed by the monitor once the accommodation centre is up and running. The monitor will not be involved in the selection of sites and there is no requirement for the Secretary of State to consult the monitor prior to establishing an accommodation centre. Decisions on the location of accommodation centres will be taken by the Secretary of State, subject to the planning process.

Part 2 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 makes provisions regarding accommodation centres. Under section 34, the monitor is required to monitor the operation of Part 2 of the Act, and in particular, to consider:

(i) the quality and effectiveness of accommodation and other facilities provided in accommodation centres;

(ii) the nature and enforcement of conditions of residence;

(iii) the treatment of residents; and

(iv) whether, in the case of any accommodation centre, its location prevents a need of its residents from being met.

The monitor must report at least annually to the Secretary of State after the centres are up and running and the Secretary of State must lay a copy of the annual report he receives before Parliament as soon as is reasonably practicable.

If the monitor were to produce a critical report and identify a need of the residents of an accommodation centre which the location of the centre was preventing from being met, this would be one factor in the overall evaluation of the trial. If the monitor raised concerns with the Secretary of State, either in a formal report or before making his formal report, we would be able to consider whether those concerns required changes to be made.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rights district councils have to stop asylum seekers coming into an area. [84651]

Beverley Hughes: It is Government policy that asylum seekers who request that accommodation be provided as part of an application for support are dispersed away from London and the south-east. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS), with the approval of Ministers of the day, designated certain areas (referred to by NASS as "cluster areas") as suitable for the dispersal of asylum seekers. Prior to designation NASS consulted each regional consortium (made up of all local authorities and county councils within that region) to seek their views on areas proposed for designation. District councils have no right to either stop NASS procuring accommodation for asylum seekers or to prevent asylum seekers being moved into NASS accommodation in their area.

Asylum seekers not requiring accommodation from NASS can live wherever they choose. Local councils have no duty to provide housing to asylum seekers if their need for this arises solely as a result of destitution.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to compel a county council to accept asylum seekers. [85063]

Beverley Hughes: Under section 101 of the Immigration and asylum Act 1999 we can, by order designate an area as a reception zone. No such orders have been made. We have established dispersal areas for asylum seekers requiring accommodation. A county council has no power to prevent asylum seekers being housed in accommodation provided to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for that purpose by an accommodation provider in an area designated by NASS as suitable for the housing of asylum seekers supported by NASS.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Folkestone is a high-dispersal area so far as asylum seekers are concerned. [85561]

Beverley Hughes: Folkestone is not used by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) as a dispersal area for asylum seekers requiring accommodation.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why he proposes to locate a 24-hour reporting centre for asylum seekers in Folkestone. [85563]

Beverley Hughes: The setting up of regional asylum reporting centres is part of the Government's strategy to introduce a more rigorous control into the asylum process and bring about improved contact with asylum seekers while their claims are under consideration. The aim is to achieve stronger management of the asylum process, while affording asylum seekers opportunities to monitor the progress of their cases.

Maintaining contact with asylum seekers while their claims are considered is essential. It is in the interests of all parties—the applicant, the local community and central and local Government—that asylum applications are managed quickly and efficiently as part of a well managed asylum system.

Reporting centres will form an important part of this process, providing a well managed approach to the handling of asylum seeker's applications; from arrival to the removal of failed applicants, or the integration into the community of those recognised as refugees.

The Government are planning to set up a number of reporting centres throughout the UK as part of an overall contact management strategy to support the processing of asylum applications and is keen to utilise such centres for this reporting process, rather than have asylum seekers reporting to their local police station with significant implications on police resources.

Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on how many occasions the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs met to discuss its 2002 report on the classification of cannabis prior to its completion; which members of the Council attended each meeting; and if he will place the minutes of the meetings in the Library; [85093]

(2) on what basis members of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs are appointed; [85092]

(3) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the concentration of the active ingredients in cannabis used in the United Kingdom, with particular reference to THC; and what changes have occurred in this respect since 1972; [85098]

(4) if he will ask the Advisory Committee on the Misuse of Drugs to review their recommendation on the reclassification of cannabis following recent research into a causal relationship between the drug and mental illness; [85099]

(5) on the basis of what scientific evidence the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on the Misuse of Drugs to downgrade the classification of cannabis was made; and what research led the Advisory Committee on the Misuse of Drugs to conclude that the original decision on the classification of cannabis should be changed; [85096]

(6) if the conclusions to the 2002 Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs report on the classification of cannabis apply to all forms of cannabis; [85094]

(7) if his intention to reclassify cannabis applies to all forms; [85095]

(8) what assessment he has made of recent research into the causal relationship between cannabis use and mental illness; and if he will make a statement. [85100]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The report by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs: 'The classification of cannabis under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971' was based on a detailed scrutiny of the relevant scientific literature, including four reviews commissioned by the Department of Health in 1998 as well as an update commissioned by the Home Office and completed in November 2001. A copy of the Council's report is in the Library. A fuller list of source materials is set out at pages 13 and 14 of the report.

The Advisory Council is a statutory and independent Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body, which was established under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Under the Act members of the Council, of whom there should be not less than 20, are appointed by the Secretary of State They must include representatives of the practices of medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and pharmacy, the pharmaceutical industry and chemistry other than the pharmaceutical industry and people who have a wide range of experience of social problems connected with the misuse of drugs.

Since 1971 the Advisory Council has kept the classification all drugs of abuse including cannabis under periodic and systematic review. Following my right hon Friend the Home Secretary's announcement on 23 October 2001 that he would ask the Council to review the classification of cannabis, the Council agreed at its meeting on 8 November to commission some individual members to produce a draft report on the classification of cannabis. The Council met to discuss the draft report on 15 January 2002. It's discussion was informed by meetings of sub-committees of the Council, which had been held on 1 November 2001 and the morning of 15 January 2002.

Minutes of meetings of the Council are not published documents. However, the Council's report on the classification of cannabis (referred to above) represents the outcome of the Council's discussions on 15 January 2002.

During the period leading up to the Advisory Council's report, its' membership, and the capacity jn which members were appointed, reads as follows:

Sir Michael Rawlins, Chairman of the Council, Professor of Pharmacology, University of Newcastle;

Mr Vivian Ahmun, Director, Network Drugs Advice Project London;

Mrs Joy Barlow, Independent consultant and researcher, Peebleshire;

Mr Norman Bettison, Chief Constable, Merseyside Police;

Reverend Martin Blakeborough, Director, Kaleidoscope Drugs Project, Kingston upon Thames;

Mr Raj Boyjoonauth, Specialist Manager, The Riverside Mental Health Service, London;

Mr Alexander Cameron, Director of Social Work, South Lanarkshire Council;

Dr William Clee, General Medical Practitioner, South Wales;

Dr Michael Donmall, Unit Director, North West Regional Drug Research Unit, Manchester;

Mr Roger Howard, Chief Executive, DrugScope;

Mr Alan Hunter, Secretary of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry;

Professor Ronald Jones, Professor of Veterinary Anaesthesia, University of Liverpool;

Professor Otto Meth-Cohn, Chemistry Department, University of Sunderland;

Mr Michael Narayn Singh, Public Education Officer, Manchester City Council;

Professor David Nutt, Director of Psychopharmacology Unit, University of Bristol;

Dr Diana Patterson, Consultant Psychiatrist, Shaftesbury Square Hospital, Belfast;

Mrs Kay Roberts, Area Pharmacy Specialist-Drug Abuse, Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust;

Mrs Patrcia Roberts, Director of the Drug Studies Unit, Ruskin;

Dr Anthony Duxbury, Senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant in Oral Medicine, University Dental Hospital of Manchester;

Ms Vivienne Evans, Chief Executive Addiction Service for Families (ADFAM);

Dr Laurence Gruer, Director HIV & Addictions,Clinical Directorate Resource Centre, Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow;

Ms Kim Hager, Independent Drugs Counsellor, Exeter;

Mr Peter Hampson, Chief Constable West Mercia Constabulary;

Mr Paul Hayes, South East London Probation Service;

Mr Russell Hayton, Manager of Drug and Alcohol Services, Plymouth National Health Service Trust;

Ms Lorraine Hewitt, Project Manager, the Stockwell Project, West Lambeth Community Care;

Mr Peter Housden, Chief Executive, Nottinghamshire County Council;

Dr Roy Robertson, General Medical Practitioner, Edinburgh;

Dr Sue Ruben, Consultant Psychiatrist, Liverpool;

Mr Ian Sherwood, Senior Clinical Nurse Specialist, Avon Drug Problem Team;

Professor John Strang, Director of the Addiction Research Unit, National Addiction Centre;

Mr Peter Walker, Headteacher, the Abbey School, Kent; and

Mrs Barbara Whiteley, Magistrate, London.

The possible link between cannabis use and mental illness (especially schizophrenia) has been debated for many years. In its report on the classification of cannabis, the Advisory Council said that no clear causal link was demonstrated, although cannabis could unquestionably worsen schizophrenia (and other mental illnesses) and lead to relapse in some patients. The research highlighted by the British Medical Journal (23 November 2002) adds to, but is not at variance with, the existing body of research which was drawn on by the Council in its consideration of the classification of cannabis. The Council reviews all recent research in a systematic way. The Home Secretary does not propose to ask the Council to review its recommendation about the classification of cannabis.

The Forensic Science Service and the Laboratory of the Government Chemist analyse drug seizures and are therefore able to monitor the concentration of active ingredients in cannabis used in the United Kingdom, and in particular of the main psychoactive ingredient, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). The data they have collected indicates that the THC content of different cannabis products has varied, and continues to vary, widely, but that during the late 1980s and 1990s products with higher levels of THC became available as a result of new growing techniques being developed.

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, in its report on the classification of cannabis, recommended the reclassification of all cannabis preparations to Class C under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. This includes all forms of cannabis listed in Parts 1 and 11 of Schedule 2 to the Act. The Home Secretary intends to bring forward proposals to the House to amend the Act in line with the Council's recommendations.

Care Home Registrations

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of time was for care home managers' and owners' applications to be registered and processed by the NCSC; and how many applications have been outstanding in each of the last six months for which figures are available. [84997]

Jacqui Smith. I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not currently available.

CCTV

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many urban areas are under 24-hour surveillance through the use of CCTV cameras; and what plans he has to extend the use of CCTV cameras for street surveillance. [84396]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Home Office does not hold information on the number of privately or publicly owned Close Circuit Television (CCTV) schemes in urban areas which operate 24 hour surveillance. It is for individual scheme owners (police, local authority or trading association) to decide surveillance periods based on crime and disorder patterns in their area and adopt an integrated approach.

Coventry had five successful bids totalling £610,718 under the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative. Although this Initiative is now closed, other opportunities for funding of CCTV schemes currently exist under the Safer Communities, Communities Against Drugs and Small Retailers in Deprived Areas Initiatives.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated cost is to his Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81873]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 98W.

Immigration

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his oral statement of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 611–12, what criteria he has used to differentiate between Iraqi nationals resident in the Sangatte Refugee Centre and those resident in the United Kingdom in the issuing of work permits. [85480]

Beverley Hughes: Iraqis from Sangatte will be issued with work visas in order to admit them to the UK. This is an exceptional scheme designed to deal with an exceptional set of circumstances. It has no implications for other Iraqi nationals resident in the UK.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the Iraqi nationals resident in the Sangatte Refugee Centre to whom he intends to offer work permits he expects to be initially accommodated in the county of Kent. [85476]

Beverley Hughes: None.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Treasury on meeting the additional costs of *(a)* housing, *(b)* medical care, *(c)* education and *(d)* police activity generated by the influx of Iraqis currently accommodated in the Sangatte Refugee Centre from central government funds. [85477]

Beverley Hughes: None. The Home Office will meet from its own budget any temporary costs arising from the need to receive people from Sangatte and match them to jobs. The Iraqis are being admitted on the basis that they will work. We expect them to make a contribution to our economy, not impose a burden.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his oral statement of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 611–12, whether it is his policy that no asylum seekers carrying French badges other than those in Sangatte Refugee Centre will be admitted to the United Kingdom. [85478]

Beverley Hughes: The Red Cross issued "badges" to all Sangatte residents between 27 September and 5 November. The arrangements announced on 2 December for bringing certain Sangatte residents to the UK apply to "badged" Sangatte residents who presented themselves at the centre by 8 pm on Tuesday 3 December.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has reached with the French Government to ensure that those wishing to seek asylum and having entered France do so in that country and are not permitted to transit to the United Kingdom. [85479]

Beverley Hughes: Since the Sangatte Centre closed to new entrants on 5 November, the French have expected illegal migrants in the Calais area to face deportation or claim asylum in France. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and Nicolas Sarkozy agreed on 2 December that the existing levels of security will be maintained in the Calais area until the message is fully understood that illegal immigration from Northern France to the UK is no longer possible.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his oral statement of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 611–12, how many *(a)* Iraqi and *(b)* Afghan nationals are claiming asylum in the United Kingdom. [85483]

Beverley Hughes: Between July and September 2002, 4,300 Iraqi and 1,555 Afghan nationals applied for asylum in the United Kingdom (excluding dependants). The number of Iraqi and Afghan asylum applicants currently awaiting an initial decision is not available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

77 per cent. of applications received in the period April to June 2002 had initial decisions made and served within two months (excludes withdrawals and third country cases).

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly. The latest publication was published on 29 November 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks are made in the immigration appeal system to prevent individuals making subsequent appeals under an alias after their original appeal has been refused; and what the cost was of such appeals in each of the last five years [82182]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration Acts make provision for a right of appeal against decisions made by the Secretary of State to refuse immigration and asylum applications to an Adjudicator of the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA). An appeal to an Adjudicator—the first tier of the IAA —must follow an immigration or asylum application. Consequently it is not possible to make a subsequent immigration appeal as described unless another application attracting a right of appeal has been made, and refused. Checks for multiple or alias applications would occur at the application stage rather than at the appeal stage.

Public Protection

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for members of the public, with proper training, to be involved in the strategic management of multi-agency public protection arrangements; and when they will come into practice. [82671]

Hilary Benn: Arrangements for appointing lay people to the strategic management boards of the multi-agency public protection arrangements are being piloted in eight Areas: Durham, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Cumbria, Surrey, Dorset, Hampshire and South Wales. They have been recruited using a thorough screening and selection system provided by the Home Office Assessment and Consultancy Unit.

A period of local induction and training in each of the pilot areas now follows, with national training for all those recruited in late January. This training will be delivered by experienced professionals in the field of public protection. It is expected that they will begin sitting on the strategic boards of the pilot areas as functioning members in the new year. The evaluation of the pilots will be conducted by Manchester University and overseen by the Home Office's Research Directorate.

The Government sees this as an important part of building public confidence in the excellent work the police and probation services, supported by other agencies, do in this field. The Criminal Justice Bill includes measures which will enable my right hon. Friend Home Secretary to appoint two lay advisers to each area's multi-agency public protection arrangements once that bill has been enacted.

Prison Population

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department is taking to ensure that where prisoners are enrolled in a course offering *(a)* education and *(b)* basic skills training, such prisoners are not moved to a different prison before completion of their course. [84249]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service tries to ensure prisoners complete education courses and minimise any disruption to family life. Establishments are advised to place the necessary 'holds' on prisoners studying for basic skills qualifications.

All prisons have a mandatory requirement to provide a core curriculum which includes basic skills, information technology and preparation for work all of which are assessed using nationally recognised qualifications.

Basic skills are assessed using a national test which is available weekly. Therefore a prisoner who is transferred midway through a basic skills course is likely to be able to continue this at the receiving prison if access to the education department is provided.

Furthermore, prisoners' studying for other core curriculum subjects should be able to complete these if they are transferred.

Probation

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the expected gross increase in the National Probation Service budget is for the next financial year; how much of that increase will be spent on *(a)* National Directorate administration and programmes, *(b)* probation officer training, *(c)* hostels revenue grant and *(d)* probation board revenue resource allocation; and how much of the Probation Board allocation will be spent on (i) property and estate charges and (ii) national information technology increases. [84303]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The National Probation Service budget for the next financial year is expected to rise from £675.8 million to £746 million, an increase of just over £70 million. This is analysed as follows:

£ million

	2002–03	*2003–04*	*Change*
(a) National Probation Directorate (NPD) Admin and Programmes	52.8	50.7	-2.1
(b) Probation Officer Training	42.0	53.0	11.0
(c) Hostels Revenue Grant	42.7	49.0	6.3
(d) General Revenue Allocation	520.0	575.0	55.0
(e) Estate and Hostels	18.3	18.3	0.0
Total	675.8	746.0	70.2

It is estimated that the property and estate charges (excluding approved premises) will be about £62 million in 2003–04. The Home Office does not have precise information from probation boards about expenditure on property and estate charges in 2002–03. It is estimated that the costs in 2002–03 are about £52 million. The total budget of £62 million represents about 10 per cent. of the combined expenditure on the main service including training.

It is estimated that the information technology costs will increase from £16 million to £21 million. Most of this increase is required to provide a superior network. The total budget of £21 million for boards represents 3.1 per cent. of the combined board expenditure on main service activities, hostels and training.

Substance Misuse

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on preventive measures to tackle the misuse of *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* tobacco, *(c)* cannabis, *(d)* ecstasy, *(e)* amphetamines, *(f)* LSD, *(g)* heroin, *(h)* cocaine and *(i)* crack cocaine, in each of the last five years. [83466]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* With regard to expenditure related to alcohol and tobacco I refer the hon. Member to the response given by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) to his question on 28 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 665W.

Separate figures are not available for the different illicit drugs specified. The nature of the expenditure can however be broken down by purpose. Figures for planned preventative expenditure across Government on all illicit drugs for the period 2000–01 to 2002–03 as follows:

preventing drug misuse by young people, including education, and early interventions which are particularly targeted at vulnerable young people—2000–01: £63 million, 2001–02: £92 million, 2002–03: £102 million;

prevention of misuse by initiatives to disrupt trafficking and to reduce the supply of drugs—2000–01: £353 million, 2001–02: £373 million, 2002–03 : £376 million; and

preventative initiatives to strengthen communities and reduce the impact on them of drug misuse—2000–01: £45 million, 2001–02: £139 million, 2002–03: £171 million.

Visa Conditions

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those granted visas to visit the UK, with conditions attached, failed to abide by those conditions in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [85137]

Beverley Hughes: Information on those people granted visas to visit the UK who failed to abide by the conditions of those visas in 2000 and 2001 is not available.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

College Green Ticket Office

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what the *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* outturn cost was of the College Green ticket office. [84721]

Mr. Kirkwood: The budget for the College Green ticket office was £53,000. The outturn cost is forecast at £53,019.

New Palace Yard (Security Arrangements)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what the cost was of the new security arrangements in New Palace Yard. [84719]

Mr. Kirkwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) on 21 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 6W.

Westminster Hall Cafeteria

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what was *(a)* the capital cost and *(b)* the gross and net annual budgeted running cost of the Westminster Hall cafeteria in the last three years. [84720]

Mr. Kirkwood: Westminster Hall Cafeteria has been closed since December 2000 while being converted into new visitor facilities, including a new café, lavatories and a lift for disabled access to the Grand Committee Room and other areas. No costs were therefore incurred after that date.

There was no capital expenditure on the Westminster Hall Cafeteria in the two years before its closure.

During the nine months April to December 2000, the actual gross running cost was £197,000; after a contribution from sales of £85,000, the net running cost for 2000–01 was £112,000.

For the year April 1999 to March 2000, the actual gross running cost was £318,000; after a contribution from sales of £132,000, the net running cost was £186,000.

Payroll budgets are not disaggregated, and so the budgeted gross and net annual running costs are not available.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

EU Equality Directives

36. **Joyce Quin:** To ask the Minister for Women what recent discussions she has had with her EU counterparts on the implementation of EU equality directives. [83641]

Ms Hewitt: I have had no specific discussions with my EU counterparts on the implementation of EU equality directives.

Pay Differentials

37. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made of the extent of differences in pay between men and women; and what her policy is towards it. [83643]

Ms Hewitt: Since the Equal Pay Act was introduced in 1970, the pay gap has reduced from 37 per cent. to 19 per cent. today. We are tackling the various causes of this pay gap, in particular by helping mothers to balance work and family responsibilities.

Women (Public Life)

38. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Minister for Women how the work of her Department supports women in social enterprise. [83644]

Ms Hewitt: Women already play an important part in social enterprises and DTI supports them through a wide range of activities. This will be strengthened through implementation of the Government's three year strategy for social enterprise, which I launched in July.

39. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Minister for Women what progress she is making encouraging women to apply for posts on public bodies. [83645]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed).

Female Clergy

40. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Minister for Women what representations she has received about granting employment rights for female clergy and ministers of religion. [83646]

Ms Hewitt: We are currently engaged in a wide-ranging consultation on the issue of employment status, and have had discussions with representatives of the clergy, and different faith communities and religious organisations, on the issue of extending employment rights. We have not had specific representations concerning female clergy to date, in response to the consultation, though I am aware of the case of Norma McNab which my hon. Friend recently raised with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Retirement

Mr. Syms: To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made of the amount of financial provision women have made for retirement. [83640]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's forthcoming Green Paper on pensions will address the impact and effectiveness of the pension system for women.

The Government are committed to ensuring that women are not disadvantaged regarding pension provision and enjoy a decent income in retirement. We have already introduced a range of measures, including Stakeholder Pensions and State Second Pension to help with this.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Civil Service Review

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Government will implement the recommendations contained in the review of the Civil Service. [84131]

Mr. Pearson: The public consultation period of the recommendations of the independent review of the "Appointment and Promotion Procedures for the Senior Civil Service of the Northern Ireland Civil Service" ended on 31 October 2002.

The detail of the responses received is currently being drawn together for consideration.

Supporting People

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that *(a)* charging and *(b)* means testing are not introduced for those in receipt of housing support services once the new Supporting People arrangements are put into place. [84515]

Mr. Browne: I am aware of the hon. Member's desire that everything should be done to avoid the need to introduce charging and means testing for housing support services. I am therefore currently exploring the potential for achieving this. However, it is clear that such a policy could be funded only by removing scarce resources from other spending priorities within the housing budget aimed specifically at improving the lives and general well-being of the most disadvantaged members of Northern Ireland's community.

University Research Grants

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what grants were given for research to

(a) Queens University, *(b)* St. Mary's University College, *(c)* Stranmillis University College and *(d)* the University of Ulster in the last 12 months. [84395]

Jane Kennedy: Figures for the last 12 months are not available; however, the recurrent research grant allocation for the financial year 2002–03 to the universities and university colleges was:

	£ million
Queen's University	16.585
St. Mary's University College	-
Stranmillis University College	-
University of Ulster	11.068

However, the Department for Employment and Learning also fund a number of special initiatives such as the Support Programme for University Research (SPUR) and the Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF) and estimated expenditure for the 2002–03 year is:

	£ million
Queen's University	6.905
St. Mary's University College	-
Stranmillis University College	-
University of Ulster	2.927

Waste Water Treatment Plant

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on future provision of a waste water treatment plant for Larne; and when it will come into operation. [85621]

Angela Smith: There is presently no waste water treatment facility in Larne. Untreated waste water from the town's combined sewerage system is discharged into the estuary of Larne Lough through short outfalls at Blackcave and Sandy Bay. This practice is unacceptable in today's environment and improved facilities need to be provided.

Plans for the provision of treatment facilities for the area are well developed and include the construction of a new works to treat the waste water from Larne and the surrounding communities of Ballygalley, Drains Bay, Glynn and Magheramorne. The new works will be designed to comply with current legislation, including the Bathing Water and Urban Waste Water Treatment Directives. These Directives apply the same standards of treatment in Northern Ireland as are applied in the rest of the UK and throughout the European Union.

The current proposals include a housed compact waste water treatment plant within the town on land reclaimed from Redlands Lagoon. Treatment is to include primary and secondary treatment. Current proposals can accommodate a further stage of treatment should it be necessary to meet the consent standards set. The proposed works will be procured on a design and build basis to a strict performance specification and a short-list of contractors deemed to be competent to undertake this project has been set up. However, the invitation to tender is conditional on full planning approval being given. A planning application for the waste water treatment works has been submitted and a decision from Planning Service is awaited. Larne borough council are still considering this planning application, but it is hoped to get their agreement in the near future. Environment and Heritage Service has proposed more stringent effluent quality standards and treatment of a higher proportion of storm flows, in accordance with their proposed new environmental policy for coastal waters, the Northern Ireland Coastal and Estuarine Waters Classification System (NICEWCS). Water Service is currently engaged in discussions with Environment and Heritage Service to agree appropriate discharge consent standards to meet all of the regulatory standards. In order that the planning application may proceed, Planning Service has arranged for agreement between EHS and Water Service on the effluent standards to be a condition on planning approval, and approval on this basis is expected shortly.

Subject to the resolution of these matters, construction of the new waste water treatment works for Larne is scheduled to commence in September 2003. It will take two years to complete at an estimated cost of around £10 million.

PRIME MINISTER

Civil Protection

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Prime Minister if there is a Minister designated as having responsibility for civil protection. [85425]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 636.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Publications (Library)

Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Council if he will make it his policy that in cases where hon. Members request that ministers place publications in the Library, a copy of the material requested is automatically sent to the hon. Member in question. [86166]

Mr. Robin Cook: As Leader of the House, I want to modernise the House and to make sure that practices and procedures make it easy for Members to be fully informed.

I am happy to endorse the practice of sending publications to Members who request copies to be placed in the Library of the House. The position remains that when informationis deposited in the Library for the first time, in response to a Parliamentary question a copy of the information should, wherever practical, be supplied to the Member at the same time[1].

From time to time there may be good reason why information cannot be made public and a request to place it in the Library therefore cannot be accepted.

[1] Government response to the Ninth Report of the Public Administration Select Committee: Ministerial Accountability and PQs.

Private Members' Bills

Dr. Iddon: To ask the President of the Council if he will review the £200 allocation from public funds under the Resolution of the House of 29 November 1971, to hon. Members who have secured one of the first 10 places in the Private Members' Bill ballot. [84410]

Mr. Robin Cook: I see no need for a review at present. While I accept that the value of a £200 allocation has been greatly eroded over time, I note that only four Members have made claims since April 1999.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the President of the Council what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable *(i)* articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books, newspapers or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain by departmental special advisers since June 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [85119]

Mr. Robin Cook: My two special advisers joined the Department in July 2001 having both had a background in research. The information requested is set out as follows. The contents of the publications and presentations listed do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.

Meg Russell

Publications:

"Women's Representation in the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales: Party Dynamics for achieving Critical Mass" (with Fiona Mackay and Laura McAllister), *Journal of Legislative Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 49–76.

"Women's Political Participation in the UK", Report published by the British Council, 2002.[1]

"Responsibilities of the Upper House: Constitutional and Human Rights Safeguards", *Journal of Legislative Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 61–76.[1,2]

"The Territorial Role of the Upper House", *Journal of Legislative Studies*, vol.

7, no. 1, pp. 105–118.[1,2]

"What are Second Chambers for?", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 54, no. 3, July 2001, pp. 442–458. ISSN 0031–2290.[1]

"The Women's Representation Bill: Making it Happen", Report published by the Constitution Unit, University College London, July 2001.[1]

Presentations:

"La riforma costituzionale nel Regno Unito, senza una costituzione scritta, dal 1997 ad oggi" ('Constitutional reform in the UK since 1997, without a written constitution'), University of Siena, 1 July 2002.

"Increasing Women's Representation in Parliament: Lessons from Scotland, Wales and other recent UK developments", Fifth International Workshop of Parliamentary Scholars and Parliamentarians, Wroxton College, Oxfordshire, 4 August 2002.

Greg Power

Publications:

"Making Government Accountable—The Report of the Hansard Society Commission on Parliamentary Scrutiny" *Journal of Legislative Studies* vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 1–12.[1]

"Making Government Accountable" (with Alex Brazier), Parliamentary Affairs, vol. 54, no.3, pp.554–559.[1]

"Real Politics—the wicked issues: Constitutional change in Britain and South Africa" (with Richard Calland and Sean Jacobs) British Council/Idasa, December 2001.[1]

"Politics with a Purpose: Reforming the House of Commons" (with Peter Riddell) in *The Progressive Century: The Future of the centre-left in Britain*, N. Lawson and N. Sherlock (Eds), Palgrave, July 2001.[1]

My Department does not have a Head of Information. When professional information services are required they are provided the Cabinet Office. The Publications and presentations listed above that were submitted after their authors joined the Privy Council Office were shown to, and cleared by, the Department's Director of Corporate Services.

[1] These publications were written and submitted prior to their authors joining the staff of the Privy Council Office, so departmental approval was not required.

[2] Also appeared as a chapter in the book "Second Chambers", N. Baldwin and D. Shell (eds.), Frank Cass, 2001. ISBN 0714651443.

SCOTLAND

Agriculture Holdings Bill

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive about the human rights implications of an absolute right to buy land under the Agriculture Holdings Bill, and if she will make a statement. [82449]

Mrs. Liddell: I have had no discussions with the Scottish Executive on this subject. The Bill in question is a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Airport Firemen

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has received on the strike by airport firemen in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [82217]

Mrs. Liddell: I have not received any representations on this issue. Industrial relations are a matter for the respective management and trade unions to resolve. I urge both sides to continue to work together constructively to reach a mutually acceptable solution which will avoid strike action. I understand that both unions are to ballot members on a revised pay offer from BAA.

Digital Television

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport relating to the impact of analogue switch-off; and if she will make a statement. [83724]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend on a wide range of issues, including the impact of analogue switch-off in Scotland. The Government are committed to ensuring that terrestrial analogue broadcasting signals are maintained until everyone who can currently get the main public service broadcasting channels in analogue form can receive them on digital systems, and switching to digital is an

affordable option for the vast majority of people. We have consulted widely on this issue and details are available on the website: www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with OFCOM on the impact of analogue switch-off in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [83722]

Mrs. Liddell: I have had introductory discussions with Lord Currie, Chairman of OFCOM on issues around the Communications Bill and its major interest for Scotland. In its UK wide role, OFCOM will have an overarching duty to take account of the interests of the nations and regions in all its activities. The regulatory functions of the new body will not take effect until the Communications Bill becomes law.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what meetings she has had with *(a)* the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and *(b)* the Scottish Executive relating to the impact of analogue switch-off in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [83723]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with colleagues and Scottish Executive Ministers on a wide range of issues, including the impact of analogue switch-off in Scotland. The Government are committed to ensuring that terrestrial analogue broadcasting signals are maintained until everyone who can currently get the main public service broadcasting channels in analogue form can receive them on digital systems, and switching to digital is an affordable option for the vast majority of people. We have consulted widely on this issue and details are available on the website: www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk.

Friends of Scotland

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the country of residence of the members of the Friends of Scotland initiative. [83944]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 6 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 360W. The countries of residence of the current members of the Friends of Scotland network are as follows:

Country	*Number of Friends*
UK	48
Australia	36
USA	18
Malaysia	11
New Zealand	10
Germany	10
France	8
Japan	8
Canada	6
Belgium	3
Hong Kong	2
Ireland	2
Trinidad and Tobago	1
Spain	1
The Netherlands	1
Italy	1
Luxembourg	1
Total	169

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Employment Rights

14. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what employment rights she estimates UK workers will have by 2007 that have changed since 1997. [83615]

Alan Johnson: In our first term, we introduced a foundation of decent minimum standards in the workplace. We are now building on this, so that by 2007, employees will, for example, have been given rights to a minimum wage, four weeks paid holidays and to proper information and consultation. They will also benefit from a range of family friendly policies, such as the right for parents of children under six to request flexible working, parental and paternity leave and improved maternity rights. They will also have access to fair discipline and grievance procedures and may not be discriminated against on grounds of age, disability, religion or sexual orientation, or because they are part-time or fixed term workers.

19. **Mr. Neil Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on changes to employment rights between 1997 and 2007. [83621]

Alan Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies).

Small Businesses

15. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many small business start-ups there were in the last quarter of 2001. [83616]

Nigel Griffiths: Official data for the whole of the calendar year 2001 show that there were 175,455 VAT registrations in the UK. There is no comparable data on a quarterly basis. VAT start-up data are not collected by size of businesses.

DRAX Power Station

16. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if she will make a statement on the future viability of DRAX Power Station. [83617]

Mr. Wilson: The viability of Drax Power Station is a commercial matter for the operators of that station, its customers and, if the security of electricity supply is concerned, the National Grid Company.

Business Taxes

17. **Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made on the impact of business taxes on companies' decisions to locate in the UK. [83619]

Alan Johnson: According to the OECD, the UK has one of the lowest total tax burdens in the EU—far lower than the EU average. This has no doubt been an important factor in enabling the UK to take first place for share of EU total inward investment in 2001.

Small Business Sector

18. **Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the prospects for the small business sector. [83620]

Nigel Griffiths: Small businesses play a vital role in the UK economy, contributing around £1 trillion each year. They provide new ideas, products and services and, most significantly, jobs. There are 3.7 million UK businesses and on average 998 of every 1,000 of them are small or medium sized.

Prospects for the sector are encouraging, for example:

The UK small business population has risen by over 50 per cent. since 1980. There is now one small business or sole trader for every 13 adults in the UK.

Latest survival rates show that over 91 per cent. of businesses are now surviving one year after registration, with 65 per cent. surviving three years after registration.

Only 1.1 per cent of active companies became insolvent in the 12 months ended Q3 (July to September) 2002.

The SBS Omnibus Survey (2001–02) shows that the vast majority of small businesses are quite optimistic—over 80 per cent. of small firms say they are doing "very well" or "well".

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2001 also shows that the UK has a supportive environment for business start up and growth.

24. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy on the small business sector. [83626]

Nigel Griffiths: The aim is to accelerate the drive towards ensuring the UK is, by 2005, the best place to start and grow a business and where:

many more people want and have the opportunity to start a business;

everyone with the ambition to grow is helped and supported;

small businesses find it easy to respond to Government and access its services.

Following DTI's recent cross-cutting review of business support, SBS' role has been re-focussed and enhanced, in particular it will:

be a centre of expertise for Government on small business issues;

be an innovator, pioneering new approaches across Government to meeting the needs of small business through better policy and high-quality services; and

be an engine for change, demonstrating what can be done, measuring progress against outcomes in the market place, and taking action, at national, regional and local levels.

SBS has developed a new framework for policy towards small business, which is based upon the key drivers for economic growth—improved productivity and a wider involvement in enterprise for all.

The framework is built around seven themes, SBS is working with all its partners to build these into seven national strategies, which are:

1. to build an enterprise culture.
2. to encourage a more dynamic start-up market.
3. to build the capability for small business growth.
4. to improve access to finance for small businesses.
5. to encourage more enterprise in disadvantaged communities and under-represented groups.
6. to improve small businesses' experience of Government services.
7. to develop better regulation and policy.

Coal Industry

20. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much coal she expects to be produced in the United Kingdom in 20 years' time. [83622]

Mr. Wilson: The Department does not have forecasts for coal production in the UK in 20 years' time. Decisions on the level of output will be a matter for the relevant coal operators to determine in the light of future developments in markets, world prices, technology, regulatory requirements and geological conditions.

Manufacturing Strategy

21. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress she has made in the implementation of her manufacturing strategy. [83623]

Ms Hewitt: The Manufacturing Strategy we published on 16 May identified seven key areas of activity necessary for manufacturing success. We have made significant progress in all of these areas to help manufacturers fulfil their potential in the UK.

Energy Efficiency

22. **David Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what role energy efficiency plays in the Department's energy policy. [83624]

Mr. Wilson: We are committed to working with others to ensure competitive energy markets while achieving safe, secure and sustainable energy supplies. Energy efficiency plays a key role in moving to a more sustainable energy policy for the UK in both the short and long terms. Energy efficiency also contributes to social and security of supply objectives.

SMEs

23. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to support small and medium-sized enterprises. [83625]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government's vision is that anybody with the talent, potential and drive to succeed in business has the opportunity and the necessary support to do so, regardless of their background. Government have an important role in creating a fertile business environment; addressing market failures; and ensuring that where it comes into contact with future entrepreneurs it encourages rather than hinders them.

Measures already put in place and new developments announced in the pre-Budget report will take further steps towards attaining this goal, and the policy framework developed by the Small Business Service (SBS) will drive forward improvements in policy and service delivery.

Government spends in the region of £2.5 billion a year on a wide range of services for small business. The Cross Cutting Review of business support set out a series of practical recommendations for driving up the quality and effectiveness of these services, with the aim of improving the customer' experience for all small businesses.

In addition, Spending Review 2002 provided the SBS with extra resources to help meet the challenges of its new role as a champion for small businesses across Whitehall. The Spending Review provided an additional £40 million by 2005–06, compared with 2002–03, to boost e-delivery of services, while the Phoenix Fund is also being extended by two years beyond March 2004 with an extra £50 million over 2004–05 and 2005–06 to promote enterprise in deprived areas.

Fireworks

25. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what review her Department is conducting of the need for legislation further to control the sale and use of fireworks. [83628]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I would refer my hon. Friend to an answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), on 17 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 889–90 announcing a package of measures to address problems caused by fireworks. This followed discussions with other Government Departments, enforcement authorities and the fireworks industry.

26. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to improve firework safety. [83629]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 introduced comprehensive controls on the types and sizes of fireworks which can be sold to the public. It also required compliance with British Standard 7114 and made it an offence to supply fireworks to those under 18 years of age.

Also, I would refer my hon. Friend to an answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 17 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 889–90, announcing a package of measures to address problems caused by fireworks.

Launch Aid

27. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of launch aid. [83630]

Alan Johnson: The Government have been and continue to be supportive of the aerospace industry in the UK. Since 1997 we have committed nearly £1 billion in Launch Investment (previously known as Launch Aid) for major new large aircraft and engine projects.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 16 May this year the establishment of the Aerospace Innovation and Growth Team (IGT), led by Sir Richard Evans. The IGT, as part of their remit, is considering medium to long-term strategic issues affecting the aerospace sector, including the future of Government support mechanisms. Sir Richard and his team are currently about halfway through their work and I expect the IGT to report by next spring with recommendations and an agreed action plan to take the industry forward.

Science Budget

28. **Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the allocation of science budget under the 2002 spending review. [83631]

Ms Hewitt: I will be making a statement in due course.

Shipbuilding Industry

29. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken in the last month to help the British shipbuilding industry. [83632]

Alan Johnson: No new initiatives have been taken in the last calendar month. Nevertheless, Ministers continue to work closely with the shipbuilding and other marine manufacturing industries to enhance their own efforts to improve their competitiveness, productivity and employment.

On 6 November, I chaired the regular meeting of the Shipbuilding and Marine Industries Forum where representatives of the companies, unions and other principal stakeholders reviewed progress against targets and activities in the Implementation Plan. This plan is a series of joint and individual initiatives aimed at improving sales, employment and profitability and having the commitment of all the major interests, not just Government.

Throughout the month, progress continued on the Shipbuilders and Shiprepairers Association's four-year programme of "master classes" and academic studies to improve productivity (a project supported by a DTI grant of £2.8 million) as did a programme towards enhancing the marketing capabilities of merchant shipbuilders (again supported by a DTI grant of £175,000).

In addition, the Engineering and Marine Training Authority was well into its six-month study (assisted by grants from the DTI and the Department for Education and Skills) into the availability of the skilled manpower that will be needed for future merchant and naval shipbuilding projects, especially the Future Aircraft Carriers.

Finally, as part of our effort to tackle unfair competition in the shipbuilding market, the World Trade Organisation action against Korean unfair pricing, which we have strongly supported, was started.

War Assets (Redistribution)

30. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the

progress of Lord Archer of Sandwell's committee on the redistribution of assets seized in World War Two. [83633]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him yesterday.

Energy Policy

31. **Dr. Desmond Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the role of environmental considerations in the formulation of the Government's energy policy. [83635]

Mr. Wilson: The Government is currently carrying out a review of energy policy with a view to issuing a White Paper in the New Year. Environmental considerations will be an important part of the White Paper. In particular greenhouse gas emissions will need to be reduced significantly during the 21st century, both globally and in the UK, if we are to avoid dangerous climate change and the energy system is crucial to that.

Public Match Funds

32. **Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of delivering of public match funds to EU objective one regions. [83636]

Alan Johnson: The Government have not carried out such an assessment, but are unaware of any current difficulties over the provision of public match funding to support projects in Objective 1 regions.

Many of the sources of match funding are national programmes that respond to demand from the regions. In January 2002, the Government published a revised list of potential central Government sources of match funding in England. It is available at http://www.dti.gov.uk/europe/mfl.htm on the internet.

Administration of the EU structural funds in Wales, including issues relating to match funding, is a matter for the Welsh Assembly Government.

Aircraft Exports (Zimbabwe)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer given on 27 November (Ref. 83035), whether an export licence was granted in respect of spare parts for Hawk aircraft for export to a country other than Zimbabwe which have subsequently been exported to Zimbabwe, contrary to the conditions of the export licence. [84725]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* No.

Working Conditions Directive

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received concerning *(a)* the Working Conditions of Temporary (Agency) Workers Directive, *(b)* the Employment Status in Relation to Statutory Employment Rights Review and *(c)* the Employment Agencies Consultation on New Regulations; and if she will make a statement. [85165]

Alan Johnson: The Department of Trade and Industry's public consultation on the proposed European Union Directive on the Working Conditions of Temporary (Agency) Workers has ended and written responses will be made available upon request. The Department is analysing the responses, which will help to inform assessment of the potential impact of the proposed Directive on UK workers and businesses.

The public consultation on employment status in relation to employment rights will finish on 11 December and written responses will be made available upon request.

On the proposed new regulations on the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations, the Department has received representations from the trade associations representing the private recruitment industry, workers' organisations, employers' bodies, employment agencies, individual work-seekers and other interested organisations. The responses are being considered and will be made available upon request.

Ministers and officials have also had meetings with interested individuals and organisations as part of these consultations.

Clergy

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on Section 23 of the Employment Relations Act 1999 with regard to the clergy. [84883]

Alan Johnson: We are currently engaged in a wide-ranging consultation on the issue of employment status, and have had, and are continuing to hold discussions with representatives of the clergy, and different faith communities and religious organisations, on the issue of extending employment rights to the clergy.

Climate Change

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* schemes and *(b)* organisations which address climate change to which her Department contributes funding to. [85485]

Mr. Wilson: The Department contributes funding to various schemes and organisations that address climate change.

It contributes to the work of the Research Councils on climate change, by funding through the Science Budget, particular programmes and activities run by the National Environment Research Council (NERC), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

The Department also assists the Tyndall Centre at the University of East Anglia which supports the work in nine research institutions to promote the understanding of the causes and consequences of climate change. The Tyndall Centre is funded by the National Environment Research Council (NERC), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC); and the

Department contributes £210,000 over three years for the development of assistance to business on climate change causes and its consequences.

In addition, the Department contributes funding to support the development of renewable energy and cleaner coal technology, which make a valuable contribution to addressing climate change. Such programmes and organisations include the Renewable Energy and Cleaner Coal R&D programmes, the Renewable Energy Capital Grants Programme, Renewables UK, the Community Renewables Initiative and the Renewable Energy Advice Centres (REACS) through the Energy Saving Trust (EST).

Developing Countries

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to promote and support the right of developing countries to provide targeted protection for their local producers to benefit from international trade. [85091]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government recognise that developing countries are at different stages of development. Within the WTO, we support the further development of Special and Differential Treatment provisions which will help all developing countries integrate into the world trading system. In addition, the Government believe that new WTO rules should reflect the implementation capacity of all WTO Members, particularly the developing and Least Developed Countries.

Electronic Trading

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 1998 for achievement in 1999 to 2002, to make the UK the best place in the world to trade electronically. [83597]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The results of the joint DTI/Office of the e-Envoy independent International Benchmarking Study 2002 has shown that the UK is now one of the world's leading environments for electronic trading—indeed the study ranks the UK as the second best environment in the world for e-commerce, behind only the US.

This is a great achievement which the report attributes to the UK's low internet access cost, light touch regulatory environment, strong use of ICT in the education system, advanced venture capital markets and strong leadership of the agenda. UK broadband prices have reduced from among the most expensive in the G7 to among the cheapest.

Around 73 per cent. of UK business, with 10 or more employees, are now connected to the internet, an overall increase of 16 per cent. year on year since the target was set. At present 46 per cent. of internet users are buying online, up from 28 per cent. two years ago. B2B (Business to Business) sales remain significantly higher than B2C (Business to Consumer) amounting to £10.9 billion in 2001, which amounts to a 36 per cent. year on year growth.

To date there are over 1.1 million broadband subscribers. There were only 180,000 subscribers this time last year and there has been an increase in the number of companies using broadband. 18 per cent. businesses with 10+ employees have a broadband connection, compared to 8 per cent. at the end of 2000.

Employment Law

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of *(a)* the Working Conditions of Temporary (Agency) Workers Directive, *(b)* the Employment Status in Relation to Statutory Employment Rights Review and *(c)* the Employment Agencies Consultation on New Regulations, on people engaged in interim management consultancy. [85166]

Alan Johnson: The Department published regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) on the proposed European Union Directive on the Working Conditions of Temporary (Agency) Workers and the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

In developing policy on the proposed Directive and regulations on the conduct of employment agencies, the Department will take into account representations received during the public consultations about interim managers.

A discussion document on employment status in relation to statutory employment rights was published on 11 July 2002. This document is not a proposal to legislate. It is seeking views on the justification for, and effects of, extending statutory employment rights to categories of working people currently excluded from them. The public consultation on employment status in relation to employment rights will finish on 11 December. If an outcome of the review was to propose new regulations, a regulatory impact assessment would be undertaken and there would be further consultation.

Energy Targets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 1998 for achievement in 1999 to 2002 to maintain or improve *(a)* levels of energy security, diversity and sustainability and *(b)* competitive energy prices. [83601]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The UK has access to a wide range of fuels and generally has a more varied and balanced supply than many other countries. The mix of fuels has become increasingly diverse, including through increasing use of renewable energy. The UK remains self-sufficient in energy, but is likely to become increasingly dependent on imports of gas. Competition in UK electricity and gas markets has contributed to lower prices. Data for 2001 suggests that UK industrial gas and electricity prices were the second and fourth lowest in the EU respectively. UK domestic gas prices in 2001 were the second lowest in the EU, while domestic electricity prices were the fourth lowest, based upon available data. By 2000, UK greenhouse gas emissions were 13 per cent. below their 1990 level. More

detailed performance information is available in the Department's publication "Energy: its impact on the environment and society" published in July, and will also become available in the Department's forthcoming publication on energy sector indicators.

French Nuclear Facilities

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to satisfy herself that *(a)* the normal emission levels from nuclear facilities on the northern coast of France and *(b)* the emergency procedures in place at nuclear facilities on the northern coast of France are consistent with proper protection of the UK environment. [84746]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Under Directive 96/29/Euratom, member states are required to ensure that discharges do not give rise to doses to members of the public which exceed the prescribed limits. The UK participates fully in the process through which these limits are determined. Each member state has an obligation for ensuring that these Euratom Community requirements are implemented in their national law, and for establishing facilities necessary to carry out continuous monitoring of the level of radioactivity in the air, water and soil. The European Commission has the task of ensuring compliance with these requirements and has specific powers under which it can verify the operation and efficiency of the monitoring equipment around nuclear sites. The UK Government have no reason to believe that the European Commission has not been assiduous in fulfilling its enforcement responsibilities in France, or indeed, anywhere else in the European Union.

In addition, under Article 37 of the Euratom Treaty, member states are required to submit general data to the European Commission relating to any plan for the disposal of radioactive waste so that the Commission can determine whether the plan is liable to result in radioactive contamination of the water, soil or airspace of another member state. France will have been required to submit such data to the Commission in respect of nuclear facilities on its northern coast and to satisfy the Commission that the disposal of waste from those facilities would not result in the radioactive contamination of any part of the United Kingdom.

It is the responsibility of each member state to ensure that the operations undertaken at the civil nuclear installations on its territory comply with the requirements of the Euratom Basic Safety Standards (Council Directive 96/29/Euratom), which includes requirements concerning emergency preparedness. Emergency preparedness requirements are also included under Article 16 of the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS) to which both France and the UK are contracting parties. As stated above, the European Commission is responsible for monitoring compliance with obligations under the Euratom Treaty. Contracting parties to the CNS are subject to a three-yearly peer review of their responses to the requirements of the Convention. Both the UK and France participated in the last peer review meeting which was held in April 2002.

Leg-irons and Cuffs

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many UK firms that have traditionally manufactured over-sized cuffs and leg-irons been subjected to inspection and investigation by her Department in each year since 1997. [82944]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The Export Control Organisation's Compliance Officers visit holders of open licences to establish that the conditions of these licences are being met. One firm that manufactures over-sized handcuffs was visited by Compliance Officers in 1997, 1998 and 1999.

Investigations into alleged breaches of UK export controls are the responsibility of HM Customs and Excise.

Renewable Energy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of sales licensed electricity suppliers are obliged to obtain from renewable sources; and what proportion they will be obliged to obtain from renewable sources *(a)* by 1 April 2003 and *(b)* by 1 April 2011. [85436]

Mr. Wilson: For the current year, the Renewables Obligation is set at 3 per cent. of total electricity sales from licensed electricity suppliers. This will rise to 4.3 per cent. for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004, and to 10.4 per cent. for 2010–11 and subsequent periods. Suppliers may discharge their Obligation either by themselves supplying renewable electricity to customers in Great Britain, or by producing Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs) purchased in the market, or by paying a buy-out price in place of all or part of their Obligation.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the electricity generated in the United Kingdom came from renewable energy sources in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* to date in 2002. [85487]

Mr. Wilson: The proportion of electricity generated in the United Kingdom, in 2001 that came from renewable energy sources was 2.6 per cent. Complete data for 2002 will not be available until summer 2003. However, because generation from large scale hydro sources by major power producers in the first three quarters of 2002 was 1.6 TWh higher than in the corresponding period of 2001 and because large scale hydro generation accounts for over 40 per cent. of generation from renewables, it is anticipated that this recovery alone will have raised the renewables percentage in 2002.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the provisions in force to ensure that exporters of renewable energy goods are protected against the risks of non-payment. [84193]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD's full range of products is available to UK based capital goods exporters in the renewable energy sector. This includes:

(i) export credit insurance providing cover against the risk of not receiving payment due to specified commercial or political risks.

(ii) guarantee for loans arranged by UK banks to overseas borrowers to finance the purchase of capital goods and related services. These enable the exporter to offer credit to an overseas buyer while receiving cash payments via the lending bank.

(iii) insurance against political risks for UK companies investing overseas.

Credit insurance for such exports is also available from private sector providers.

As announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in September this year, from April 2003, ECGD will make available cover for at least £50 million of exports each year for projects in the renewables sector which meet its minimum risk standards.

Thailand

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has concluded a trade deal with Thailand with respect to *(a)* armaments and *(b)* poultry. [85475]

Nigel Griffiths: No trade deals have been concluded with Thailand in respect of armaments and poultry.

Universities

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 1998 to increase by 50 per cent. the number of companies spun out by universities by 2001–02. [83593]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 119W.

TRANSPORT

Bus Lanes

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if there is special provision for ministerial cars to use bus lanes in guidelines issued by his Department. [85332]

Mr. Jamieson: The Departmental guidance, Local Transport Note 1/97— Keeping Buses Moving, makes no reference to specific categories of cars.

East Lancashire

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times he has visited east Lancashire in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82399]

Mr. Spellar: None.

Future Development of Air Transport

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many completed questionnaires have been returned following the consultation paper *(a)* The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: Midlands and *(b)* The Future Development of Air Transport in the UK: South East. [84979]

Mr. Jamieson: To date, around 16,000 paper and 1,500 web questionnaires on the Midlands consultation have been returned. The corresponding figures for the south-east are 8,000 over 3,000 respectively.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what throughputs were projected for Manchester Airport's second runway; and what the actual throughput is. [85617]

Mr. Jamieson: It is estimated that by 2030 the throughput of Manchester Airport could range from 40 million passengers per annum (mppa) (if no new terminal capacity is provided) through to 70 mppa (if growth is facilitated and concentrated at Manchester). This equates to the runways handling between 300,000 and 440,000 Air Traffic Movements (ATMs) per annum.

In 2001, Manchester handled 19.1 million passengers and 182,000 ATMs.

Modes of Travel

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what methods he uses to estimate the relative environmental impact of journeys by *(a)* train, *(b)* aeroplane and *(c)* ferry; and if he will make a statement. [85088]

Mr. Jamieson: Environmental impact assessments of different transport modes take into account the full range of environmental matters, including air pollutants, CO_2 emissions and noise, the length of journeys and the quantity and type of fuel consumed. There is also consideration of other local emissions sources, background levels of air pollution in the area and the extent to which emissions from the transport modes in question can be dispersed. The impact of infrastructure on the local environment is also assessed.

Rolling Stock

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average age of rolling stock is in each of the rail operating companies; and what proportion is *(a)* over 10-years-old, *(b)* over 20-years-old and *(c)* over 30-years-old. [85337]

Mr. Jamieson: The table gives the average age of rolling stock for each train operating company. The proportion of stock over 10, 20 and 30-years-old is not readily available.

Company	*Average Age (years)*
Anglia Railways	25.12
Arriva Trains Merseyside	23.50
Arriva Trains Northern	12.54
c2c	2.00

Company	Average Age (years)
Central Trains	10.92
Chiltern Railways	8.67
Connex South Eastern	19.89
First Great Eastern	18.24
First Great Western	27.70
First North Western	15.27
Gatwick Express	12.29
Great North Eastern Railway	16.63
Island Line	35.50
Midland Main Line	21.26
Scotrail	15.53
Silverlink	17.56
South West Trains	24.68
South Central	28.95
Thames Trains	11.50
Thameslink	15.50
Virgin Cross Country	17.84
Virgin West Coast	32.44
Wales and Borders	14.76
Wessex Trains	15.80
West Anglia Great Northern	19.23

Speed Cameras

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what type of *(a)* fixed speed cameras and *(b)* mobile speed cameras are in operation in the UK; and how much they cost. [84585]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

Information on fixed site and mobile speed cameras used in the United Kingdom is not held centrally. All speed enforcement devices must, however, be type-approved by the Secretary of State in order for their evidence to be relied on in court proceedings. Devices currently type-approved, from among which police forces select their equipment, are listed in the table.

The cost of the devices is a commercial decision for manufacturers and their agents, and this information is not held centrally.

Speedmeters type-approved by the Secretary of State for police use

	Approved from
Mobile	
Radar speed measuring devices	
Kustom Falcon	31 July 1986
The Gatso Mini Radar Mark 3	31 July 1986
The Gatso Mini Radar Mark 4	31 July 1986
Kustom HR 4	1 January 1987
Kustom HR 8	1 January 1987
Kustom Roadrunner	1 January 1987
Muniquip K-GP	8 November 1989
Kustom Cordless Falcon	31 October 1997
Speedar SR1	10 February 1998
Light beam speed measuring devices (laser)	
The LTI 20.20 TS/M	1 November 1993
The Kustom ProLaser II	18 September 1995
The Kustom ProLaser III	21 October 2002
The LTI 20.20 TS/M "Speedscope"	1 April 1996
Riegl LR90–235/P	16 October 1998
Cleartone Stealth Speedlaser	5 May 1999
Laser Data Interface (LDI) only when used in conjunction with Kustom ProLaser II	24 May 1999
Also Autovision (AV3) when used in conjunction with both Kustom ProLaser II speed measuring device and the Laser Interface (LDI)	24 May 1999
Unipar Urban Speed Ace	28 May 1999
LTI 20.20 UltraLyte 100	15 July 1999
Jenoptik LaserPatrol	15 October 1999
Leica XV2 SpeedLaser	12 February 2001
Autovelox 104/C-2	15 October 2001
LASTEC Local Video System (for use with LTI 20.20 TS/M or LTI 20.20 TS/M "Speedscope" only)	10 February 1998
LaserCam Digital Camera System (for use with LTI 20.20 TS/M or LTI 20.20 TS/M "Speedscope" only)	26 February 1998
Gatsometer BV + AUS speed camera battery powered (commonly known as the "Gatso Camera"	1 July 1992
Road sensors speed measuring devices1	
Micro Mercury 90500	9 August 1993
Micro Mercury 92600	9 August 1993
The SpeedMaster DS2	9 August 1993
The Autovision 2	9 August 1993
The Speedman Enforcement System	9 August 1993
The Truvelo M4 Squared speed measuring device	9 August 1993
The Truvelo Combi S	23 June 1997
The Truvelo Combi S-mc Speed Camera System	15 April 1999
Speed Master DS3 and Autovision 3 (AV3). Approved from same date and subject to the condition that it be used in conjunction with Speedmaster DS3	24 May 1999
Fixed	
Radar speed measuring devices	
Gatsometer BV + AUS speed camera mains (and a few battery powered and/or trailer mounted) (commonly known as the "Gatso Camera")	1 July 1992

Speedmeters type-approved by the Secretary of State for police use

	Approved from
The Serco Speed Enforcement System Type 1 with either the Techspan Systems Controlled Motorway Indicator Type 450EE or the Securite et Signalisation (SES) Controlled Motorway Indicator Type 450EE (M25 controlled motorway project)	24 May 1995
Road sensors speed measuring devices[1]	
The Traffiphot "S" speed detection device	11 March 1994
The Truvelo Combi S	23 June 1997
The Truvelo Combi S-mc Speed Camera System	15 April 1999
Distance over time measuring devices	
Speed Violation Detection Deterrent (SVDD)	1 April 1999

[1] Activated by means of sensors or cables on or near the surface of the road.

Note:

Some equipment can be used as either a mobile or a fixed site unit.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his latest estimate is of the completion date of the West Coast main line upgrade. [85334]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's draft strategy for the West Coast Route Modernisation project proposes substantial completion by 2006, though work in the Trent Valley, for which Transport and Works Act approvals are required, is planned to continue until 2008.

TREASURY

BCCI

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the meeting between the Inland Revenue and the BCCI Staff Committee. [85087]

Dawn Primarolo: I understand that the Revenue are continuing their contacts with representatives of all parties to the proposed BCCI settlement with a view to clarifying the tax treatment as soon as possible.

Child Tax Credit

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the percentage of families in the Portsmouth, South constituency who will benefit from the child tax credit from April 2003; and if he will make a statement. [85868]

Dawn Primarolo: Nine out of 10 families with children will be eligible for the child tax credit, to be introduced in April 2003. Estimates of the number of families with children in the Portsmouth, South constituency who will benefit from the child tax credit are not available; however, an estimated 650,000 families with children in the south east of England are expected to benefit from the child tax credit.

Insurance Industry

Andy King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to institute an inquiry into the working of the insurance industry. [86046]

Ruth Kelly: We have no plans to institute a general inquiry into the working of the insurance industry. The Department of Work and Pensions will be undertaking a formal review of employers liability compulsory insurance and will announce details shortly.

Working Families Tax Credit

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many recipients of the child care component of the Working Families Tax Credit there are in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region; what percentage of recipients of the child care component represents WFTC claimants in each region; and what percentage of recipients of the child care component represents households with children in each region. [85184]

Dawn Primarolo: The latest available figures appear in the following table.

Families benefiting from the childcare tax credit[1] within Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC) or Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC)

Government Office Region	*Total benefiting, May 2002*	*As a percentage of all families with children receiving WFTC or DPTC[2], May 2002*	*As a percentage of all families receiving Child benefit[3], August 2002*
England	138,836	13	2.3
North East	6,679	9	2.1
North West	25,985	13	3.0
Yorkshire and The Humber	16,092	11	2.6
East Midlands	13,104	12	2.6
West Midlands	17,166	12	2.6
East	11,115	12	1.7
London	17,267	17	2.0
South East	17,527	14	1.8
South West	13,813	12	2.4
Region not identified	88		

[1] The childcare tax credit gives help with eligible child care costs for children aged up to 15 (16 if disabled) at the September following the start date of the award.

[2] WFTC and DPTC are available to families with children aged up to 16 at the start date of the award, or aged up to 18 and in full time non-advanced education.

[3] Child benefit is available to families with children aged up to 16 (or 18 if in full time non-advanced education).

Sources:

Inland Revenue, Department of Work and Pensions; administrative data

Tax Credit Claims

Mr. Simon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to issue Regulations under section 42 of the Tax Credits Act 2002 relating to claims by persons subject to immigration control. [85403]

Dawn Primarolo: Regulations under section 42 of the Tax Credits Act 2002 will be made shortly.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Basic State Pension

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the arrangements and procedures are for deferring the basic state pension. [84449]

Mr. McCartney: Entitlement to the state pension arises when a person attains state pension age but to be entitled they have to make a claim. They can put off claiming their state pension to earn increments. When they claim, each part of the state pension is increased by about 7.5 per cent. for each full year of deferral. The minimum period of deferral is seven weeks.

Currently the maximum period for deferral is five years but from April 2010 there will be no time limit and the incremental rate will increase to about 10.4 per cent. for each full year.

It is up to the individual to decide whether to claim their state pension at state pension age or to defer claiming. A person can choose to defer either by writing to the Pension Service to request deferral or by not returning their claim for a state pension.

Lone Parents

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of lone parents are *(a)* in full-time employment, *(b)* in part-time employment, *(c)* in education, *(d)* on a training scheme, *(e)* unemployed and *(f)* claiming sickness benefits. [86163]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is in the tables. As these categories are not comprehensive or exclusive there will be some lone parents counted in more than one category and some that are not included in any.

Data from the spring 2002 labour force survey	*Percentage of lone parents*
Full time employment[1]	29.1
Part time employment[1]	24.5
In education[2]	12.7
On a training scheme	1.1
Unemployed	6.6

[1] Full time employment is classified as work of at least 30 hours on average per week. Part time employment is classified as work of less than 30 hours on average per week.
[2] The percentage of lone parents in education is taken as those lone parents enrolled in some type of formal education; this includes both part time and full time education as well as those enrolled on courses and not attending and those enrolled and not revealing their work status

Data from Family Resources Survey[1] 2001–02	*Percentage of lone parents*
Claiming sickness benefits[2,3]	8
Of which	
Incapacity benefits	2
Sickness benefits	7
Statutory sick pay	1

[1] In the FRS benefit receipt is based on self-assessment and therefore may be subject to mis-reporting.
[2] "Sickness benefits" comprises all lone parents claiming at least one of the following: DLA, War disablement pension, Severe disability allowance, Disabled persons tax credit, Attendance allowance, Industrial injury disablement benefit, Disabled person's tax credit.
[3] Lone parents claiming one type of sickness benefit may also be in receipt of other sickness or incapacity benefits, hence the percentage of lone parents claiming any type of sickness benefits is smaller than the sum of those claiming each type of benefit.

New Deal

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what data is collected on the number of persons who have entered the New Deal gateway more than once; and if he will make a statement. [84439]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The New Deal for Young People and the New Deal 25 plus are the only New Deals that have a gateway period. The New Deal Evaluation Database contains details of each spell a person has spent on gateway.

At September 2002, 776,800 people had started on the gateway of the New Deal for Young People programme (629,920 individuals). Of these 126,410 clients (20 per cent. of all individual gateway starters) have entered the gateway more than once.

At September 2002, 508,380 people had started on the gateway of the New Deal 25 plus (383,580 individuals). Of these 97,560 clients (25 per cent. of all individual gateway starters) have entered the gateway more than once.

Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database.

Voluntary Sector

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the impact of the voluntary sector on the labour market. [80408]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We recognise the value of the voluntary sector to the community and have recently laid before Parliament draft regulations that should make it easier for people out of paid employment and claiming jobseeker's allowance to make a greater commitment to volunteering.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES — **VOLUME 395**

SESSION 2002–03

25th November—5th December 2002

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

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- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
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- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
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Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
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- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

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- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'ws' indicate written statements.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting, is a written statement or is a written question.
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  - *Chamber Debates* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
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  - *Written Statements* (consisting of ministerial statements issued in writing); and
  - *Questions* (which includes all written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division
- (HL)=Bill starting in House of Lords
- (SP)=Bill in Scottish Parliament.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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